

Unified Communications

A new way of working

By Tim Price, MD of Executel Ltd

Unified Communications – or UC as it's become known – is the latest buzzword among us 'techie' bods but what does it actually mean? And how exactly can it benefit you and your business? Let me shed some light...



What is it?

Very simply, UC helps you keep in touch with others, wherever you may be located, via whatever device you have to hand. By presence-enabling business processes, UC technologies facilitate anytime, anywhere access to your critical communications. This in turn results in better, faster interaction and service delivery for the customer alongside significant cost savings for your business.

For the more technical among you, UC is the umbrella under which sit two core products, namely Microsoft OCS (Office Communications Server) and Microsoft Exchange Server. When integrated with an IP telephony solution, these products unite and knit together common business applications across a range of interfaces including telephone, PC, web and mobile.

Who is it for?

In today's fast pace business world, many find themselves floundering in a sea of options for person-to-person communications and almost without exception; none are integrated with any other. It's like sending a message in a bottle; you blindly attempt to contact someone without knowing their availability and willingness to participate or respond, thereby potentially wasting precious time.

Meanwhile, more and more organisations are moving away from the traditional nine to five desktop environment as employees go mobile – working from home, on the move, between sites – which further exacerbates the problem and increases the odds of missing the person you are trying to reach. This might seem like a modest annoyance but in actual fact can have a significant impact in the long run. Internal communication obstacles can lead to critical time delays, missed deadlines and lost opportunities, they could even drive customers away affecting both sales and profitability.

So what's the solution? Thankfully it's not rocket science. A new way of working now exists which will help overcome these challenges but every business is different and the first step therefore is to identify what your specific communication issues and requirements are.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does my existing communications network extend to every single member of staff?
- Do all my employees spend their entire day in the office at a desk?
- Can I communicate effectively with every member of my workforce?
- Have my employees got the correct tools with which to do their jobs?
- Are fuel/travel expenses high within my business?

Why adopt it?

Because many can't afford not to, particularly in the current climate. We all know that driving down costs is paramount to surviving during an economic slowdown and if new technology has the power to help achieve that cost-effectively, why wouldn't you adopt it?

At the same time however, I appreciate that just as there was no single reason for the adoption of the Internet, there is similarly no single reason to adopt UC. In fact, you might argue that there are many applications available today which cut costs, increase productivity and improve customer satisfaction and to all intents and purposes, you would be right.

But the true power of UC lies in the convergence of voice, video, data, and mobility applications. As the office environment extends beyond the desktop, work can be carried out anywhere, at any time and on any device. Mobile workers are immediately more accessible to customers and colleagues, which in turn enables them to be more productive while on the road as well as more timely in addressing and resolving problems.

Going beyond the productivity benefits, UC technologies also yield direct cost savings which brings me to another advantage of adopting a UC strategy – travel avoidance and reduced fuel expenses. For many businesses, spiralling travel expenditure is a very real concern when perhaps it needn't be. Using Microsoft OCS, you can reproduce that crucial 'in-person' experience with those located on the other side of the world and share documents online in real-time at the click of a mouse, thereby reducing non essential travel.

This inevitably has a knock-on effect on your carbon footprint which is still considered a nicety by many but as 'green' initiatives continue to gather momentum, those that have embraced UC will be far better equipped to meet sustainability goals and run their businesses as responsible corporate citizens.

I could go on but the message is clear... UC is without doubt the way forward to optimise business processes and as the evolution from the desktop-only environment to an increasingly mobile workforce continues, Executel has the tools and expertise to help you keep in touch anytime, anywhere.

For further information, contact your Executel Account Manager on:

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