Corporate Collaboration: The Essential Ingredient to your UC Strategy
As video sharing pervades consumer lives, enterprises must make room for it in the workplace. From WebRTC to consumer video in the enterprise, UC technology innovation is changing the future of collaboration. Enterprises are beginning to learn that the essential ingredient to any UC strategy is corporate collaboration.

Video sharing: Your kids can do it. Why can’t your employees?
By: Irwin Lazar

As video sharing pervades consumer lives, enterprises must make room for it in the workplace. Nemertes Research explains the business case, concerns and tips for video content management.

Among the under-30 crowd, video sharing is pervasive. Services like Instagram, YouTube, Vine and Snapchat easily allow individuals to make their own videos and share them with friends. But most companies lack these same capabilities for business collaboration, either internally or externally with business partners. That’s rapidly changing.

The Nemertes 2014-15 Enterprise Technology benchmark, based on data gathered from more than 200 end-user organizations, found that more than half (54%) of companies already have an enterprise platform for video capture and streaming. Another 18% are either evaluating products or services, or are planning a deployment by 2015; just under 29% have no plans. So, problem solved, right? Not exactly.

Video sharing use cases in the workplace

When we dug into use cases for video content management and streaming platforms, we found that the overwhelming majority, nearly 67%, are primarily using them for distance learning, allowing employees to access a library of video-on-demand content regardless of location. The second-biggest driver (7%) is recording video conferences for future playback. While both use...
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cases are valuable, neither allows users to easily create their own videos and share them as they can with public services like Instagram. Just a handful of companies are enabling support for such capabilities.

Govern your video policy

What happens if IT doesn't deliver a streaming video platform of its own? Employees will simply attach their videos to emails or upload them to file servers, clogging up storage resources. In the worst-case scenario, much like we saw with instant messaging and are currently seeing with mobile document sharing, workers will simply bypass corporate IT and use consumer services outside of IT's control. Circumventing IT creates security and governance headaches as companies lose control of content, and consumer applications make it next to impossible for personnel to search for relevant video content.

Either of these scenarios has the potential to add to network congestion woes, especially at remote sites or across maxed-out Internet connections. Neither allows for IT governance, which includes retention, classification and encryption policies. Just 26% of benchmark participants have a policy in place to govern recorded video, while 11% plan to have one by the end of 2014. The remaining 63% are either evaluating potential policies or haven't even started to look at video content management requirements.

Prepare your network for video sharing

So, what's an enterprise IT planner to do? Fortunately a slew of companies exist that provide enterprise-grade video content management capabilities. These include Brightcove, Ignite, Kaltura, Kontiki, Qumu, and VBrick as well as video conferencing vendors like Cisco, Lifesize and Polycom.

Key differentiators among the vendors include:

• the distribution architecture (e.g., peer-to-peer multicast, distributed appliance or network multicast),
• support for cloud storage,
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By: Irwin Lazar

Unified Communications is poised for rapid change that will be driven by a perfect storm of mobilized workers, innovative technologies and a changing vendor landscape.

On the vendor front, Microsoft Lync is challenging Avaya and Cisco for market dominance, while new cloud-based providers promise to allow IT to scrap its own servers, disband centralized technology budgets and assign spending to specific lines-of-business.

Meanwhile UC technologies are evolving to enable new kinds of communication through a wider variety of endpoints. WebRTC offers the power to democratize UC by extending features like voice and video into any desktop or mobile web browser. Additionally, UC vendors are integrating wired and wireless worlds to better serve the growing base of unwired workers who spend more time on tablets or smartphones than at desks. Finally, video isn't just for conferencing anymore, as consumer services such as...
as YouTube and Vine drive enterprise video collaboration and content sharing in the enterprise.

The following five trends are changing UC with the potential to alter how companies deploy technology and how business professionals communicate:

1. **Cloud-Based UC: How SaaS Will Change the Way We Spend**

   More than 90% of companies now use Software as a service (SaaS) applications, according to the Nemertes 2013-14 Enterprise Technology Benchmark.

   Enterprises are turning to SaaS partially because they lack in-house expertise and need speedier deployment. But even more important, SaaS allows enterprises to be flexible with IT resources and spending.

   Specifically, buying cloud-based UC applications allows IT to eliminate capital spending and move to an operational cost model in which companies only pay for what they need, when they need it. What's more, SaaS allows IT teams to push service costs directly out to specific lines-of-business.

   Cloud UC isn't for everyone, however. The larger the user base, the more likely it is that cloud services will be more expensive than on-premises UC, according to Nemertes Research. The tipping point for IP telephony is about 2,500 users. Cloud services don't allow for the customization that some organizations require, and the cloud may not be acceptable if security regulations dictate that companies must store all data on premise.

   The solution may be in deploying a mix of cloud and on-premises applications, but that requires integration using middleware from...
vendors such as Esna and Next Plane to allow presence federation between applications. That means additional cost and complexity. But integrating services from multiple cloud providers (e.g., one vendor’s Web conferencing with another’s video), is even more problematic.

Despite the challenges, most companies will take cloud services into consideration as they evaluate UC technology.

2. Mobile UC: Enterprises Must Deliver UC to a Multitude of Devices

Enterprises have learned quickly that the BYOD trend can benefit them if personal and enterprise-issued devices are used to improve worker productivity. So they’re moving to support mobile workers across a wide range of devices and mobile operating systems, and enable mobile UC applications.

Employees demand capabilities, like single-number reachability and the same set of UC features on their tablets or smartphones that they have on their desktop. For IT, supporting mobile workers entails a new set of challenges, including guaranteeing real-time application performance on crowded wireless networks, tracking user location for 911 response, securing applications and data on employee-owned devices and managing UC performance on mobile devices outside of IT’s control.

In tackling these issues, companies will continue to embrace mobile device management and mobile application management tools from vendors including AirWatch, Good and Mobile Iron. Or they turn to mobile carriers such as AT&T and Verizon for hosted mobile device management services.

Meanwhile, most UC vendors have delivered fully functional mobile clients for personal and enterprise devices that support their applications and features. Mixed-vendor shops, however, face a
larger problem because it’s generally not possible to enable a seamless end-user experience across many disparate UC applications and features on one mobile device. Often this challenge leads UC architects to consolidate UC vendors around a single strategic partner that can deliver a fully integrated set of applications on desktops and mobile devices alike.

3. Video: Not Just for Conferencing Anymore

Video is an increasingly central part of collaboration technology, becoming a more universal conferencing tool while simultaneously transforming into a medium for enterprise content sharing.

On the video conferencing front, new codecs like H.264 high profile and H.264 Scalable Video Coding (SVC) are reducing the network impact of video, even enabling high-definition video across the Internet or public 3G/4G wireless networks. H.265 is on the horizon, offering the same benefits but in a standard protocol that should allow interoperability among various video vendors. Cloud services such as Blue Jeans Network and Vidtel provide the ability to hold conferences among a mix of room and desktop endpoints, mobile users and consumer services (like Skype)—all without the capital cost of buying a multipoint conference unit.

Meanwhile, a revolution is taking place as companies embrace user-generated video, bringing the capabilities of consumer services like YouTube into the enterprise. From recording video conferences for future playback to distance learning, video is quickly emerging as a way to share content internally and externally from a multitude of sources. IT leaders are evaluating and deploying multipurpose video platforms from vendors including Kaltura, Kontiki and Qumu. They’re also looking at integrated options from video-conferencing vendors like LifeSize and Polycom. Even service providers like Verizon are getting into the mix, delivering content management and sharing as a
hosted service.

4. WebRTC: Voice and Video for All... No UC Platform Required

WebRTC enables Web browsers to function as voice and video endpoints without the need for a separate app or browser plug-in. This means users can “click-to-call” from within a webpage or mobile app without ever having to pick up the phone. Ultimately, WebRTC aims to provide UC apps like telephony and video conferencing to literally anyone.

Because WebRTC is implemented using JavaScript, Web developers can use the technology to add voice, video and screen sharing to their applications. This means they can enable peer-to-peer communications without using a UC platform, which raises some concerns that Web developers will create rich media applications without the knowledge of the network team.

Despite all the hype, WebRTC is still in its infancy. Chrome’s and Firefox’s implementations aren’t supported by Internet Explorer or Safari. Video codec standards aren’t universally defined and common telephony features like compressed voice codecs aren’t yet supported. Still, WebRTC represents one of the more exciting and potentially transformative areas in UC.

5. Lync: Transforming the Vendor Landscape

Ever since Microsoft introduced “VoIP As You Are” in 2007, Microsoft has gradually challenged the incumbent VoIP vendors including Avaya, Cisco, Mitel, NEC, Siemens and ShoreTel. Its efforts recently accelerated with the launch of Lync and Lync 2013, positioning Microsoft as a full-fledged, fully featured alternative to competing telephony platforms with one major advantage—the company’s applications already dominate the desktop.

Microsoft is convincing a growing number of its IM and Web
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Corporate collaboration: The essential ingredient to any UC strategy

By: Karen Kervin

Collaboration is a key component of the unified communications (UC) discussion. Many think of corporate collaboration in communications as the audio/Web-conferencing and shared-workspace component of the UC tool, but there is so much more to it. Collaboration means using communications tools to enable geographically distributed employees and work groups to cooperate with each other to achieve a business objective or goal.

Most UC and collaborative communications solutions are not single products. This means they require integration, either between technical elements or with processes and other applications, in order to simplify user enablement. Corporate collaboration is what brings value proposition to UC by improving productivity and reducing travel expenses and real estate costs. The overarching goal of unified communications and collaboration (UCC) is to not only improve intracompany collaboration, but to seamlessly and effectively allow real-time intercompany collaboration and communications.

Shared components of UC and collaboration

In addition to talking, audio/Web conferencing and shared workspaces, collaboration also encompasses the following UC components:
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Contents

Chats, text, or instant messaging for quick discussions
Presence for knowing who is available for quick discussions
Social collaboration for sharing information and documents internally
Email for discussions that need more words and possibly attachments
Video conferencing for face-to-face collaboration

Integrating UC and collaborative components

UC architects should spend time with end users to determine current and future collaboration and UC needs in order to understand which components to implement. Since most of these elements are not single products, components must be integrated for maximum productivity and ease of use. UC architects tend to integrate these tools into the IP telephony platform, into the cloud, into the corporate data center or some combination of the three. Integration, for instance, makes it possible to view someone’s presence status from within a customer relationship management (CRM) application or from a mobile device. It can allow a user to click-to-conference with a coworker then escalate into a video chat. Collaboration tools must be easy to use or they won’t get used. Integration is the key.

Combine corporate collaboration and UC in the cloud

As enterprises assess how to build, deploy and manage their UCC strategy, they are turning to managed, hosted and cloud-based UC service providers to impact success. A recent 2012 Nemertes Research Group survey found that use of managed, hosted and cloud (MHC) services is exploding, with 75% reporting use of such services in 2012, and the majority (58%) reporting they intend to increase MHC service usage over the following year. Cloud-based UC services are a key method for reducing the complexity of your UCC deployment. For this strategy to be successful, follow these steps when building a UCC strategy:
1. Take a complete inventory of your infrastructure assets and network, staff skills and capabilities, and total cost of ownership, and understand how your IT strategy aligns with your business plan.

2. Decide which UC components should be outsourced, and determine return on investment (ROI) and service-level expectations.

3. Create a plan outlining key milestones, skills requirements and cutover priorities.

4. Choose a financially viable provider with a good track record of quality and responsiveness that can fill in where your internal team is weak.

Once your UCC plan is implemented, and end-user training is complete, ensure that you can show ROI in terms of reduced travel, enhanced productivity and end-user satisfaction. This should be easy to do since collaboration, both inside and outside the company, will be greatly enhanced due to carefully planned unification.
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