

Seven Things to Consider When Developing a Unified Communications Strategy

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Unified Communications Overview

To boost competitiveness and improve business performance in today's global environment, more and more enterprises are turning to Unified Communications (UC), which helps companies increase revenues, reduce costs, and enhance customer relationships.

A lot has been written and discussed about UC in the past few years, and there is still much confusion about what UC is – but there is no question that UC technologies and solutions are helping workers be more productive, responsive, effective, and efficient. There's been considerable hype as of late about what UC is and isn't, but what's most important and should take center stage is what UC can do for companies – its impact on the business processes and the business itself.

Is unified communications about providing the ability to access a variety of communication modes from a single interface, or is it about reducing human latency via business process integration? The answer, of course, is both. UC goes beyond the simple unification of communication modes to the integration with presence capabilities, providing context about the users, as well as integration with business processes and applications.

What makes UC attractive is that it enhances communications both inside and outside of the enterprise. Whether through the basic “click to call” application, or more advanced business process integration, workers can better communicate and collaborate with colleagues, customers, partners, and suppliers, regardless of location or media channel. This paper outlines the 7 things organizations should consider as they begin to develop a unified communications strategy.

1. A Cornucopia of Components - Understand the various elements that UC encompasses
2. Impacting the End User and the Business - UC can positively change the end-user and the business experience, ultimately bringing about total enterprise transformation
3. Under the UC Umbrella - How end-users leverage communications tools now and in the future
4. It's All about the Business Process - Benefits organizations can realize from incorporating communications into business processes
5. UC and the Contact Center - Where does the contact center fit in your UC strategy and deployment? How can it impact the way you interact with customers?
6. ROI Impact - Assess your potential ROI to make the right business case for a UC deployment
7. Paths to Unified Communications - The path to UC can take a logical phased approach which makes the deployment less problematic and can yield positive benefits during each step of the process

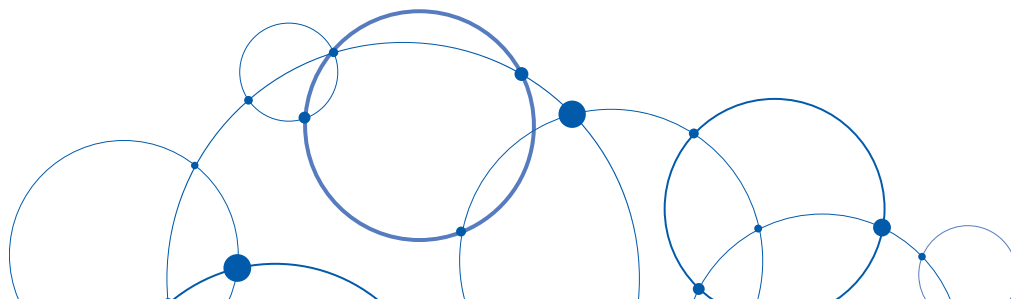
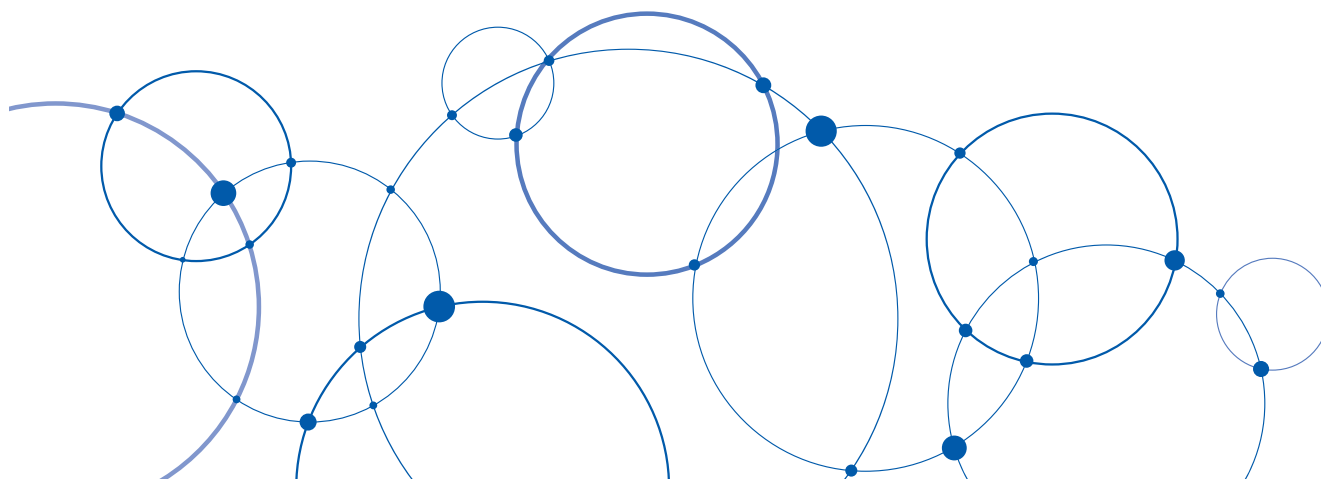


Table of Contents

Unified Communications Overview	1
A Cornucopia of Components	3
Impacting the End User and the Business.....	3
Under the UC Umbrella	4
It's All About the Business Process	5
UC and the Contact Center	6
ROI Impact.....	7
Paths to Unified Communications	7
Conclusion	7
Case Study.....	8



A Cornucopia of Components

What's especially important to realize is that UC isn't a single product or technology - it's a solution based on a variety of previously siloed elements or components that change how work is completed for individuals, workgroups, and the organization as a whole. A UC solution may include:

- Call control, and/or switch integration;
- Presence (both online and telephony presence) and a rules engine;
- Messaging: instant messaging, email, voice mail, unified messaging, short message service (SMS);
- Conferencing: audio, web, video;
- Collaboration: shared workspaces, white boarding, document sharing;
- Mobility; and
- Unified client: whether on the desktop, mobile device, soft phone, or Web portal.

There is no "one size fits all" when it comes to UC - every company has unique requirements and business goals, and will use the components that are needed for their specific UC solution.

According to UCStrategies.com, unified communications is communications integrated to optimize business processes. Using rules and policies, UC integrates real-time and non-real-time communications with business processes, based on presence capabilities, presenting a consistent unified user interface and user experience across multiple devices and media types.

Just as there is no single UC product, there won't be a single UC vendor. Multi-vendor integration and interoperability is key - the different UC elements or components will come from a variety of vendors, including switch vendors, desktop vendors like Microsoft, customer relationship management (CRM) and application vendors, mobility vendors, and so on, with integration services provided by professional services organizations, systems integrators, and other UC services organizations. Making all of the components seamlessly and harmoniously work together is paramount - and without the right resources, can be challenging.

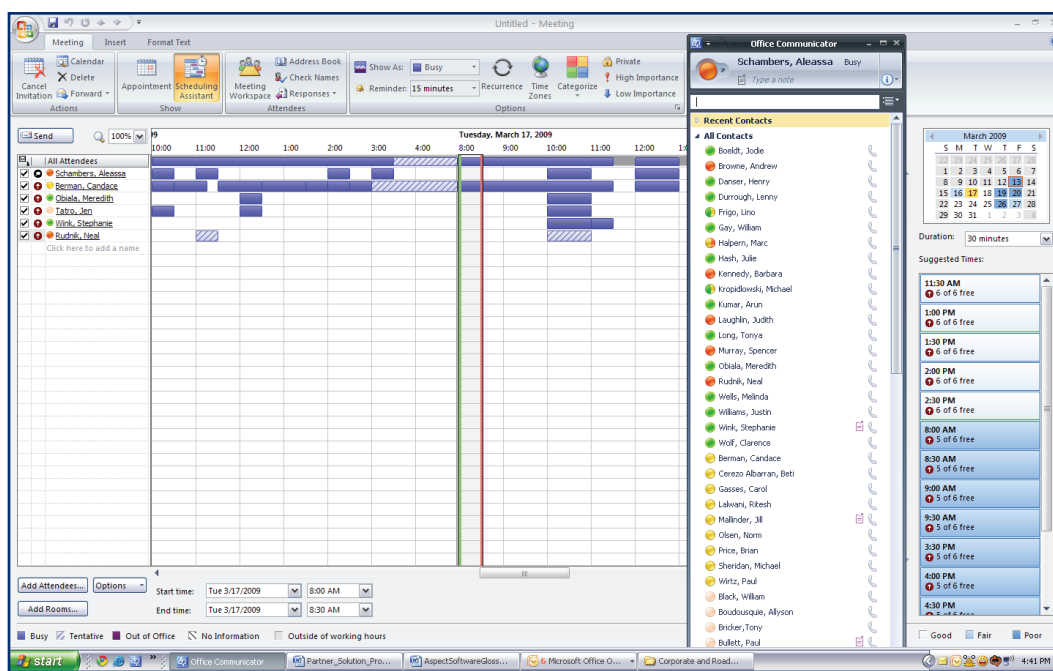
Impacting the End User and the Business

UC is much more than a buzzword - early adopters and users of UC have experienced new, improved processes for doing business, and have realized a variety of business benefits from UC like increased mobility, enhanced collaboration, reduced travel time and costs, or improved customer service. By integrating UC with business processes and applications, communications are streamlined, human latency is reduced or eliminated, and workers can be more productive, efficient, and responsive. Through the use of UC tools, such as presence, mobility, and collaboration technologies that let workgroups exchange knowledge and documents, enterprises are experiencing shorter project times, quicker time-to-market, and improved organizational efficiency - which impacts their bottom line and competitiveness.

For example, if John needs information for an important customer deal, instead of blindly calling Jane, reaching her voice mailbox and having to wait several hours or even days for a response, John can view Jane's presence status from within his desktop sales application and determine the best way to contact her. If Jane is not available by phone, maybe John can reach her by instant messaging. Or if John sees from Jane's presence status and calendar information that she is out of the office for the day, he can look on his buddy list and see who else is available for him to contact. Using UC, John is able to get the information he needs, when he needs it, making him more responsive to his customer and more likely to close the sale, which impacts his company's bottom line.

By interviewing end users and hearing what they have to say about UC and how it impacts them, UCStrategies.com identified several ways that UC helps workers, and in turn, their companies:

- More effective contact management
- Better problem resolution
- Increased responsiveness
- Faster decision making
- Greater access to experts and resources
- Accelerated collaboration
- Enhanced mobility
- Reduced travel and travel expenses



From SMBs to large enterprises, companies in varied vertical industries across the globe have been benefiting from UC. More than ever, companies today need to enhance customer relationships and intimacy, enable anytime/anywhere communications, increase worker productivity – whether in the office or on the road – and streamline and simplify business processes. We live in a mobile society, with new devices and technologies, making work from anywhere more than an option – it’s an expectation. Customers, partners, and employees expect to have the same communication capabilities available regardless of location or device – and with more personalized services.

Under the UC Umbrella

There are actually two types of UC solutions and benefits under the “UC Umbrella” – UC-User (UC-U), focusing on end-user productivity, and UC-Business Process (UC-B), focusing on the business process integration. While it’s more difficult to measure the return on investment (ROI) of UC-U, it’s clear that workers and enterprises have been able to reap significant benefits, mostly in terms of enhanced communications and increased productivity in their specific jobs. Many enterprises have begun UC implementations by starting with user productivity elements, and then moving to UC-B, which provides greater ROI to the company as a whole. It’s clear to anyone who’s used UC that it provides benefits to both the individual worker and the company as a whole, but the ROI is measurably greater when integrating UC with business processes and applications, resulting in communications-enabled business processes (CEBP).

When most people think of UC, they think of click-to-call, which is the most common form of UC-U. Communications becomes significantly faster and easier when you can simply click on someone’s name on your PC screen and be connected via instant messaging (IM) or a voice call without having to leave the application you were working in.

Workers using UC can better manage their communications for improved user productivity, both inside and out of the office, with capabilities that include:

- Personal Call or Contact Management provides desktop call screening of inbound calls, on-screen directory dialing, and PC or graphic user interface (GUI) control of phone features. Screen pops on calls let users see who’s calling before answering the phone, making it easy to prioritize and screen incoming calls, while single Number Reach lets workers give out a single contact number, and be reached on their device of choice even when out of the office.
- Mobile Access extends UC capabilities to mobile devices, allowing workers out of the office to have the same communication tools, regardless of location.
- Workgroup or Team Collaboration lets workgroups, whether at the same location or geographically dispersed, work together and share and exchange information. Team members can work interactively in real time, resulting in shorter project times, quicker time-to-market, and greater organizational efficiency.
- Access to Mobile Personnel enables callers or other contact initiators to locate and connect to individuals within an organization. Important customers can reach you by dialing your office number, regardless of where you are, ensuring that they get the attention and service they demand and deserve.

- Expert Assistant lets contact center agents see the presence and availability of knowledge workers and subject matter experts across the organization, and contact the expert in real time to get the information they need via IM or the phone in order to best solve the customer's question or issue.

All of these capabilities make it simple to identify and reach the right people and resources rapidly, leading to more efficient communications, and faster responsiveness and problem resolution.

Personal productivity benefits are important and make life easier for users, but it's challenging to measure and quantify the benefits. Even though workers can save from 20 minutes to more than an hour a day and can be more efficient at doing their jobs by using UC, the way in which this impacts the bottom line is not always clear.

Enter UC-Business Productivity. When UC is tied to the business processes and applications companies use in their day-to-day business operations - whether CRM, Microsoft® Office applications, or custom programs - the benefits are even more significant. UC helps to reduce "human latency" in business processes by integrating communication functions directly into the systems and applications that people use to do their jobs. For example, by integrating UC with an inventory control system, the appropriate and available people can get notified when inventory gets too low, and can interact via audio and video conferencing to decide what steps to take and how to resolve the issue.

And, by enhancing productivity through removing human delay in communications, companies can experience increases to the bottom line and improved competitive performance. UC can impact enterprises in the greatest way by helping to provide improved customer service.

UC can also proactively deliver information to the right people at the right time. Decisions can be made faster, products can be brought to market sooner, customer inquiries and problems can be resolved more quickly - all of which impact the bottom line in terms of improved competitive business position, reduced cost of doing business, increased or faster revenue generation, and increased profitability.

It's All About the Business Process

Where organizations will see the greatest bang for their buck in UC is communications-enabled business processes (CEBP) - when communication capabilities are embedded in or integrated with enterprise business processes and vertical applications. During the course of everyone's workday, there are times when they need to communicate with or receive information from co-workers, suppliers, partners, customers, and others, and the business process essentially comes to a halt until they get a response. By embedding communications capabilities directly into the business applications or business process workflow, these business processes can move forward without delays, reducing or eliminating human latency and making business flow smoothly.

Almost every business, in every vertical, has experienced productivity bottlenecks that delay or even stop the workflow process. Whether it's a loan officer that needs to get information from the underwriter before moving to the next step of the loan process, a hospital administrator ready to release a patient but needs the doctor's approval, or a manufacturing quality control manager who found a defect that needs to be fixed, delays in business processes have consequences that negatively impact any worker's ability to get their jobs done as efficiently as possible. The impact on the organization could be comprised of unhappy customers, additional costs and expenses, or decreased competitive positioning.

Examples of CEBP applications abound, and don't have to be overly complex. Some typical examples include:

- A manufacturing exception system can detect an issue and automatically notify the appropriate people (i.e., quality assurance specialist, engineer and supervisor) via any communications mode, be it mobile or desk phone, email or IM. Through the click of a mouse, the right people are brought into a Web or video conference and can resolve the issue on the spot.
- Financial services organizations can monitor real-time events and quickly notify both advisers and their clients of changing conditions, such as a large change in a stock price, giving them the opportunity to immediately connect and decide what to do.

The benefits of CEBP are significant – but getting through the planning and implementation stage to determine the best opportunities for CEBP throughout the enterprise is also a key part of the process. Professional services are one of the most important aspects of a successful UC-B or CEBP implementation. UC today (and in the near future) is far from plug-and-play, and integrating all of the UC components together – and with the enterprise’s specific business processes and applications – requires system integration and professional services. Professional services engagements are needed to provide a thorough analysis of the company’s business processes and how the various UC components can help the company meet its goals.

UC and the Contact Center

One place companies can begin to implement UC is in their primary customer-facing portion of the company – the contact center. It’s clear that a large number of the capabilities in today’s UC solutions have their roots in the contact center, including metrics, screen pop, and the ability to search for experts based on their skill group. There are considerable lessons to be learned for enterprises implementing UC based on contact center industry experiences.

Contact centers have been using several UC tools and capabilities for years, and UC is built on many of the fundamentals based in the contact center. The use of “presence” is relatively new to most knowledge workers, but the concept has been around for a long time and has been used by most organizations in the contact center. Presence status and awareness – otherwise known as “agent state” – is one of the cornerstones of the contact center. In addition, contact centers have years and years of expertise and experience in the area of metrics, or how you measure the effectiveness of specific interactions. Contact centers measure customer interactions from a large variety of perspectives, identifying not only basic measurements such as the length of the interaction, but how effective the interaction was, and how well a situation got resolved. Enterprises implementing UC will need to use similar metrics to measure the effectiveness of the UC tools to determine how successfully they are being applied, and how it impacts the business.

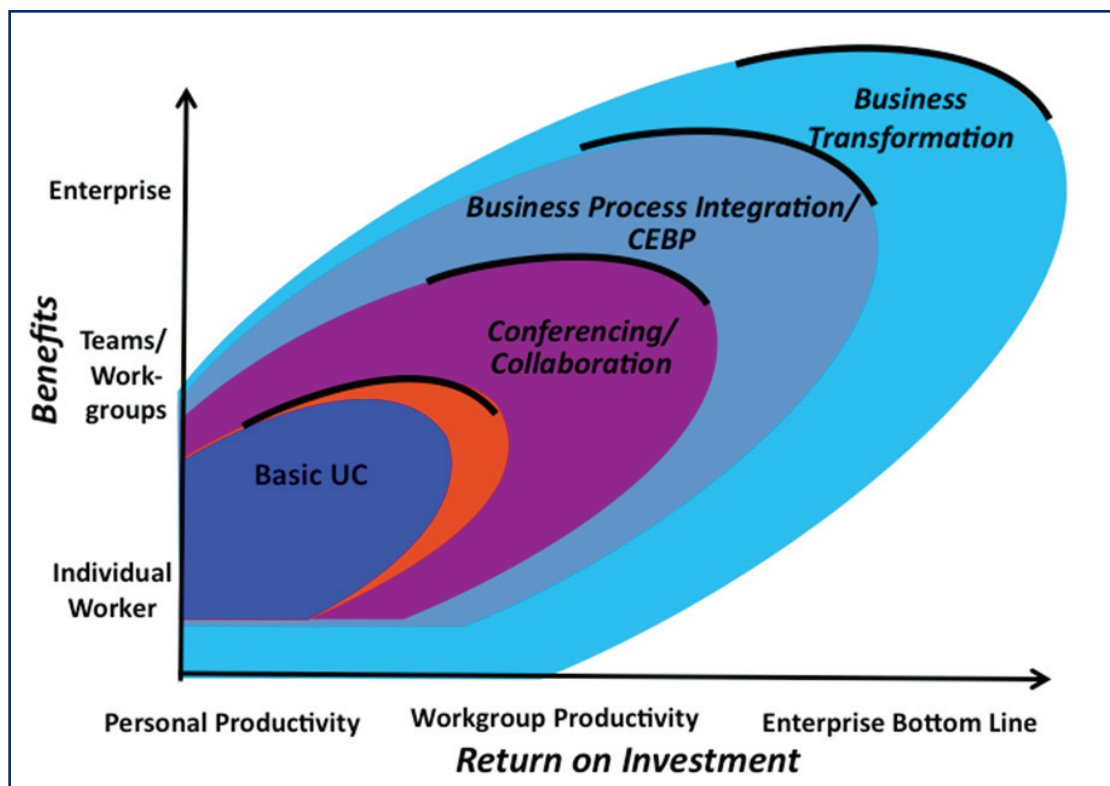
Organizations of all sizes realize the importance of serving customers as efficiently and effectively as possible – and sometimes that means making customer satisfaction and relations the responsibility of a much broader set of people than dedicated call center agents. A survey conducted on behalf of Aspect showed that 10.3 percent of contact center agents’ calls required expertise from someone outside the contact center. Clearly there is a need to leverage outside expertise in order to quickly resolve customer’s questions and problems more effectively and efficiently, leading to higher first call resolution (FCR). Using UC, contact center agents can leverage subject matter experts or outside resources that have the expertise needed to solve a customer’s inquiry or situation right away, without having to put the caller on hold or call them back. The all-important first call resolution becomes a reality, as companies can deliver a higher level of customer service.

Since the advent of skills-based routing in the mid 1990’s, contact centers have been able to connect a caller with an agent based on their skills or area of expertise. We’re all familiar with “Press 1 to speak to an agent in Spanish,” or when calling in to tech support “Press 1 for help with your PC, or press 2 for help with your Mac,” for example. Skills-based routing has made it possible for callers to directly reach an agent that has the expertise needed to help them with their specific issue. UC extends this capability beyond the contact center throughout the enterprise, while at the same time utilizing a variety of channels. It’s now possible to find the appropriate resource within an organization and contact them based on their skills. UC users can view a list of subject matter experts and their presence availability, and contact them via IM or telephone, in order to get the information they need when they need it. Using presence and other tools, UC makes this simple and fast. A call center agent or an employee at a financial firm, for example, might need to get information from an expert on international currency rates, and instead of looking for a specific individual, they can search for an international currency expert and get connected with an available expert. Finding the right resource to solve a problem leads to not only higher customer satisfaction, but companies have also reported ROIs exceeding 100% in these UC investments.

According to UCStrategies’, “Unified Communications End User Productivity Study,” the real value of UC is in having access to the people and the resources needed in order to do one’s job more efficiently. The study, based on UC end-user interviews, showed that UC changes the way in which people work, enabling them to be more responsive, save time, and find the right resources more quickly and easily. One UC end user noted, “I can go online and tap into the subject matter experts needed and set up an ad hoc conference call. I can get information instantly by contacting an expert.” Another said, “Our people can take a call from someone and when they need information from a subject matter expert they can send an instant message and get the information needed, or send the call to someone else to solve the problem right away.” Demonstrating the value of UC, one marketing professional noted, “In my role in marketing, I need to tap into experts in the organization for critical issues, and there are lots of times I need information urgently. The ability to reach a person through an appropriate mode of communication is really powerful. I can get the person I need whether they’re remote or local.” Users can resolve problems more quickly, as people can get immediate notification of issues, and can easily communicate and collaborate with other people who can provide input and help resolve issues.

ROI Impact

It's now clear that the benefits of UC and its ROI can affect users differently (see Figure 1). Basic UC, or UC-U, impacts personal productivity and the individual worker, but as collaborative capabilities are added, the benefits extend to the team or workgroup, impacting workgroup productivity and increasing the ROI. As organizations incorporate CEBP, the benefits extend beyond individuals to the enterprise as a whole, and the ROI is even greater. Companies that transform their business or business processes, or truly change how work is completed, can find the highest return on investment.



Paths to Unified Communications

There is no one right way to successfully implement and operate UC - there are a variety of approaches. Each end-user company will go about selecting and implementing UC products and solutions according to their needs, goals, existing infrastructure, business processes, and more. The majority of companies start off on the road to UC with UC-User Productivity, by integrating the various communication modes with each other, while adding presence to enable click-to-call or click-to-communicate capabilities.

After having the opportunity to try this out for a while, many companies then move on to find other ways in which UC can be utilized within their organizations. This generally involves communications-enabling business processes. However, some companies understand the value of UC in optimizing their business processes and go straight to business process integration from day one. What works for one company may not work for another - it's best to look at what your goals are, and then determine how best to approach your journey to UC.

Conclusion

To be competitive, most businesses strive to increase sales, decrease costs, and improve customer relationships. One of the most compelling ways to do this is by making workers more effective, efficient, and productive, by transforming the way work gets done. By tying the UC tools with business processes and applications, they become exponentially more useful to businesses and workers. Companies that have implemented UC have experienced a variety of benefits, including accelerated collaboration leading to quicker decision making, shortened development cycles, faster speed to market; as well as greater access to experts and resources and more effective contact management leading to increased responsiveness, crisis avoidance, deeper customer relationships and increased customer satisfaction. The key to UC success is to realize there are the seven areas that need to be considered when developing a UC strategy for the entire enterprise and that each brings value to the organization. So even if you aren't ready to fully deploy UC across the entire enterprise, by considering all areas during the planning phase, you'll be adequately prepared during each part of the rollout.

CASE STUDY

A Telecom Company

Taking a Unified Communications Path, a Telecom Company Sees Real Results

The Company

With locations all over the world, this leading global IP solutions provider offers a full range of secure data, voice, and video products to Fortune 500 companies, as well as to 700 carriers, mobile operators and ISPs. They have 5,000 employees and operate two contact centers.

The Business Challenge

- Contact center hardware was reaching end of life
- Network had limited capability making it difficult to route calls between contact centers
- Lacked processes to identify the availability of content experts to improve first call resolution. Missing features like real-time reporting and single user interface for voice portal and routing.
- Wanted to improve business efficiencies, lower training costs and meeting expenses, as well as reduce overlapping communications costs across multiple sites
- Needed features like presence; employees didn't know the best way to reach colleagues when trying to fix a problem, or even who to call
- Required a unified solution to help the company successfully deliver streamlined communications and business processes

The Solution

The company chose Aspect® Unified IP®, an IT-ready Microsoft® .NET Web services platform product that brings together customer contact capabilities to help organizations execute on their unified communications (UC) strategies.

The company installed two Aspect Unified IP systems, offering advanced call routing capabilities to transfer callers to agents based on their skill sets and customer data gathered by back-end applications. The tight integration with Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 allows agents to identify the availability/presence of experts throughout the enterprise to solve specific customer inquiries, helping improve first call resolution and enhance customer satisfaction. There are currently seven federated UC solutions in place, with more expected down the road.

Results

Some of the results include:

- Reduced long distance services costs by 30 percent
- Decreased third party collaboration down to 37 percent, expected to be down to zero
- Saved about \$16,000 to \$25,000 a week being on net with OCS
- Reduced travel costs by 40 percent
- Reduced IT support costs and security risks from IM tools
- Increased user satisfaction

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About Aspect

Aspect is a global software and IT services firm specializing in applying Microsoft unified communications and collaboration to help customers achieve optimal results through enhanced business processes across the enterprise and in the contact center. Aspect provides IT consulting, integration services and business applications. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.