

Unify your messaging

How unified communications can simplify your business endeavors **Interviewed by Troy Sympson**

Unified Communications (UC) is defined as integrated means of communications, used to optimize the flow of information across an organization. UC integrates real-time and not-real-time communications components with a consistent unified user interface and experience across multiple devices and media types.

“When businesses are ready for increased productivity they are ready for UC,” says Monty Ferdowski, the president of Broadcore. “And, the more the better; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Smart Business spoke with Ferdowski about UC and how it can help your business become more efficient and profitable.

What applications or components are included in UC?

UC solutions are made up of a variety of components and elements, including calling (IP audio and video), messaging (e-mail, instant messaging, voice, video), conferencing (audio, Web, video), presence (online and telephony), mobility (client and device awareness), collaboration (whiteboard, document and file sharing), business process automation (customer relationship management interface and Web 2.0 integration), contact directory management and calendaring. In a complete UC solution, all these components are tied together with a consistent, unified user interface and experience across multiple devices and media types.

What differences will a company experience when integrating UC?

The main benefit of UC is increased productivity. The most common and costly pain point in organizations is the latency or waiting to receive information from colleagues who are not available when needed. Loss of several hours per week may be attributed to the disjointed systems and inefficiency in flow of information.

With UC, each employee is aware of the status of his or her associates and there is no need to play phone tag. In fact, in many cases an instant message is all that's needed between two coworkers working on a task. The communications between associates may begin with an instant message, escalated to a phone call, clarified through a collaboration session, and followed up with a detailed e-mail.

The unified messaging component of UC allows users to be able check voicemail in



Monty Ferdowski
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their 'e-mail clients.' Employees no longer need to call into their voicemail box and plow through several messages just to get to the one message they need. With messages stored in the e-mail client, the users can easily go right to the message they want.

A single user interface is all that's needed to make and receive calls, check voicemail, and send or receive e-mails and instant messages. There is no need to switch between client applications or devices to access different UC components.

Should businesses invest in premises-based UC or hosted UC?

Hosted UC is definitely better for several reasons:

- **Lower initial capital investment:** Clients do not invest in purchasing network and application hardware or software.

- **Flexibility:** The on-demand, pay-as-you-use model allows organizations the flexibility to grow as fast as their business requires, without investing in excess capacity.

- **Lower predictable total cost of ownership (TCO):** The larger the organization the lower the per-unit TCO. Hosted providers are generally able to deliver their service at prices lower than premises-based solutions. The cost of ownership is a predictable flat monthly fee that is based on the number of current users.

- **Reliability backed by a service level agreement (SLA):** Hosted providers offer specific SLAs that establish objective tools and processes to measure and verify compliance, along with appropriate incentives or penalties based on service performance and reliability.

- **Focus on core competencies:** You can focus on your core business objectives instead of getting involved in the 'business' of providing communications tools for your employees.

- **Shorter and more successful deployments:** Hosted providers have established process-led, repeatable implementation workflows, resulting in more successful and timely deployments.

- **Future-proof investment:** There is no hardware or software that needs to be upgraded or replaced. Upgrading and adding new functionalities and features are all part of the service.

- **Hardware agnostic:** Hosted providers use the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) open standard to deliver their solutions. Hosted providers are indifferent to which network equipment, voice endpoints, desktop clients and mobile devices are used.

- **Technical resources are not necessary:** You no longer need to hire and retain highly technical staff members with special skill sets just to maintain and manage resources.

- **Geographical independence:** Hosted UC is delivered over any private or public IP network without requiring virtual private networks (VPN) or multi protocol label switching (MPLS) designs. Clients are able to easily maintain a distributed work force with unified presence and receive the same user experience.

- **Reduced energy consumption:** It is estimated that an individual premises-based IP telephony solution consumes about 20 to 30 amps. A hosted solution removes this consumption from the customer's premises to the carrier's data center and reduces the customer's direct consumption by about 50 percent.

- **Single-vendor accountability:** Hosted providers are responsible for delivering the whole solution to their customers. There is no separation between providing access or UC components and there is no finger pointing. The one single vendor is ultimately responsible for ensuring uptime at all times. <<

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