

Bringing Unity to SMB Communications

A THREE-PART WHITE PAPER SERIES FROM 1TO1 MEDIA AND MITEL



PART THREE

Connecting to the Future for SMBs

New developments open competition at all levels



Connecting to the Future for SMBs

New developments open competition at all levels

Technology has redefined what it means to be a small-to medium-sized business (SMB). The Internet and all its communications applications for telephony allow SMBs to look and act like their much bigger counterparts. At the heart of this technology is a concept called “Unified Communications.” It represents the intersection of IP Telephony and advanced Internet applications and it can launch SMBs into more valuable and efficient consumer communications, customer relationships and employee teamwork. This white paper series will reveal how Unified Communications can connect SMBs to their most valuable customers.

>contents

The Unified Enterprise	2
Five Keys to the Unified Enterprise	3
Conclusion	6
Case Study	7
About This Series	8

The Unified Enterprise

It’s 3 am, New York City, Eastern Standard Time. The mid-sized London-based dealership of a luxury car manufacturer has just opened its doors and faces a problem. A print ad appearing in that day’s newspaper has listed the wrong price and the wrong finance rate on its most popular model. The only way to fix it is to make sure the dealer’s sales personnel and the dealer’s contact center, know what to say, how to say

it and convey the correct information when faced with an inquiring customer. The worldwide marketing office in New York is unavailable to help.

The scenario is hardly beyond the pale. Communications mistakes in pricing happen all the time. But imagine if the pricing problem in London could be fixed by sending a mobile text message to all sales personnel regardless of whether they were still traveling to work, or at work. Imagine if that sales staff had one phone number to receive all communications. Imagine if they could access inventory data for the car model in question via a wireless device. Imagine if a London-based contact center agent that was on the phone fielding an inquiry about the pricing mistake could IM a colleague in Bangalore and get information on the problem. Imagine if the same text message could greet every New York City-based marketing employee for the dealer’s supplier later that morning.

Like the pricing problem, the fix is rooted in reality. The communication advantages described in the London pricing scenario will be enabled by the Web 2.0 type of functionality that Unified Communications brings to SMBs. But a company doesn’t need a Fortune 500-sized budget to incorporate the communication advantages of mobile technology and social networks.

Key Takeaways

For SMBs, Unified Communications is moving forward at high speed. Developments will include:

- **Collaboration:** Collaboration technology will enable SMBs to share information on customers in real time.
- **Reachability:** The next phase of reachability for most SMBs will provide simplified and more immediate access to employees who use mobile devices.
- **Security:** Advances by larger enterprises will push unified solutions to a par with traditional hard-wired solutions
- **New network protocols:** New industry standards will enable many of the advanced customer-facing features that extend IP beyond simple telephony, such as internal and external text and instant messaging.
- **Interoperability:** Developments that remove the barriers between Unified Communications and legacy networks will result in seamless communications with complex networks of customers.

Five Keys to the Unified Enterprise

Just as texting, mobile access, and social media have made the world wide open for a company's customers, the same possibilities are available within companies. SMBs will be profoundly impacted by the change, or become vulnerable to more aggressive and technically savvy competitors. Unified Communications will put SMBs on a plane with much larger companies. An audit of current capabilities and an understanding of new technology developments will make a positive difference in workforce and customer communications.

"The old digital phone systems were work-horses and a lot of SMBs got seven to 10 years out of those systems," says Mark Ricca, a partner with market research firm IntelliCom Analytics. "But now these businesses are looking to add features and functionality to their communications systems. Unfortunately, many are realizing that a lot of the new applications can't run on their existing platform. So now many midsize businesses are migrating toward IP systems that provide open architecture and the ability to add third-party applications as the business grows."

Many of the features that SMBs are looking to integrate into their communications system are advanced Unified Communications applications, according to Alison Brewer, propositions marketing manager for Mitel, "Businesses are migrating to unified communications platforms that allow them to pull their voice, data and video messaging together into one system," she says. "This provides significant cost reductions, and also helps them look and operate more like a big enterprise."

The first two papers in this three-part series from 1to1 Media and Mitel, "Bringing Unity to SMB Communications" framed the choices available in migrating to Unified Communications and clarified its role with SMBs. The final installment will examine five key areas that will shape the future of SMB communications

strategies. Some are based on technology that will enable stronger customer relationships. Others are extensions of current applications.

1. Collaboration

Customers can share opinions on their experience with a company almost immediately via social networks. That's Web 2.0. From a customer service standpoint, collaboration technology via Unified Communications has enabled SMBs to share information on customers in real time to improve service levels. For example, Unified Communications portals feature pop-up screens that coordinate a voice call with data screens identifying the caller and providing background on their call history. A contact center agent in Washington, DC can IM a contact center agent in Seattle, WA while he is trying to resolve a complaint. These types of tools enable customer service agents to resolve issues and answer questions in a quick and efficient manner. In effect, Unified Communications will

New technology developments will make a positive difference in workforce and customer communications.

Perfect Timing

Several factors, including a 2011 network technology switch in the UK, made Unified Communications an urgent consideration.



Source: Mitel

enable a social network within a company. Instead of the Web 2.0 habit of sharing information about the latest gossip or posting product reviews, these networks will allow customer-facing employees to communicate about customers and serve them better.

Unified Communications has other collaboration advantages over legacy communication systems. SMBs already make use of audio conferencing solutions to solve business problems. On digital and analog systems, conference call functions often had to be outsourced at a considerable expense. By upgrading to Unified Communications solutions, most SMBs will find applications such as Mitel's Quick Conference that make it cost effective and simple to connect remote team members on an ad hoc basis.

Quick Conference provides a simple, flexible and scalable audio conferencing solution for small-, medium- or large-sized businesses. Basically it gives employees the ability to hold "ad hoc" conference calls. Complex registrations and scheduling systems are not necessary. Users can set up conference calls "on the fly" from any location at any time, without operator assistance. Simply dial into the conference bridge from any location to join or initiate a conference call. Users initiating a conference call can even select their own conference ID (bridge) for simplicity and ease of use. Mitel Quick Conference supports up to 200 audio channels that can be used in any combination, such as two conference calls with 100 participants, or four conference calls, each with 50 participants, etc.

More advanced SMBs have added web functionality to their conferencing so that documents can be reviewed on the desktop, once again without outsourcing. The most leading-edge firms are now adding video functionality to their virtual meetings. Through unified communications platforms, a host of solutions will be available that support video telephony and other rich media conferencing functionality in cost-effective integrated packages that are well

suited for small businesses. These collaboration tools will enable SMBs to communicate in real-time with their supply chain partners regardless of their location.

2. Reachability

Reachability may be the most compelling reason for SMBs to adopt Unified Communications. Given the global landscape of business today, most businesses have staff working from remote locations. Unified Communications solutions have enabled SMBs to stay connected with remote workers while presenting a seamless face to the customers. From a customer service standpoint, the capabilities delivered by Unified Communications solutions have provided significant competitive advantages for SMBs. For example, with teleworker solutions, contact centers are no longer limited to providing service only during the office hours of the headquarters.

The next phase of reachability for most SMBs is providing simplified and immediate access to their employees who use primarily mobile devices. Some of the more advanced mid-sized companies have started to take advantage of features and functionality such as Mitel's Mobile Extension, which allows mobile workers to receive both their office and mobile calls on a single number.

Another key reachability practice that businesses are adapting from the consumer Web is presence information. Providing an indication of an employee's availability status to communicate with a co-worker or customer, presence information has proven a very successful tool to achieve first call resolution on customer issues. Most presence management tools operate like consumer instant messaging systems, but Unified Communications systems will provide presence-enabled dashboards so that all employees, including receptionists or call center agents can view across the company to see which employees are available to address questions.

With teleworker solutions, contact centers are no longer limited to the regional hours of the headquarters.

3. Security

Through their experience on the Internet, consumers have learned that tools like firewalls, anti-virus solutions and spam filters are essential to protect their personal computers. Those same concerns are multiplied for small businesses choosing an Unified Communications system. An SMBs intellectual property as well as customer data is on the line.

In the past few years, security concerns kept many small businesses from adopting Unified Communications. Just as a network or Website could be hacked, so could customer data shared via Unified Communications. However, as the technology has become well established by larger enterprise companies, SMBs are realizing that IP solutions offer a high degree of security.

Most current IP networks and individual phone sets are backed by industry standard 128 bit AES (Advanced Encryption Standard) encryption. Because calls are sent out across Local Area Networks (LANs) or in some cases via the public Internet, this encryption ensures confidentiality and protects against eavesdropping or interception of conversations. Most of the leading unified communications platforms now feature “security by default” call control signaling and passwords as added protection using proprietary protocol encryption.

Dan York, Best Practices Chair with VoIPSA (Voiceover IP Security Alliance), says some SMB customers still “ask the questions” about call and data security over Unified Communications. However, he says most mid-sized businesses are less concerned about security and are now more focused on “availability” issues as they make the migration to Unified Communications. The questions York answers now are more about “when can I get a Unified Communications system?” than “should I get a Unified Communications system?”

4. Session Initiation Protocol

It is critical for SMB managers to understand the underlying importance of SIP in driving the

future of Unified Communications. An acronym for Session Initiation Protocol, SIP is a signaling protocol for Internet conferencing, telephony, virtual contact center presence, events notification and instant messaging. SIP was established by technology vendor work groups in the communications industry back in 1999. It established features such as the “redirect,” which enables customers or employees to initiate and receive communications using the same phone number regardless of location or device. A company’s employees are never completely disconnected from each other or from their customers with mobile extension.

SIP is being rapidly developed and evangelized by different parties in the communications business (both large and small) because it enables Vendor A to bolt equipment and software on to Vendor B’s existing system. It has also opened up the application development process so that independent software vendors can build specific functions for vertical markets that can be easily integrated into existing systems.

“SIP-enabled solutions have been around for a few years now, but the protocol is still a critical foundation of Unified Communications,” says Brewer. “The standard has helped integrate traditional voice communications with Web-based services and brought voice, data and video into a single infrastructure.”

5. Interoperability

SIP, at another level increases “interoperability.” For SMBs it means that an upgraded communication system has to work together. For example, if a medium-sized international pharmaceutical company with diverse communications systems needs to have an immediate conference call to discuss a new patent, every member of that team must have compatible technology regardless of location. Unified Communications guarantees that consistency of operations. Because standards such as SIP are now well established, it is relatively easy for small businesses to integrate applications from

A company’s employees are never completely disconnected from each other or from their customers with mobile extension.

different media (email, voice, video) as well as equipment from different vendors (mobile devices, PCs, phones).

“The interoperability benefits of Unified Communications are huge for SMBs,” says Mitel’s Brewer. “It gives SMBs a level of flexibility they have never had before. They can choose the products they want from a PBX (Unified Communications server) or handset, and also now have access to more advanced solutions like video and rich data communication that likely would have not been available to them in the past.” It’s crucial that SMBs understand the impact on their day-to-day operations.

Conclusion

This series of white papers has presented the case for upgrading or replacing current SMB communications systems. SMBs have a shorter decision process and a more direct connection between the purchaser and the supplier. Those are advantages SMBs hold over large enterprises. In order to make timely and sound decisions regarding Unified Communications implementation, it is recommended that SMBs focus on evaluating the following three areas.

1. Economics/Budget: Financing, purchasing and leasing options are broader than ever for SMBs. Before moving forward with a supplier, companies should understand their flexibility to offer different options for short-term and long-term communications spending.

2. Workforce: Next, a SMB should audit their employee communication needs. System choices are varied and choosing the right one depends on what the company needs. One of Unified Communications’ strongest suits is unifying workforce communications. Remote workers, mobile extensions and contact center applications must figure into the plan. Employees that possess scarce technical and other key skills are an even more critical

resource for the SMB than they are for larger enterprises. If an SMB loses a key person, it can damage their business significantly. So, communications tools must deliver not just accessibility but also enable staff retention policies such as flexible work hours and work at home.

Because a large number of SMBs use Outlook and other Microsoft software to run their daily business, it is critical that Unified Communications solutions “interoperate” with those core applications. Many solutions will be designed with this in mind, enabling businesses to implement IP-based solutions through a seamless integration with Microsoft’s Office Live Communications Server. This enables an SIP-based presence and collaboration server, which will allow customers to deliver emails on mobile devices and instant messaging into their Unified Communications platforms.

SMBs have a shorter decision process and a more direct connection between the purchaser and the supplier.

3. Customers: Finally, and most importantly, an SMB must audit its customer-centric performance. Customer service can be dramatically enhanced by Unified Communications. Contact centers equipped with presence technology can increase first call resolution. If customer acquisition is the goal, Unified Communications can be used to reach out to new customer groups and new geographic territories.

Above all, SMBs should understand that Unified Communications is within their budget and should be factored into their future investment plans. Employees and customers, will demand no less. The benefits of next generation networks for the small business are enormous, allowing business owners to have more control and flexibility in how they want to operate and the types of applications they want to use today and in the future.

CASE STUDY

In Fort Wayne, You Can IM Your Librarian



Libraries typically don't make the cut when it comes to best practice lists for advanced Unified Communications implementations. Especially a library outside of a major metropolitan area. The Allen County Public Library (ACPL) breaks that rule and provides some real world examples of advanced Unified Communications applications.

The ACPL serves Fort Wayne, IN and surrounding towns. Fort Wayne topped the list of "Best Read" cities in the U.S. in 2006 according to *Places Rated Almanac*. However, armed with a book collection that outranks major metropolitan areas and an IP communications system that rivals major corporations, it proves that big thinking can come out of smaller markets. The ACPL's main building is 360,000 square feet, making it the 14th largest library in the country, and the facility features the nation's largest public genealogy collection, second only to Salt Lake City, UT. With only 311 employees however, it still ranks as a mid-sized business.

As part of a recent \$84-million expansion, the main library relocated to a new facility in 2006, and 13 branches were fully renovated. Prior to reopening its doors, the ACPL also decided to upgrade its customer service strategy. An integral part of that mission was upgrading its communication system to be more responsive to its members and internal staff of librarians. Funded directly by property taxes, the ACPL has a more substantial budget than many other public libraries, but it also has a more demanding base of patrons.

"We have a long history of serving our community and we consistently rank among the top 10 in the country in terms of usage," says Sean Robinson, Director of IT for the library system. "Our patrons want to get real tangible value for their tax dollar so they have come to expect a wide variety of services and programs and we work hard to meet those expectations."

Robinson was looking to provide the library's staff with extended functionality such as wireless

phones and text messaging capability to the desktop. To enable such advanced functionality, the ACPL chose a Microsoft Office Live Communications Server and integrated that with the Mitel Live Business Gateway and Mitel IP Phones.

Patrons now have the ability to send questions via an Instant Message to members of the library's staff. "We want patrons to be able to get answers to their questions immediately. Just as a store wants to make sure it is easy for customers to make transactions, we want our patrons to be able to get the information they want when they want it. Whether they want to send an IM or contact us via phone," Robinson says. "We don't want to have any barriers between our patrons and the person they are dealing with."

Because the main library is such a large facility, reaching staff members was difficult with its prior system. Although the staff had been utilizing cordless phones, Robinson says they weren't always accessible in remote areas of the building. The new solution incorporates wireless phones which offer all of the same functionality as a desk phone. Now, regardless of where staff is located, they can be reached either by voice or text messaging, which lowers cost and increases productivity and customer service.

In addition to better serving its patrons, Robinson says another goal was providing more efficient response to the staff of librarians. The contact center personnel can directly call or IM the staff, regardless of where they're located. "Our librarians were getting frustrated with our old call center and they let us know they didn't want to be put through to a voice mail or be given a lot of different automated options to choose from," he says. "They wanted to talk to a person promptly and have their problem addressed. The new system allows them to accomplish that."

Overall, Robinson estimates the ACPL will save approximately \$25,000 per year through the Unified Communications solution. ■

Funded directly by property taxes, the ACPL has a more substantial budget than many other public libraries, but it also has a more demanding base of patrons.

About This Series

Technology has redefined what it means to be a small-to medium-sized business (SMB). The Internet and all its communications applications for telephony allow SMBs to look and act like their much bigger counterparts. At the heart of this technology is a concept called “Unified Communications.” It represents the intersection of traditional IP Telephony and advanced Internet applications, and can launch SMBs into more valuable and efficient consumer communications, customer relationships and employee teamwork. This white paper series reveals how Unified Communications can connect SMBs to their most valuable customers.

Mitel

Companies don’t make decisions, people do. That is why Mitel is leading the way toward a new and more personalized approach to communications for enterprise and small business. Our innovative solutions, applications and desktop appliances enable you to access, process and control your communications and information naturally, simply and efficiently. Our solutions allow you to collaborate over distance and time and to interact with your customers, colleagues and partners as never before. By combining the power of voice, data and video over converged high speed networks, Mitel provides you with flexible and personalized tools that let you leverage the latest advances for personal and organizational advantage.

More information is available at: www.mitel.com or 1-866-641-8082.

1to1® Media

1to1® Media is dedicated to helping organizations realize the greatest value from their customer base. We provide resources that deliver current and relevant information on the latest thought leadership regarding customer strategy and marketplace trends. Our goal is to serve as the catalyst that will inspire senior executives to drive change within their organizations, making customer-based initiatives the centerpiece of their growth strategy and competitive advantage.

Led by *1to1 Magazine*, 1to1 Media’s print, electronic and custom publications explore the best practices, trends and developments from companies who are using customer initiatives to drive bottom-line impact. Backed by Peppers & Rogers Group, the globally-recognized leader in customer strategy and relationship marketing, 1to1 Media combines thought leadership, field experience, editorial expertise and global brand awareness to deliver the content needed by our audience of more than 250,000 decision-makers and practitioners. More information is available at: www.1to1media.com