



Unified Communications in Transition:

PRESERVING YOUR OPTIONS AND PROPELLING YOUR GROWTH

As the pace of business accelerates and the demand for boundary-less IT support intensifies, you're challenged to make critical decisions with regard to business communications.

However, it's often difficult to gain clarity when you try to sort through all the claims and promises being made in relation to unified communications solutions.

The truth is, unified communications is a set of technologies in transition. There is enormous uncertainty about what tomorrow's applications will look like. It's unclear how to strike an appropriate balance between capex and opex, on-prem and cloud, what's core and what's peripheral.

Recognizing these uncertainties, you'll have to decide the right path for your organization. How will you preserve your options? How will you prepare your communications



infrastructure for the future? And how will you maximize the business impact of your UC investments?

Along with answering these questions, you'll have to determine what type of partner can provide the guidance and support you require. Of course, you'll be approached by product vendors and systems integrators—each offering a complicated path to UC implementation.

Flexible because it integrates with all technologies and platforms, avoiding proprietary lock-in and enormous upfront investments; cloud-enabled to seamlessly integrate into any cloud configuration you may have.

While enterprises have generally taken steps in relation to each one of the four key components that contribute to UC, perpetual innovation requires IT and business decision-makers to continuously re-examine their options on all fronts.

This third alternative to unified communications has never been more easy or effective. Read on to learn why.

FOUR COMPONENTS OF UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

The concept of unified communications has changed considerably over the years. At present, there are four key components that collectively contribute to the UC concept:

Conferencing and collaboration: enabling stakeholders throughout and beyond your organization to actively communicate and collaborate, make decisions and take action.

IP voice and telephony: providing foundational infrastructure for voice communications and related apps based on the IP protocol.

Networking and network management: establishing control over network infrastructure and endpoints to ensure robust,

seamless and secure communications.

Messaging and presence: facilitating discrete, electronic interactions through email, SMS, chat, IM and other technologies as well as applications, making it possible to locate and identify a computing device as soon as the user connects to the network.

Together these four factors make up a unified communications framework. While enterprises have generally taken steps in relation to each one of these areas, perpetual innovation requires IT and business decision-makers to continuously re-examine their options on all fronts.

THREE FACTORS IN TODAY'S TRANSITION

But it's difficult to make decisions when everything is seemingly in flux. Indeed, this is a fast-paced, often confusing and risk-laden moment in the world of unified communications. In his opening presentation at the Enterprise Connect conference in the spring of 2013, event director Fred Knight discussed three key factors that reflect the present transition in the UC field.

Citing research from UC Insight, he noted that the growth rate for unified communications products and services was 2.5% per month in 2012. And yet, only 40% of Fortune 500 companies claim to have UC deployments. "So, there's been a lot of progress, but there's a long way to go," he said.

Secondly, Knight pointed to a change of focus from hardware to software as yesterday's special purpose devices give way to general purpose computing and communication tools. Finally, he pointed to the "webification" of enterprise communications—putting real-time voice and video onto the web.

On top of these transitional factors, Knight pointed to the overlay of delivery systems, particularly wireless delivery. "How much of your traffic and how much of your business," he asked, "is going to shift to mobile?" And yet another point that he raised about delivery is ownership. "How much of your service and how many of your apps will run over systems that you own, manage and control, and how many will be run in the cloud or through some other outsourced service?"

It's against this backdrop that you are challenged to make sense of your investments in communications infrastructure

and applications. It's clearly a lot to consider—and there's a lot at stake. As competition intensifies and stakeholders become increasingly demanding, you'll have to determine the most strategic path for your organization.

TWO PATHS TO THE WRONG DESTINATION

You face a full spectrum of needs and challenges with respect to unified communications. And there's no shortage of parties knocking on your door and offering to solve your problems.

The two types of entities most actively promoting UC solutions these days are product providers and systems integrators. But it's worth considering the strengths and weaknesses of these types of players when it comes to fulfilling your UC objectives:

- **Product providers.** These are the hardware and software product vendors that tout their suites or platforms as integrated solutions to UC problems. Strengths? Product providers can be useful when your requirements are narrow and focused. These vendors, after all, tend to be specialists in certain components within the overall UC framework. Weaknesses? Product providers do not provide a complete suite of capabilities to address the full spectrum of UC needs. They are unable to give you the best-of-breed in every category. In fact, they are financially

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incentivized to promote suboptimal product offerings in areas where they do not excel. It simply doesn't make sense to directly engage a product vendor if you are considering a more holistic, integrated and future-proofed

UC solution to support your roadmap. The vendor will attempt to lock you in to its own proprietary roadmap, not yours.

- **Systems integrators.** These are consulting companies that specialize in either implementing on-premises systems, maintaining systems as a managed service provider or both. Strengths? Unlike product vendors, systems integrators tend to have an independent perspective in relation to products. They can help you identify, implement and integrate best-of-breed technology in all areas of the UC framework. Such approaches can make sense when the technology is highly customized to your specific needs. Weaknesses? Systems integrators either leave you to run your own systems or they lock you into a managed service plan. The problem with the on-prem solution is that you must continue to keep up with rapid changes in technology, not to mention the hard-to-find talent necessary to maintain it. The challenge with managed services is you are stuck with a huge upfront investment in order to get access to advanced technology. Systems integrators either walk away when they are done implementing or force you to trust them as they take control of your infrastructure with an expensive managed services contract.

Such approaches fall short in terms of preserving your option value and protecting you from technological obsolescence. At a time of dynamic and disruptive innovation, you may get locked into proprietary and suboptimal technology. Or you may surrender precious capital. Ultimately, you risk losing access to the most advanced infrastructure and services available to you. You surrender your options and become vulnerable to an onrushing future of continuous change.

One Way to Preserve Your Options:

The Cloud-Enabled Solution

To ensure you are preserving your option value, you'll want to carefully consider a third path to unified communications: the cloud-enabled solution. You'll want a service provider that is fully committed to best-of-breed technology as opposed to proprietary lock-in. And you'll want a partner that can provide unified communications as a cloud-enabled service—enabling

you to shift from capex to opex investment as appropriate. But not every communication demand is necessarily met with a cloud-based solution. With that in mind, you'll need a service provider that can support you across a spectrum of scenarios ranging from on-premises support to managed services to advanced, cloud offerings. With a solid track record, your partner should demonstrate:

- Commitment to best-of-breed technology on all levels.
- Operational excellence in terms of service provision.
- Flexibility in terms of capex and opex investment options.

These are the factors that matter most as you consider your short-, medium- and long-term options. You need flexibility and freedom to most effectively match advanced products and solutions to your business communications roadmap.

Cloud-enabled service providers enable you to focus on the activities that strategically differentiate you as an enterprise. But they also recognize and address the constantly transforming nature of technology. In other words, you'll want to

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preserve the option to purchase a growing number of services on-demand—consuming them just-in-time as opposed to just-in-case.

Leading Enterprises Adopt Cloud-based Solutions

Consider some of the companies that have embraced this approach. Among them: Scott's Miracle-Gro; Monsanto; and D+M Group.

With more than 60 geographically dispersed sites, Scotts Miracle-Gro realized it needed an advanced platform enabling

its people to communicate and collaborate in more productive ways. With that in mind, executive decision-makers committed to a cloud-based solution addressing several facets of the unified communications framework.

The hosted solution, based on West Unified Communications Services' VoiceMaxx CE platform, encompasses voice, messaging, mobility and a full spectrum of conferencing capabilities, which enable the company to bring rich communications to both its in-house and remote workers at all locations. Relying on West for platform management and support, IT leaders at Scotts Miracle-Gro can turn their attention to the strategic business factors that set the company apart and drive growth.

Such capabilities not only enable effective meetings within the company, they help it actively engage farmers and other agricultural professionals around the planet. With implementation and hosting support from West, Monsanto has even taken active steps to ensure 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.

Mahwah, NJ-based D+M Group, a specialist in consumer electronics with 2,000 employees, sought a way to increase operational efficiencies, promote innovation and lower its total cost of ownership for communications infrastructure. "Teamwork is a central corporate value, and our CEO wanted to break down barriers between brands to encourage collaboration and innovation," says John Jackson, vice president of global infrastructure and vendor management for D+M Group.

To bring its consumer, professional and automotive divisions together, the company began offering shared services, including communications and collaboration. "When every division had its own communications system, there was no tie to bind them together," says Jackson. "Making it easy for people to collaborate across divisional and geographical boundaries would help D+M Group function as an efficient, single entity."

Jackson asked himself what type of communications system he would invest in if starting a brand-new company. The answer: a cloud-based solution. "Our goal was to gain

advanced communications and collaboration capabilities without a large, up-front investment," he says. "We are moving many of our services to private or public clouds, and a hosted communications service seemed like a natural fit."

Having clarified its objectives, D+M Group adopted a common cloud collaboration platform based on Cisco's Hosted Collaboration Solution and delivered by West. The results? The company bridged organizational silos and made it easier to collaborate from any global location. It accelerated decision-making by enabling more people to collaborate without travel. And it lowered its three-year TCO for communications at its headquarters by 72 percent.

TAKING ACTION WITH THE END IN MIND

So what should you expect from a world-class, cloud-enabled service provider? Here are three key criteria to consider:

Focus on outcomes, not technology. While communications technology is an essential enabler of performance, it's clear that your performance as a business should come first. Look for a service provider that can lock on to your key business objectives and ensure the solutions they prescribe can help you meet them. That means you'll need reliable guidance to assess your existing environment, provide relevant options and help you migrate to new platforms and integrate new applications. To deliver top performance, your service provider should understand how to augment and enhance your business processes through unified communications.

Expect a service orientation, not a product orientation.

To obtain the full returns on your communications investments, you'll want to ensure your partner is committed to integrating, maintaining and perpetually upgrading your platforms and applications. You don't want a one-way vendor relationship that leads to proprietary lock-in. You want a service provider that consistently delivers top service levels and can pull together the full mix of advanced solutions.

Solution support for UC across all implementation scenarios.

Enterprises often face a range of scenarios in terms of implementing unified communications. In some cases, you may choose to stick with an on-premises solution, particularly when security or customization are key issues. Or

you may choose a managed service for certain applications. And in still other cases, you may shift to the cloud. In terms of unified communications, you will be well served to rely on a partner that can provide guidance and support you in all such scenarios. That will help you maximize the performance impact

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of your UC solution.

As an IT leader, you have to ensure your investments have a strategic impact. To do so, you'll want to ensure your unified communications solutions are enabling you to drive growth and competitively differentiate your company—whether they are on-premises or in the cloud. Your decisions with respect to investment and partnering must start with the end in mind.

CONCLUSION: CAPITALIZING ON UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

Enterprises like yours are now realizing they need an alternative to proprietary lock-in and expensive managed services contracts. They've discovered they need a new kind of solution support if they are to preserve their option value and invest in their communications platforms for the long term.

As you consider your own options, you'll want to compare product vendors, systems integrators and cloud-enabled service providers. But you will want to conduct this activity with a keen eye toward which option will help you best capitalize on unified communications.

Keep in mind that cloud-enabled service providers bring a laser focus on those activities that strategically differentiate you as an enterprise—and help you wade through the thicket of an ever-changing technology landscape from a business perspective. The intersection of networks, technology and applications is a complex one. Look for a partner that understands those complexities and can help you move your business forward.