

Vol.9 Number 2
February 2009

Bang for the Buck: **Unified Communications Delivers Solid Rewards to the Small-to-Medium Enterprise**

Did you know?

- A study by ComGroup, an independent communications consultant, found that an office worker saves upwards of 50% of their time on average using Unified Messaging to check all of their messages from their email inbox, as opposed to checking their phone, fax and email separately.
- ComGroup also found that remote and mobile employees experienced a 70% savings in time when checking messages on the road using Unified Communications technologies.

With such clear, definable value, it's surprising that more small-to-medium businesses are not taking advantage of all of the benefits that Unified Communications (UC) has to offer. The reality is that many small companies don't believe that they can afford UC technology, but cost is shrinking with the new hosted computing capabilities that are being developed. The biggest expense of traditional UC has been Microsoft® Exchange.

Now, through providers such as Google™ Apps, Exchange can be accessed in an online, hosted environment. Instead of the \$5,000-\$10,000 that you would normally invest on a Microsoft Exchange server, you can pay a simple, monthly fee that is easily affordable—even for companies with only 5-10 employees.

So what exactly is Unified Communications?

Unified Communications is the ability for an employee to communicate in real time with anyone inside or outside their organization, regardless of their location and regardless of the end user technology that they are using (cell phone, laptop, etc.). Unified Communications is a combination of Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR), Auto Attendant, Text-to-Speech (TTS) and other technologies in a format tailored to how a company does business. It is all designed to drive fluid communications, and maximize productivity, customer service and overall workflow within an organization.

So what can Unified Communications do for me?

Beyond the messaging capabilities discussed above, Unified Communications makes the concept of Presence Management possible. Presence is the ability to instantly know the availability of an employee, and the quickest way to communicate with that individual. An organization starts to develop their presence by deploying IM over corporate networks as an addition to e-mail. Then it can be expanded to wider networks that include mobile devices, and a company can develop call communication profiles for its entire staff. Calendars, schedules and presence information integrate with the telephone system to automatically reroute incoming calls to the most suitable destination when staff are on leave, in a meeting, or temporarily working off site.



What to look for

Be sure that the Presence technology you're considering has the ability to work with hosted technologies before making your final purchasing decision. Once you have the right phone platform in place, all your employees have to do is sign up for a remote hosted service such as Google Apps. They will be able to access all of their daily business applications in a hosted environment, as well as the best Presence Management has to offer, including speech recognition and text-to-speech applications.

But even without utilizing a hosted environment, Unified Communications can still be affordable. Five-to-ten years ago, deploying a UC platform would have been a \$100,000 investment, accessible only by the largest organizations. Today, you can deploy such a system for as little as \$7,000. Unified Communications is definitely within the grasp of small-to-medium businesses. And the bottom line is that your people are the most valuable capital asset that you have. By investing in their productivity, you are investing in the future growth of your business.