

Defining Unified Communications

Unified Communications Strategies¹ breaks down Unified Communications (UC) into applications that drive productivity (UC-U) and improve business process (UC-B). Within these categories, there are five basic application groupings:

- Contact Management to facilitate access from clients, partners and associates
- Resource Identification and Problem Resolution to find a skilled, authorized person or team to address a customer issue or concern
- Seamless Information for Mobility to deliver access communication and information to mobile employees
- Collaboration Acceleration to help teams collaborate on projects in the most efficient manner possible
- Communication-Enabled Job Portals to package communications right into the user's workflow and application tools

You'll notice that these groupings are solution-based, not technology-based. That's because any effective UC deployment should begin with how it will benefit the business and define goals to reach those objectives. Then the right combination of technologies can be targeted to achieve the outlined goals. UC is designed to drive fluid communications, and maximize productivity, customer service and overall workflow within a business.

The central philosophy of Unified Communications is focused on a concept known as "Presence Management." Presence Management is the ability for employees to define how they want to be reached in real time. Here's an example of both UC and Presence Management in action: A salesperson needs to check in with the VP of Sales from the road. The VP has already defined their current availability right through a smart phone. If the executive is available, the call is routed to wherever that person may be (through the office extension, cell phone or other number specified).

If this same VP needs to have a quick conference with all of the sales staff, the executive can access a secure online interface that details that status of all employees. The VP simply schedules a meeting time, and everyone is contacted by whichever method that they specified. The meeting goes off with a minimal interruption in workflow — and no one is going from office to office trying to hunt down the entire team.

Unified Communications: Tangible Productivity

Consider this scenario as an example of the business process benefits of Unified Communications: A customer sends an urgent email to a trusted contact at a vendor that a service call is needed. The employee who receives the email is away on vacation. Normally, this could end in hard feelings for the customer. But the employee accesses his or her email right on a smart phone. Using a feature known as "find me/follow me," the system locates the appropriate available employee and dials that person at their current location. There is a question about the service call, so the employee uses instant messaging (IM) to contact a tech manager who is in a meeting. The manager approves the service call over IM, allowing the truck to roll.



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The first employee is notified by the smart phone that the customer's concern is addressed. The employee records a message to their client that support is on the way. This recording is converted into a .WAV file. This file is attached to the original email and sent back to the customer as a reply. From the customer's perspective, they never knew that the employee was on vacation.

Implementing UC

Unified Communications is more affordable than ever before. 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 \$1,000 per user. 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.

Unified Communications starts with intelligent value-based call routing for the most effective and accurate routing decisions. By leveraging software that works with both CSTA and TAPI standards, a company can create a powerful combination of telephony and computing resources to provide a range of productivity and service enhancing functions. With this approach, inbound callers are immediately identified by the calling number. Customer database records are retrieved and the incoming call is automatically routed to the most appropriate call-handling agent or department. Internal telephone numbers are seamlessly called up from computerized directories such as a company database, an application directory, web pages, portals or a MS Outlook™ contact folder and the system dials the number automatically.

Discuss with your vendor the potential that UC can bring to your own unique industry and business. Start with the productivity gains you're looking for and work backwards to the right applications to help you achieve your goals. You might be surprised at the different ways this technology can yield substantial productivity gains for your enterprise.

¹ "Unified Communications Applications, Case Studies and Justification," Unified Communication Strategies, <http://www.ucstrategies.com/unified-communications-applications-case-studies-and-justification.aspx>



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