Unified Communications:
The 'Anywhere, Any Time' Workplace

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This paper explores the ways in which Unified Communications (UC) solutions can empower workers for greater productivity. For IT professionals, the paper examines concrete examples of how UC can help the business, key UC applications, and how to select a UC provider that enables you to get the most from UC tools for you and your workers.

Workers are Increasingly Mobile

Take a look around your office. You'll probably see evidence that your colleagues have gone "mobile." Maybe your colleague's desk is empty because she is working remotely or at a client's office. Perhaps you're reading this paper as you travel to or from home. If so, your situation reflects a growing trend.

As workers disperse to locations away from their offices, their need to engage and confer using mobile devices to make time-sensitive decisions intensifies. These findings demonstrate the trend according to one recent study:[1]

- 78 percent of US employees use a mobile device for work,

- 65 percent of white-collar roles require phone mobility

- 44 percent of "knowledge workers" telecommute at least one day a week.

Furthermore, a different study projects that the predominantly mobile portion of the workforce will more than double in size in the years from 2013 through 2018.[2]

Where you work has become less important. Working where you are has become more important than ever.

The Mobile Workforce Uses Many Applications

The overlap between work and home creates an increased familiarity and dependence on different technologies and tools. Workers use applications at work, and they want the same applications at home, and vice versa. As a result, the communications devices we carry with us are exploding in number and variety. According to Cisco, knowledge workers will use an average of 3.3 devices in 2014.[3] Workers are no longer tethered to their desks. They want to bring their office to their own phones and other devices and still be able to instantly collaborate with coworkers.

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[1] BYOD & Virtualization: Insights From the CISCO IBSG (Internet Business Solutions Group) Horizons Study, 5/12, p. 4
[2] Gartner Research, 2014 Top Ten Strategic Tech Trends, 10/9/13
[3] BYOD & Virtualization, ibid, p. 5

UC

What Do We Mean By
Unified
Communications?

Fundamentally, UC is a response to the growing realization that the companies who can communicate information faster, easier, and most effectively will have the competitive advantage.

UC is not a single service, although there are many disparate UC services in the marketplace. We define UC as a combination of several tools that collectively enable workers to communicate more efficiently across organizations, work smarter, and drive down costs.

UC unites previously separate business communications capabilities, such as email, conferencing and video, to enhance worker productivity and business processes and connect workers, wherever they are.

One analyst report found the top drivers that are pushing organizations to adopt UC includes the demand for:

- Increased productivity
- Increased flexibility for employees
- Faster response time/delivery of information[4]

IP—the Great Enabler of Unified Communications

Our use of technology has evolved and reshaped our work environments in many ways, and Unified Communications is a direct result of these advancements. In the past, companies used separate dedicated networks to carry different types of communications. The telco Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) transported voice. Packet networks transported data. And cable networks distributed video. Then Internet Protocol (IP) made it possible to carry all types of media as data packets over an IP network.

IP is now the central unifying force that made Unified Communications practical through its ability to combine diverse methods of communication and transport them using only one networking protocol.

The Cloud—the Great Enabler of Hosted "as a Service" Platforms

Just as IP has made it easier to transport different types of communications over one network, the growing use of the cloud has made it easier to deliver communications while reducing dependence on equipment. The cloud refers to software, platforms and infrastructure that are

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[4] IDG Enterprise, 2012 Unified Communications & Collaboration Survey, 3/12

sold as a service, either remotely through the Internet or through a private IP connection. The cloud has made it more efficient to access services from specialized service providers across a distance. In this scenario, companies pay only for the services they use, without upfront commitments or equipment costs. And in this way, IP and cloud technologies converged to become hosted communications solutions—solutions that offer all businesses a scalable and affordable way to adopt Unified Communications.

With IP and cloud use becoming more widespread, companies around the globe have been able to use advanced technology to gain a competitive edge. This competitive pressure strengthens the demands for greater efficiency, reduced costs, and above all, ever-increasing acceleration of information transfer and communication.

All businesses face pressures in this competitive environment and depend even more on relationships with trusted, well-prepared, responsive communications service providers to help respond rapidly and constructively to challenges.

As shown in Figure 1, a recent report uncovered the three top employee "workplace" frustrations across all surveyed industries were the need to wait for information; the inability to locate and contact people; and—email overload.[5]
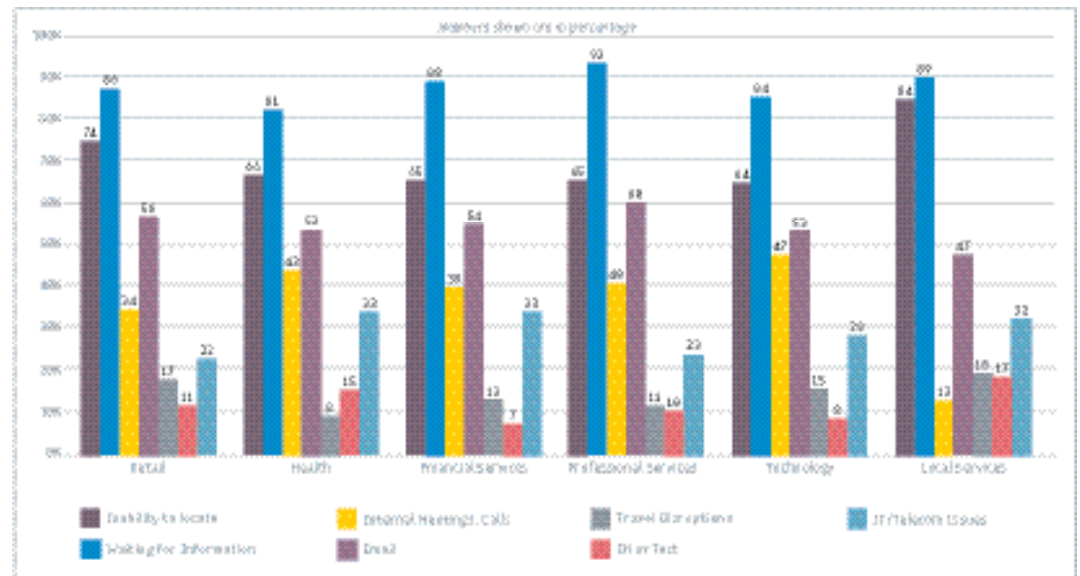

Figure 1: BroadSoft User Persona Research 2012—Top Communication Frustrastions

Another study found that the average "knowledge worker" spent nearly a third of work time, or 73 full work days a year, on email alone.[6]

Unified Communications addresses all of these concerns, and more.

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[5] IDG Enterprise, 2012 Unified Communications & Collaboration Survey, 3/12

[6] Forbes, 2/19/14, "How Unified Communications Drive Productivity," N. Burg.
  http://www.forbes.com/sites/unify/2014/02/19/how-unified-communications-drive-productivity/

How UC Can Help: User Scenarios

A manager gets 15 or more voice mails each day. With her UC application, she can readily display them on a screen, indexed like email, to see who the messages are from and gauge their urgency instead of having to listen to them in succession.

Another worker dealing with a heavy influx of email over a busy afternoon prefers to have his emails read to him as voice messages. Perhaps he is listening to his email messages while traveling or commuting. He can select this option using a UC application.

Two employees are collaborating on a project by phone. The first employee describes something to the other worker, but the second worker admits he doesn't understand the concept. To help articulate the concept visually, the first employee uses a UC tool to pull up and share a picture on screen, while both employees are still on the phone. This gives the second employee what he needs to grasp the concept.

An employee needs to quickly consult with a much-in-demand subject matter expert. Using UC tools, the employee can scale the expert's wall of mounting emails and overcome "telephone tag." Instead, using a combination of company directory and presence applications, it becomes easy for the employee to locate the expert faster than by phone or email, open and request an instant message chat, and often get a quick answer. The expert may already be on the phone with someone else, but is able to exchange an IM to respond to a simple question—without the delays of static modes of communication.

A product manager is still on a conference call when she needs to leave for another meeting or pick up a child from school. Without disrupting the conference, she can leave the office, still listen to the conference conversation on her mobile smartphone, and be able to pick the child up on time from school. A UC application enables seamless and simultaneous call transfer so that the product manager can multi-task and accomplish work and home life needs without disruption. These extra five, ten or fifteen minutes on this call could result in her being able to deal with a critical work issue and thereby avoid the need for more meetings. Conversely, some callers prefer to switch mobile calls to land line phones once in the office or at home for more reliable call quality.

Select UC Providers Carefully

UC is so vital to businesses that it's important to select a trusted, quality communications services provider to act as adviser and provide a complete, end-to-end UC solution.

Look for a UC provider that can provide solutions with business-grade performance, customer service and responsiveness. Some providers use the public Internet to host UC solutions but it has unreliable quality and security. Instead, seek a provider with its own high-quality, secure, IP data network with local, nationwide and international coverage. You'll also want to select a provider that provides transparent access to a web-based portal where your employees can control their own UC preferences, yet IT administrations have control over overall company policies and settings. Tier One service level agreements are also a must for the best performance. All of this is possible—even at costs that beat the Internet-based UC companies.

Key UC Service Elements

Mobility Applications

Key UC mobility applications (XO calls theirs WorkTime) let workers virtually take their office with them, anywhere, anytime. Workers can always put forth a professional appearance on business calls because the mobility app lets them use their business phone number on any BYOD wireless phone. They can use different numbers for work and personal use or combine the two on one number.

A mobility app is the glue that brings UC to mobile devices. It provides simultaneous ring across desk phone, personal smart phone and/or home computer. Smart phone users who use WorkTime, for example, get IM, presence and videoconferencing along with free on-net, local and inbound calling and long-distance calling charged to the company plan. Each device license gets five thousand free SMS text messages monthly. Business mobile cost reductions from using a mobility app such as WorkTime typically average over 40 percent.

User accessibility and ease of use are essential for UC to flourish. Employees should be able to readily download the UC mobility app to their personal smartphone and computers. XO's WorkTime is available with XO's SIP, Hosted PBX and IP Flex for a modest per-person fee. The application integrates these XO VoIP services with workers' devices, using the network or WiFi connection of the worker's own phone, eliminating any need for separate cell phones and standardizing IP telephony across a business while securely separating work and personal information, applications and numbers on smartphones and computers. Businesses can add or remove WorkTime and VoIP users with a few clicks on a single consolidated dashboard.

From the IT management perspective, UC mobility applications

- Virtually eliminate any need for company mobile phones
- Consolidate all business-related call costs under one plan; and
- Provide a consistent user experience for organization-wide UC.

For workers, UC mobility applications mean

- Not having to carry extra devices
- Ability to use the same features for work and personal use
- Directory and presence integration across laptops, smartphones and office phones; and
- Gaining automatic application support and updates.

XO WorkTime is a UC application that can be used with the Hosted IP-PBX and Enterprise SIP solutions discussed in the next section of this paper.

Hosted IP-PBX

Hosted services such as Hosted IP-PBX utilize the Cloud to provide business-grade voice communications and UC capabilities. Hosted IP-PBX lets customers replace old phone systems with a far more flexible solution offering advanced enterprise-class IP voice service and the latest features and functionality from the Cloud with reduced customer costs, chores and concerns.

Voice and data are combined on one circuit with free calling between your Hosted IP-PBX locations. Hosted IP-PBX service offers the most up-to-date voice and advanced features available on premise-based PBXs, future-proofing businesses while avoiding the capital and operational costs of maintaining and periodically upgrading equipment. It includes enterprise-wide top-quality "HD voice" along with WorkTime and other UC and IP telephony applications.

As well as lowering TCO, Hosted IP-PBX requires minimal IT support, with voice features configurable through a simple Web interface. The only cost is a monthly service fee with easily scalable all-inclusive per-seat pricing incorporating all phones and phone features. Business continuity is assured by a Web-based portal allowing call forwarding to unaffected locations. Software enables easy scalability and automatic upgrades. Customers can stop worrying about their communications and focus more energy and investment on their core competencies.

Enterprise SIP

Maintaining consistent UC and voice services across many geographically disparate branches can become costly and time-consuming for larger organizations, especially as they often must deal with multiple carriers, and as requirements change at each location over time. These burdens create demand for centralized SIP trunking services like XO's Enterprise SIP (ESIP).

Centralized SIP trunking lets large enterprises deploy a centralized IP-PBX architecture at one or a few main locations and use that to deliver VoIP across the entire enterprise, reducing TCO by eliminating the need to buy and manage equipment and pay for local lines, long-distance and other networking costs for each location. The service simplifies and streamlines the enterprise network, helping businesses transition from a distributed architecture to a more cost-effective converged SIP solution.

With centralized SIP trunking services such as ESIP, voice sessions and Unified Communications capabilities can be shared across the organization. Beyond savings, organizations with centralized SIP trunking better manage company-wide calling and make quick, simple configuration changes from one unified dashboard. Idle capacity can be redistributed, enabling "bursting" periodically above purchased bandwidth for call spikes. Auto-reroute means businesses can ensure business continuity and better pinpoint emergency callers in event of disruption.

Contact Center On-Demand

Contact Center On-Demand (CCoD), another UC service, offers a contact center from the Cloud that improves customer service while reducing costs of managing customer interactions, integrating multiple contact media into a single on-demand center especially suitable for e-commerce. Media include phone, chat, email and social media.

CCoD avoids new infrastructure investments for organizations unable to justify their own year-round contact centers. The service offers scalability, rapid set-up and ability to combine geographically diverse agents onto a centralized, Cloud-based architecture. CCoD provides extensive analytics and can be operational within days of ordering.

Why XO Communications for UC?

XO and its UC solutions combine the quality, reliability and national network of a high-end provider with the costs and strong customer service of the most nimble providers. Only XO provides enterprise-grade capabilities to businesses of all sizes, and equally supports cloud-based solutions such as Hosted PBX and premise-based solutions using Enterprise SIP. XO's WorkTime solution encompasses UC across distance and device, enables the growing worker mobility trend, and is available with all of our Voice over IP services. XO is playing a major role to help businesses and their customers make the most of rapidly expanding Unified Communications capabilities. We recommend that you visit XO's Unify page to learn more about the elements that comprise XO's Unified Communications solutions.

white paper

About XO Communications

XO Communications is a leading nationwide provider of advanced IP communications, intelligent networking, and network-enabled cloud solutions for business, large enterprise and wholesale customers. These customers include more than half of the Fortune 500, in addition to leading cable, mobile wireless and domestic and international telecommunications companies. XO offers a superior customer experience through its innovative solutions, its employees' focus on customers and the proven performance of its advanced network. To learn more about XO Communications, visit www.xo.com or blog.xo.com.

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