The Next Generation Trading Floor

IP Based Trading Turrets Come of Age
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Technology innovation offers new features and benefits for organizations that are willing to adopt these cutting-edge business enablers. Much like the mainframe gave way to the PC, enterprise voice communications have moved from TDM technology to IP technology. With the proliferation of affordable storage, virtualization technologies and the arrival of cloud-based technologies, we are experiencing a new era in anywhere, anytime communication.

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Introduction

Communications systems have come a long way over the last decade. This is especially true in the financial trading communications space. There are several reasons for this change. First and foremost, there are social reasons. The world has evolved into a community-based workforce. The days of one trader talking to one client or one colleague at are time are over. Decisions are made faster, information needs to be presented more quickly, and people need to collaborate real-time via voice, data, instant messaging (IM) and audio/video conferencing. They also need to connect via many different devices such as traditional handsets, desktops and mobile smartphones.

There are also three technological enhancements causing these rapid changes. First, traditional digital Time Division Multiplexing (TDM) system architectures are being replaced by Internet Protocol (IP) server-based architectures. Second, fast processors, affordable storage, and ubiquitous connectivity options offer today’s businesses a multitude of on-premise and hosted (read: “cloud-based”) communication solutions options. Lastly, virtualization technologies and the promise of cloud computing are delivering dramatic productivity, efficiency, and cost savings to organizations of all sizes. IP Communications are here. The hype has been replaced by adoption. The benefits include tangible business results.

The time is now to take advantage of these changes. The new world of financial trading happens on a global level with multiple people collaborating with information shared over a ubiquitous IP communications network.

This paper will define some of the technologies that are driving this communications evolution, as well as highlight the way IP trading turret communications solutions are changing the way business is done on the trading floor.
The Challenge

Over the next decade, the majority of the financial trader workforce will have grown up with the internet and cloud-based technologies. Innovative communications technologies are, and will become increasingly, paramount in offering them productivity-gaining and efficiency-gaining capabilities.

In addition, the way work gets done on the trading floor is changing. Communities of people will make decisions on a global, boundary-less basis, with information shared over voice, data and video. This is the anywhere, anytime era of communications.

The community approach to decision and deal-making must also comply with regulatory requirements. This means that all documentation that is relevant to the trading process must somehow be integrated. This can occur with IP-based unified communications solutions where all data and information can be captured on one platform and architecture.

Technologies Triggering the Change

There are several key technology enablers driving the change in the communications systems that are being deployed on today’s innovative trading floors. For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on the five most relevant:

- **Internet Protocol (IP)** solutions are transforming the communications experience for traders by enabling converged communications including traditional voice calls, unified communications and messaging, instant messaging (IM), chat and audio, and video conferencing. They may also be integrated with additional enterprise applications including: Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Order Management Systems (OMS) further optimizing the productivity on the trading floor.
- **Session Initiation Protocol (SIP)** is a signaling protocol widely used for controlling communication sessions (e.g., voice and video calls) over IP. Other SIP supported applications include: instant messaging, video conferencing, presence information, streaming multimedia distribution, and file transfer. SIP offers cost effective, open-standards connectivity for distributed trader voice solutions for secondary sites.
- **Unified Communications (UC)** refers to the concept of consolidating phone, email, fax, chat, video, presence and collaboration into a single unified channel, either on a device or on a computer. If you receive a voicemail, it is deposited in your email inbox where you can listen to the message, review the availability status of the party who left it, and respond to them in their desired communication channel, whether it is chat, phone or email.
- **Virtualization Software**. Today’s computer hardware was designed to run a single operating system and a single application, leaving most machines vastly underutilized. Simply put, virtualization technology allows you to run multiple virtual machines (servers) on a single physical machine (server),
As processing power has increased and switching technology has matured, there has been a tectonic shift to more flexible and scalable IP-based solutions.

- Cloud Communications is a set of web-based tools and services that permit users to acquire computing resources and development capabilities to build or support applications, or perform specific IT functions, on a pay-as-you-go basis.
- Hybrid Cloud provides a dedicated instance of these services for your exclusive use, and as a result can be secured and accessed privately from remote and satellite offices. While they are housed in a provider’s data center, they do not leverage the pool of shared resources, so they cannot grow and shrink. They also do not include failover and redundancy.

Trading Turrets Defined

A trading turret is a specialized telephony key system, also known as a dealer board, which is generally used by financial traders in conjunction with other tools that make up their electronic trading platform.

Voice trading turret systems differ from typical phone systems due to specialized features, functions and capabilities specifically designed for financial traders.

Trading turret systems provide:
- The ability for traders to visualize and prioritize incoming calls from customers or counter-parties and make calls to these same people instantaneously by pushing a single button to access a line.
- Multiple handsets and multi-channel speaker units that are generally shared by teams (e.g., equities, fixed income, foreign exchange and global trading organizations).

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, these systems have evolved significantly over the last decade. Trading turret systems traditionally relied on distributed switching architectures that enabled parallel processing of calls ensuring a non-blocking scenario due to there being more call paths than users, which in turn offered a certain level of fault tolerance and business continuity. As processing power has increased and switching technology has matured, there has been a tectonic shift away from these TDM solutions to more flexible and scalable IP-based solutions.

There have also been major ergonomic enhancements. The footprint for the turret sets is sleeker, enabling it to take up less desktop space. The touch screens are larger and brighter and feature a more intuitive user interface. There are more softkeys for programming additional features. Over the last several years, a soft client has been introduced by many vendors to allow users to use their PC’s as their telephony capability as well.
"... the systems must be able to be deployed quickly and be seamlessly equipped to be managed and monitored from a browser-based or portal-based management user interface..."
“Technology innovation offers new features and benefits for organizations that are willing to adopt these cutting-edge business enablers.”

into any turret handset are paramount for the always-on-the-go modern trading floor. Other key features include Unified Communications features such as:

- Click-to-dial
- Caller ID
- Voicemail
- IM
- Presence
- Video/audio conferencing
- CRM integration
- Microsoft Outlook and Active Directory integration

A Sea Change is Occurring

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The IT Data Center model of capital investment and ongoing management of systems has changed the game from the historical capital-intensive purchase of hardware and software to a predictable operating expense model has allowed for a true pay-as-you-go-model. This is especially relevant to the financial trading market that experiences growth spurts and troughs in a frenetic sine wave fashion. The power of a singular distributed IP architecture in the data center will offer a platform that offers consistent communications features affording increased efficiency and agility to the business.

In addition, private cloud-based solutions enable these organizations to turn up smaller satellite offices as they experience incremental growth, rather than purchase full-fledged systems with capital that may far exceed their needs and capacity requirements.
Things to Remember

All new technology frontiers hold the promise of what could be, and pitfalls for what will be. As previously stated, thorough due diligence should be completed before making any fundamental technology change.

The following areas need to be addressed before any vendors are chosen and any contracts are signed:

1. Security – When doing due diligence on a potential vendor, one should look carefully at its security infrastructure and track record with other customers.
2. Vendor Reputation – Get references from other customers, discuss the potential technology partner with colleagues, and research them on the Web.
3. Business Continuity Plans - Data protection and backup and disaster recovery plans must be thoroughly examined to ensure the safety of your critical data. As mentioned earlier, this is a benefit of the IT Data Center model.
4. Pricing Models – You need to understand the pricing variables available to you. These models could be based on: the storage required, software licensing, moves, adds, and changes (MACs), number of users, or central processing unit (CPU) time. Or, it could be a subscription-based model.

Summary

Ultimately, you will need to determine if an IP-based trader voice system is right for you and your business. Remember, do your due diligence, and start with an area of your organization that makes the most sense to deploy these types of systems. Whether you make your choice due to budgetary constraints, lack of the appropriate skills, or a desire to focus your IT staff on core competencies – maybe it’s time your business embraces IP-based communications solutions.

Regardless of the path you choose, make sure that the products you select use standard protocols, have a well-documented application programming interface (API) to support future plans, and include a documented and tested list of interoperable equipment. Also, confirm that the vendor you are considering can demonstrate what they are selling, preferably outside of their demo lab.

IP-based trading turret solutions hold great promise. Tread carefully and execute your seamless communications strategy with a tactical approach that has clear and realistic expectations.

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About Unify

Unify is one of the world's leading communications software and services firms, providing integrated communications solutions for approximately 75 percent of the Fortune Global 500. Our solutions unify multiple networks, devices and applications into one easy-to-use platform that allows teams to engage in rich and meaningful conversations. The result is a transformation of how the enterprise communicates and collaborates that amplifies collective effort, energizes the business, and enhances business performance. Unify has a strong heritage of product reliability, innovation, open standards and security.

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