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Business Communications as Your Growth Catalyst

GOING BEYOND TECHNOLOGY TO FOCUS ON STRATEGIC IMPACT

The Scotts Miracle-Gro company knows something many companies don't: To reach your full potential, you have to start with the why and not the what. That's why it's so serious about its vision statement: *To help people of all ages express themselves on their own piece of the Earth.*

Notice the company's highest aspiration is not about selling world-class lawn fertilizer. Instead, it places a premium on communicating why it is in business. Putting its purpose as a company front and center, Scotts Miracle-Gro has grown to nearly \$3 billion in revenue and continues to be an impressive brand leader in the lawn products and services marketplace.



Consider the company's strategic perspective on business communications. When it invested in a new hosted platform encompassing voice, messaging, mobility and a full spectrum of audio, video and web conferencing services, it realized rich, collaborative capabilities for both its in-house and remote workers at 60 locations worldwide. And while the executive team was impressed with the promise of unified communications, it wasn't the technology itself that attracted them. It was the opportunity to pursue their vision by enhancing interactions throughout and beyond the enterprise. It was the why, not the what.

In his best-selling book *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Simon Sinek provides some insight into the power of putting your purpose first. "People don't buy what you do," he contends. "They buy why you do it." Whether Sinek is explaining the triumphs of Steve Jobs, Orville and Wilbur Wright or Martin Luther King, Jr., he emphasizes that what makes you exceptional is your ability to connect with others in terms of greater goals, objectives and aspirations.

Unfortunately, the communications technology industry is letting its prospective customers down on this front. At present, the industry is mired in excessive product hype. It's engaged in an arms race to pump out cool tools, features and functions, which sellers will celebrate in glitzy demos if you'll just enter their trade-show booths. Too often, product vendors are selling "shiny objects" as opposed to clearly defined outcomes. They are selling the what, not the why.

At the heart of all this hype, you'll find that product vendors play a diminishing role as markets mature. Buyers want relevant business solutions, not new invitations to technological turmoil.

Buyers want to maximize the value of every communications touch point. They spend a great deal to recruit and retain the best talent. They invest time and effort in lining up the right partners. And they work diligently to build client relationships for a lifetime. They want enriched communications and collaboration, and the communications infrastructure necessary to facilitate those objectives so they can deliver measurable gains to their bottom lines.

In turn, they want partners who can help them achieve business

success by optimizing their IT assets through a variety of cloud and on-premises delivery options. Ultimately, they want to take advantage of every aspect of their core assets—people, information and processes. Product vendors, by contrast, must move product. They don't have the time or inclination to uncover the deeper objectives and concerns—much less the distinctions and idiosyncrasies—of your increasingly complex business. They can't guide you through difficult and demanding transitions. And, significantly, they can't speak to the wider business implications of your communications technology investments.

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How would that look?

and elevate IT leaders above the fray of fragmented technology. To make business communications technology truly strategic, you have to ask why: Why might we rethink our approach to communications and collaboration? Why might a new approach set us apart in the marketplace? Why might our employees, partners and customers value this approach? By diligently addressing these questions, you make communications a catalyst for enduring growth.

MEGA-TRENDS AND MARKET DRIVERS: COMPLEXITY UNDERMINES COMMUNICATIONS

Today's business communications issues play out against a backdrop of several overarching trends and market drivers. It's important to understand these factors because they tend to both drive organizational change and influence your perceived options.

- **Rising expectations, diminishing budgets.** It's clear the keepers of the communications infrastructure are under mounting pressure. CEOs expect CIOs to provide more advanced capabilities and perform more responsively. Meanwhile, CFOs expect CIOs to achieve these objectives with severely limited budgets. To the extent that every technology decision is viewed through a narrow window of cost, IT decision makers are highly constrained. Of course, more funding can be obtained for IT investments in key applications and business solutions. But it's money that's increasingly managed by line of business leaders.
- **Extending the enterprise:** mobile; remote; and global. Whether they are in the office, field or home, members of today's workforce are increasingly mobile. They need access to advanced communications wherever they are and whenever they need to interact. Multiply this challenge by the growing number of constituents worldwide. Enterprises must concentrate not only on internal communications among increasingly distributed employees, but external communications with other parties such as partners and customers. Issues of data security, telecom tariffs and variances in infrastructure arise as the world gets more connected.
- **Rogue devices and applications.** It's hard to keep control when expectations exceed the ability of an IT team to rapidly respond. As a result, you have a proliferation of devices that IT leaders have struggled to sanction and secure. Meanwhile, individuals, groups and whole lines of business are acquiring business applications on their own behalf—circumventing the governing role of IT in the process. So “shadow IT” now casts a shadow of risk over entire enterprises.
- **Expectations for on-demand access.** Workers expect to have access to content, colleagues and data to execute more effective product or market launches, improve their sales pipelines, shorten service cycles, reduce operational costs and allocate resources better. They expect their business processes to facilitate business results. Not only do they have this expectation of access, but they also want to view and download the information any time, from anywhere, not just when they are at their desks behind the company firewall.

- **Maintaining security.** Woven throughout each of these trends is security. With increasing demands for information, the consumerization of IT and a growing workforce outside of the office, maintaining the security of sensitive company and customer data becomes an even greater challenge. This is only compounded when you consider that budgets are not unlimited.

As market pressures mount and the communications environment becomes increasingly complex, the perceived value of IT is at risk. Indeed, IT leaders are particularly vulnerable to getting dragged down into activities that are less than core, critical or competitively differentiating.

That may explain why just 43% of CIOs said they were engaged in strategic decision-making when recently surveyed by Ernst & Young. It may also explain why the status quo for many enterprises is increasingly troubling and unacceptable, particularly as it relates to their communications.

THE STATUS QUO: COMMUNICATIONS BREAKDOWNS AND CHRONIC UNDERPERFORMANCE

Enterprises today struggle with both communications interfaces and infrastructures. Existing communications technology costs too much and does too little. And, at a time of rising demands and expectations, such factors are contributing to IT's diminishing esteem in many organizations.

So what's behind today's business communications challenges, and what are the factors that will render certain companies obsolete while others will flourish?

One key issue is that many enterprises are tied to legacy infrastructure that holds them back. They may have a diverse array of on-premises PBXs or network servers—often attained in a series of acquisitions over the years. In the absence of VoIP technology, they may have severely limited phone or conferencing capabilities. And they may expend extraordinary sums simply maintaining obsolete systems—some of which may have been produced by manufacturers that are no longer in business.

And even when they attempt to adopt new technology, enterprises can find themselves unable to leverage it for substantial business impact. Too many products and even cloud-based services are not designed to support far-reaching

rollouts that are interoperable with other communications and business applications. Too much attention is paid to the many features in a product suite and too little is paid to the value of those features or the means by which they might be consumed.

This is where the product vendors' focus on the "what" becomes most problematic. When there is no real assessment of business needs and objectives (the why) or alignment with network demands and architecture, the likelihood of disappointment is massively compounded. Cool as their products might seem, product vendors are rarely in a position to guide you on how to maximize business performance. In the absence of strategic guidance, the benefits product vendors deliver are often isolated and limited.

Where do these constraints and limitations play out? In poor performance tied to poor collaboration; in misunderstood objectives and strategies that aren't conveyed consistently or clearly; and in low engagement and participation, all the result of a belief that the means of communication is less important than the message.

When technology (audio, video, web, VoIP, cloud, webRTC, etc.) becomes the focus of a business communications initiative, something important is at risk. That something might be the performance of your people. The participation of your partners. The experience of your clients. To ensure these factors are fully addressed, it's critical to step back and approach business communications strategically.

COMMUNICATIONS AS CATALYST: THE STRATEGIC LEVERS OF GROWTH

Thinking strategically about business communications is about considering the total value equation of a decision. It starts by understanding the performance objectives the business is trying to obtain. And it recognizes there are no all-encompassing, inter-galactic, product suites—no "silver bullets"—that will fully address these goals. Products must be interoperable, and they must be integrated within a larger framework and network environment.

It's also critical to ensure you are considering performance gains that can multiply over time as opposed to just the "hard" cost savings that deliver only short-term gains. When communications becomes a mere "commodity" in the minds of IT decision makers, it confers no competitive advantage. But it

can. Total value equations should account for the vast, ongoing returns associated with productive meetings and interactions among professionals. Strategic approaches to business communications encompass and enable your lines of business. They involve a clear-eyed view of how business gets done—and how business performance can be taken to new levels. Think of your communications systems and services as strategic enablers at every touch point—for every opportunity you have to come into contact with employees, customers and partners—and consider leveraging these systems and services to achieve growth in activities such as:

- Improving customer relationships
- Increasing revenue
- Reducing cost and capital
- Increasing quality
- Reducing risk
- Capturing valuable data

If technology becomes the focus of a business communications initiative, you put employee performance, client/partner participation and user experience at risk.

The underlying communications tools supporting these strategic initiatives, by necessity, must address the trends and market drivers discussed earlier—the very things that impact the way organizations operate and make decisions. Only by fully leveraging these tools as catalysts for growth opportunities can businesses realize their business goals.

One company that understands the value of a strategic approach to business communications is Monsanto, the \$11.8 billion bio- and agriculture-technology leader. With 21,000 employees spread out across 404 facilities in 66 countries, the company invested strategically to obtain a robust conferencing and communications solution. The company can now deepen interactions with its customers, for instance, by vividly and visually demonstrating how its advanced seeds and weed control products can increase agricultural yields.

Such capabilities not only enable effective meetings within the company, they help it actively engage farmers and other agricultural professionals around the planet. With the assistance of West Unified Communications Services, Monsanto has even ensured it can richly communicate with customers in fast-growing regions, including parts of Asia and Africa, that have limited telecom infrastructure and challenging tariff policies. Such moves have contributed to strong profits on strong sales.

Another company, Planview, a software firm specializing in IT portfolio management, capitalized on the power of strategic business communications to launch its own virtual user conference. Due to budget and travel restrictions among its customers, the company sought an alternative to its annual on-site conference.

Impressively, the firm was able to increase attendance by 250%, generate nearly 3,000 content downloads and enable

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more than 3,000 visits to 18 virtual booths. What’s more, it facilitated 634 one-to-one chat sessions and 250 meet-the-expert sessions. With a keynote address by Guy Kawasaki, 50 videos and 35 customer and company presentations, the event far exceeded projected results and demonstrated that thoughtful business communications can deliver a powerful experience that deepens customer relationships and drives growth.

Lastly, D+M Group, a \$1 billion manufacturer and distributor of high-end audio products for commercial, home and vehicle-based applications, outlined its goals and how strategic business communications could help attain them. The company was focused on increasing its competitive agility, engaging its clients more productively and enhancing interactions with all its other constituents.

With 2,500 employees and 30 offices around the world, the company had obtained a wide array of on-premises PBX systems through acquisitions. To meet its strategic objectives, the company would need to unify its voice communications and collaboration platform. Ultimately, it invested in a cloud-based IP PBX and unified communications solution.

Drawing on the technical resources of West, D+M was able to make the transition—allowing its people to focus on strategic concerns. The result? The company has reduced its total cost of ownership for communications infrastructure by 70%. But, more importantly, it has united its professionals all over the world—enabling them to collaborate through a rich mix of media to develop innovative products and roll them out to demanding customers everywhere.

CONCLUSION: FACING THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

The future points to business communications as a source of strategic value and competitive differentiation. How you communicate determines how you perform. That’s the reason there is now so much riding on the richness of your enterprise’s interactions—whether they occur internally or externally. It’s why so much is at stake in terms of the quality of your communications, particularly as your platforms and applications are tested by the intensifying demands of mobile, remote and global participants.

You can’t, however, truly capitalize on advanced communications technology until you think beyond it. Investing in business communications is all about the vision and the mission.

Which brings us back to Scotts Miracle-Gro—a company that’s committed to helping consumers “create beautiful and healthy lawns and gardens,” while providing “a dynamic workplace for our associates to succeed and grow their careers.” It realizes these commitments will be “rewarded with an improved market presence and profitable growth that enhances shareholder value.” Indeed, the company has produced steady growth in recent years by clarifying and communicating its purpose.

To start with “why” is to downplay the “what”—focusing on the wider impact you intend to make. And, by taking a strategic approach to business communications, you seize the future.