



Work With Me

The Business Value of Collaboration & How to Make it Work

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Introduction: Why Collaboration Has Become Critical to Business?

New research shows that beyond a nice ROI for technology and services, collaboration has clear correlations to business performance.

The continued thrust of consumer technologies into the business arena has created expectations by younger workers and customers that carry enough critical mass to demand attention. The workforce is becoming more geographically dispersed, widely separating co-workers, customers and suppliers. Employees need to work together and reach each other without travelling and losing productivity.

It would be easy, by all the buzz around collaboration technology, to assume that if you get your hands on voice, web and video conferencing technology, you've got everything covered. But that is not reality. New research shows us the criticality of integrating communications with commonly used business tools. And user adoption is vital to ROI. The irrepressible push of new consumer devices and social media into business can bring challenges of policy management and security. And simply keeping IT skills current with such a wide field of technologies, each in the midst of its own rapid innovation cycle, can be a strain.

For some businesses, the situation can be further confused by the debate over whether to replace the current communications infrastructure with a unified communications and collaboration (UC) framework; or whether the current environment can be satisfactorily augmented with new capabilities, enabling a more gradual evolution.

The purpose of this paper is to provide insight and an information framework to aid in successful planning and deployment of collaboration solutions that perform.

It would be easy to assume that if you get your hands on voice, web and video conferencing technology, you've got everything covered.

Part 1: The Business Value of Collaboration

Collaboration has a direct correlation to growth, market share and profit.

On-demand, well-integrated communication and collaboration allows staff, customers and partners to provide qualified, contextual information to the right people at the right time.

Four years ago, researchers at McKinsey & Company began studying the business impact of new social media and collaboration technologies – a set of technologies they refer to as Web 2.0 collaboration.

While executives at companies using these technologies had reported many benefits, the question McKinsey set out to answer was: “do these benefits translate into fundamental performance improvements, measured by reported market share gains and higher profits?”

Yes¹.

The latest round of McKinsey research declares the emergence of a new type of company – the Networked Enterprise – “one that uses collaborative Web 2.0 technologies intensively to connect the internal efforts of employees and to extend the organization’s reach to customers, partners and suppliers”. The findings: these companies gain greater market share and enjoy higher profit margins.

It makes sense. On-demand, well-integrated communication and collaboration allows staff, customers and partners to provide qualified, contextual information to the right people at the right time. Information silos can be broken down, driving cross-functional and cross-location collaboration; enabling more customer input to product and service offerings; and removing latency from business processes that rely on expertise, current status information or approvals for completion.

And, there is plenty of data on cost savings associated with building in-house voice, web and video conferencing services to slash bills from external service providers and reduce the need for travel.

What may not be as universally understood is the growing role of social media in the collaborative realm of business communications. In fact, a study by the Yankee Group³ documents consumer demand for business contact via social media. According to the study:

- 80% of survey respondents believe businesses should review social media sites to see what people are saying about them
- 70% of consumers want to chat with company experts in real-time via social media sites
- 58% of consumers say regular communication with a business via social networking sites improves their loyalty to that business
- 65% of consumers want to share new product ideas with a company

Though it may be a bitter pill, the study also finds a significant generation gap that may be adversely affecting executive attitudes toward social media in business. Consider the polarized responses, based on age: 51% of respondents over age 50 state that social media is *not at all important* to a business, while 43% of 18 to 24 year olds say it is *very important*.

¹ The Rise of the Networked Enterprise: Web 2.0 Finds its Payday. Jacques Bughin and Michael Chui: McKinsey & Company, December 2010.

² Social Media Means Serious Business. Sheryl Kingstone and Zeus Karravala: Yankee Group, June 2010.

³ Finding the Value in Unified Communications – Understanding the Hierarchy of Return. Frost & Sullivan, November 2010.

In an effort to thwart unproductive time and unauthorized broadcasts on behalf of the company, some businesses continue to have a 'no social media' policy – though the Yankee Group study has some interesting revelations on the ineffectiveness of this approach. Fully 73% of respondents say they use social media tools at work. 67% of them say they need more tools to track and manage their social communications *for business purposes*. Clearly, the social media genie is out of the bottle. Employees on-the-go will Tweet colleagues looking for available support. Sales reps leverage LinkedIn® to find and connect to prospective new customers. Product and Service managers set up unofficial Facebook pages for the company to gather ideas and opinions from the market and partners.

The challenge with social media – and other collaboration technologies – is the incredible influx of consumer technologies into the business arena – by employees, partners and customers. With such rich communications being used for personal communications, a business's most savvy, communicative and well-networked employees are very likely using social media and rich collaboration for business via personal devices and services, if they are not otherwise provided by the company. It just isn't being managed, tracked, secured and integrated by the business.

Increasingly, if you want secure web collaboration, you need to get ahead of employees and provide a secure, trackable web conferencing tool as part of the corporate communications plan. Likewise, if you want to ensure skilled and authorized representation of the company on social media sites, keep up with things being written about your company, and ensure managed and measured response to social media communications, you need to have the tools integrated into the business communications environment, with use plans and policies that help minimize the risk of unfavourable use. Keeping ahead of costs, for many businesses, means getting ahead of user demand and introducing secure,

integrated solutions that are cost optimized for the business. Employees need to be trained on appropriate practices in screen-sharing, whiteboarding, posting on social media sites, converting posts into trackable media for compliance purposes and more.

The good news is that most executives who have made investments in these technologies clearly find it worthwhile. The McKinsey study found that nearly two-thirds of respondents at companies currently using these technologies say they will *increase* future investments in these technologies, underscoring the value they expect. A Frost & Sullivan study³, similarly found that executives who have deployed collaboration and unified communication technologies have found overwhelming value in the deployments:

- 100% of C-level executives say video conferencing and UC technologies meet or exceed their expectations for boosting collaboration
- 100% of C-level executives say VoIP, UC and presence information meet or exceed their expectations for improving customer service.
- 100% of C-level executives say unified communications meet or exceed their expectations for reducing costs.

Wrap that up with McKinsey's observation that "... technology-enabled collaboration with external stakeholders helps organizations gain market share from the competition", and it's clear that companies that are not embracing comprehensive collaborative technologies may be falling behind in ways that effect their costs, productivity, market share, customer loyalty and profitability.

The challenge is to make it all work – to make enterprise-class solutions out of technologies that have strong roots in the consumer world; get in step with employees, customers and partners who are using these technologies; and make sure deployments are setup to maximize return on investment.

Collaboration Must-Haves

What's in today's best of breed business collaboration suite?

Voice Conferencing – shed external service bureaus and start saving

Web Conferencing – meet online more securely and reduce wasted time traveling

Video Conferencing – improve team building and rapport with high quality video

Rich presence and IM – move business forward by having real-time access to people and information

Social Media Integration – integrate your communications with social apps like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to reach a broader audience and establish brand loyalty

Part 2: Making Collaboration Work

Good technology is only part of the solution. To get the return on investment, collaboration technology needs to be integrated, mobile, secure, scalable and – perhaps most important of all – embraced by users.

That's how a good UC solution removes process latency and encourages rich communication: it streamlines communication tasks and leverages technologies like presence to enable successful communications wherever you are.

While there are many factors that can influence the degree and speed of success with your collaboration and unified communications deployment, you'll cover a lot of ground if you get inside these five critical factors.

Integration

The McKinsey study shows that the degree of integration has a direct correlation to the achieved results. In fact, the top-performing companies showed substantially higher levels of integration of social and collaboration technologies into day-to-day work tools and processes.

The over-arching goal for integration is to remove all possible communications activities from To-Do lists. If a call-back or setting up a conference requires a separate task, chances are a business process is stalled. If your communication and collaboration tools are well integrated into common applications and mobile devices, a communication task can often be completed in less time than it takes to make notes for later execution. That's how a good UC solution removes process latency and encourages rich communication: it streamlines communication tasks and leverages technologies like presence to enable successful communications wherever you are.

Look for solutions that:

- Offer a complete presence model that is more than just IM presence and more than just vendor-based telephony presence
- Integrate to groupware and enterprise applications with ease
- Create all-in-one command centers for presence, scheduled or ad hoc collaboration sessions, and all message formats (voice, email, IM, social media alerts)
- Are accessible via multiple clients – PC or telephone; desktop app or browser; office or mobile
- Integrate well with contact center agent tools, as well as contact workflows and reporting
- Enable popular user interface options, such as smart phone gestures, to keep up with user expectations
- Provide integration toolkits and services to fuel development of customized solutions that support critical business processes

Open, standards-based technology with few or no proprietary extensions is invaluable to achieving the needed level of integration. By its nature, unified communications is a multi-vendor game: your business needs multiple applications that come from different suppliers.

Intuitive and seamless integration into the applications your employees use every day will help achieve the business process optimization and efficiency that drive competitive advantage. You'll have more flexibility and more affordable integration with open, modular, best of breed solutions.

- **OpenScape UC**

Mobility

Collaboration technologies are often most needed by people on the move. The good news is that a collaboration plan built on an open, unified communications platform can add security and integration while helping to contain or reduce mobility costs.

When checking out mobile solutions, keep these in mind:

- Can users access it via desktop or mobile device?
 - Can the functionality be leveraged by voice-only users, such as those dialling in from cars or hotel rooms?
 - Can users access the solution via web browser, as well as a desktop client?
 - Do the user interfaces align elegantly with the general device interfaces of smart phones, tablets and laptops?
 - Does the solution enable seamless hand-off of calls between desktop and mobile devices?
 - How efficiently does the solution perform via wireless connections?
 - Can the solution leverage cost-saving network optimization capabilities, such as IP Least Cost Routing, routing mobile calls over the enterprise WAN, and SIP trunking?
 - What can be secured and tracked via the enterprise solution?
- **OpenScape Video**
 - **OpenScape Voice**
 - **OpenScape Mobility**

Security

What happens to shared files after your employees end a web conference? Can a service provider decrypt files on their servers and introduce unexpected security risks? Do your employees have the option to share only necessary applications, rather than opening their complete desktop to others? Does the web conferencing software open vulnerabilities to your operating system?

Many collaborative technologies, like Web Conferencing have reached critical mass, but the level of security may not be up to enterprise standards in all cases. In many companies, employees are signing up for free trial offers and individual accounts, without questioning the security aspects of the solution. Adoption is often viral and users can become hooked on a solution that may not be secure enough for the kind of sensitive information being shared. Adoption is often viral and users can become hooked on a solution they can easily access - without asking questions astute IT managers would ask about security.

With so many elements at play, plan a session with prospective vendors and/or engage a security consultant to help assess and mitigate risk in collaborative technologies.

At the same time, take a look at the user-accessible security features for collaboration solutions.

- Do users and participants have to download/install unverified software onto their PCs?
- Can users see who is on a conference in any medium?
- Can they selectively remove unidentified participants from a conference?
- Can they share only a specific application rather than their entire desktop - easily and intuitively?
- Can conferences be password protected?

Do your employees have the option to share only necessary applications, rather than opening their complete desktop to others?

Fortunately, these are usually paired with a great return on investment and communications advantages that boost productivity and market engagement.

- Is additional hardware setup and software installation required to include external parties in a collaboration session?
- What happens to your shared documents after the collaboration session has ended?

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Scalability

Collaboration has a learning curve and an investment curve in most companies. Fortunately, these are usually paired with a great return on investment and communications advantages that boost productivity and market engagement. You may wish to start with a community of power users; but once they have robust, affordable tools at hand, demand for those tools will grow virally. As it does, you'll improve organizational collaboration and move more fans to your cost-saving in-house solutions. You'll also create more demand for user licenses, network capacity for richer communication, and support for different devices.

It's vital to create a roadmap for scaling collaborative solutions - including network capacity and user support - to accommodate growing use. This is about more than the number of users or conferences supported by a collaboration application. Consider factoring into your plans:

- **Network readiness, monitoring and quality of service resources.** You may wish to source much of this to a partner with deep experience in real-time communication networks, at least through your first year or two deploying rich collaboration solutions. Adoption rates on collaborative technologies can suddenly hit a tipping point, and you'll want to have in place systems and resources watching the impact on your network

- **Wireless LAN impact and scalability.** Mobile use and mobile bandwidth will continue to grow for businesses with highly mobile and virtual employees needing to collaborate on a daily basis. Be sure to factor this into plans for scalability. Wireless cloud solutions may be a good option.
- **Data center-friendly solutions.** Managing from the data center is a critical component to optimizing Total Cost of Ownership (TCO). Evaluate solutions for their hardware burden (servers to support added users and functionality); extent of and formats for virtualization; branch survivability options; and the flexibility to deploy via public cloud, private cloud or custom hybrid models.

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- **Architectural elegance matters.** A sound architectural foundation will scale up easily, with minimal hardware and without creating complicated server clusters to manage. Look for a collaborative solution that is open, modular, scalable, software oriented, and based on industry standards. This is something that creates a consistent framework that is open, modular, scalable and software oriented. Collaborative communications often leverage multiple resources simultaneously. Bringing the components of a collaboration solution together will be easiest with a native SIP foundation that supports a common framework for call routing, quality of service, session management, session detail recording, etc. A solution that layers adaptors over each component or that requires complex integrations of each component can become cumbersome and drive cost of ownership upward.

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User Adoption

To get the optimal return, you'll need to fuel user adoption. That can mean thoughtful, top-down communications with users in the beginning and establishing solid user support practices that serve the new environment.

Most businesses that have deployed collaboration technology see similar patterns in user adoption. A few technologically bold employees will use the new capabilities with little more than an invitation. Others hold back because they are comfortable with what they know, and simply assume that learning a new technology is going to burden their schedules. Without the right plans for user communication and support, your return on investment in collaborative technologies can drag out.

Through these tough economic times, employee productivity has grown as work forces have shrunk. That translates into employees strained to new limits and hard pressed to find time to self-educate on new tools. For some users, new technologies can simply feel uncomfortable. Video conferencing, for example, can be unnerving because we simply aren't used to seeing ourselves in a meeting - and most of us are our own worst critics. A few pointers and the experience of feeling more connected can quickly overcome this natural reticence and get employees to prefer both richer communications and the improvement in work/life balance that comes through use of video rather than travel. It just needs to be part of the deployment plan.

Get users through the learning curve with the right support, and you'll be on your way to richer collaboration and lower costs.

Again, consider out-sourcing some or all user training and support for at least the first year or two of your collaboration deployment. You'll enjoy an influx of skills and experience and be able to scale support more easily. An intense focus on user adoption usually drives financial returns more quickly - not to mention the advantages to having enthusiastic users.

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Finally, this is one of those times when you want to review the implementation practices of your vendors. With so many variables at play, a proven methodology that focuses on your business objectives is crucial. Look for:

- A clearly defined process for implementation
- ITIL-based practices to ensure consistency and compliance to plan
- Proactive mapping of technology to your business objectives, and fixed review points to evaluate achievement of those objectives
- Experience with multi-vendor solutions
- Enablers of regional or global repeatability to ensure a consistent process and experience

Part 3: Being There...Now

Is your old communications infrastructure delaying your deployment of collaboration technology?

A comprehensive overhaul may be too demanding on budgets and staffing and too large in scale to expedite cost savings.

Stories abound of companies that have paid for complete voice infrastructure migrations with the savings on conferencing and collaboration solutions. Or SIP trunking and IP Least Cost Routing. Or a more productive contact center.

For some businesses, however, a comprehensive overhaul is too demanding on budgets and staffing and too large in scale to expedite cost savings.

Just as common are scenarios where a legacy voice network has been left in place, with new unified communication and collaboration capabilities introduced as overlay solutions. Done correctly, this approach allows businesses to achieve immediate cost savings and ease into a communications network overhaul gradually and based on the business value of each step.

The secret is to deploy point solutions with strong ROI that are built upon open, scalable, modular technology. The investment gives you both immediate functional and cost performance advantage and a more agile and economic next step in your journey.

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What's key, however, is what's at its core. The solution is built upon Unify's award-winning OpenScape technology - the SIP-based, scalable, resilient, modular, software-based foundation for the complete portfolio of OpenScape Unified Communications solutions.

If you need to update a contact center, you can add contact center licenses and overlay a new contact center. If you want to stop maintaining small voice and voice mail systems at remote sites, you can simply add voice licenses for those users, with centralized unified messaging. If you need to reduce mobile phone charges and want to deploy one-number service, you license the mobility application. SIP trunking and IP Least cost routing? Software licenses. It all runs on the same highly scalable, highly resilient, open software architecture. And nearly all of it can be virtualized in your data center.

So, if you start with the right conferencing (or SIP trunking, contact center, etc.) overlay solution today, you can migrate to the fullest concepts of Unified Communications with relative ease and economy when you choose. Make each move based on the value that different capabilities bring to your business - at your own pace, in the order you like. Those business cases for additional capabilities are accelerated because you already own - and have an ROI from - the optimal platform.

Additional flexibility can be gained by deploying via a cloud-based communication service. This provides great scalability in a pay-as-you-go model and can likewise be a mechanism to speed deployment of cost-saving solutions. For example, OpenScape is built upon a carrier-grade foundation – designed for scalability, resilience and multi-tenant operations. And now, OpenScape is available in the cloud. This means that you can deploy OpenScape solutions on-premise, via private cloud, public cloud, managed services or hybrid solutions.

The right approach and technology allow you to optimize what, when, where and how you deploy and manage the spectrum of collaboration and unified communications solutions. In fact, most businesses are doing precisely this. Frost & Sullivan's white paper "Finding the Value of Unified Communications – Understanding the Hierarchy of Returns" delineates 4 distinct stages most businesses go through on their journey to UC³.

The bottom line is that you can get the critical functional and cost-saving solutions you need quickly and let your infrastructure migration evolve over time. It's a rewarding journey: at Unify, our journey to a private UC cloud solution led to \$41 Million dollars in savings and vastly richer collaboration across the organization.

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The solution is built upon Unify's award winning OpenScape technology – the SIP-based, scalable, resilient, and modular, software-based foundation.

³Finding the Value in Unified Communications – Understanding the Hierarchy of Return. Frost & Sullivan. November 2010.

Conclusion

Collaboration and social media are vital to improving productivity, market share and profitability. They create faster more effective connections amongst employees, partners and customers that improve productivity, market share and profitability.

The right collaboration technology matters, but the technology alone will not optimize the business outcomes. Integration, mobility, scalability, security and user support are vital factors to ensuring the performance and savings of collaboration solutions.

With most businesses facing learning and adoption curves for these technologies, companies that are not actively deploying solutions now may be losing ground to those who are. Moreover, the strong use of video and social media collaboration in the consumer sector means that employees, customers and partners increasingly expect the same in the business world.

The right collaboration technology matters, but the technology alone will not optimize the business outcomes. Integration, mobility, scalability, security and user support are vital factors to ensuring the performance and savings of collaboration solutions.

It's also worth the effort to look at the supporting services available. With so much flexibility, comes complexity. The right partners and services can fill skills gaps, help ensure user acceptance and look out for the many related points of a unified communication and collaboration solution.

Fortunately, these solutions can often be added via overlay and/or cloud solutions that quickly and affordably deliver both functionality and cost savings, leaving the broader migration of legacy voice networks to occur when, where and how it makes sense for your business.

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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