

Briefing

A simple idea for a complex world

**How unified communications will
transform the way we communicate
and the places we work**



If there's one thing we have learned over the past forty or so years it is that whenever there is a change in the way we work, the underlying cause is invariably technological...

Over the past four decades, each revolution in working practices and the places we work can be associated directly with the development of a significant new technology. In the 1980s, the growing ubiquity of the desktop computer changed the nature of the work done by people in offices from the processing of information to the application and communication of information. In the 1990s, the second wave of technological change was founded on the idea that people could work anywhere and take their stuff with them. Mobile technology meant that work was no longer confined to offices.

We now take this principle so much for granted that the line between the office and other public spaces and our working

and private lives have not so much been blurred as eradicated.

During the noughties, the not so lingering death of the VDU and its replacement with flat screen monitors and laptops and other forms of mobile technology allowed organisations to work with smaller, rectilinear workstations and the effect was profound; typically resulting in a net space saving of up to 20 per cent and 25 per cent per workstation and the freeing up of more and more space.

The changing role of the office

This does not mean that we no longer need offices. Just that we need them for different things. They are now increasingly important as meeting places, social spaces, information exchanges, ideas



The future of unified communications will be defined by the growing role of videoconferencing. It will change the nature of the way we work and the structure of the working environment.

factories and sources of identity for the organisation and its employees. The workplace is a far more complex and dynamic idea than ever before, not least because many of its elements are dispersed and connected in new and evolving ways.

The latest technology that will revolutionise the way we work is now upon us. It is called unified communications and it is a principle that strikes at the very heart of this new world of fragmented yet interconnected work. It is a comparatively straightforward idea intended to solve a complex challenge.

As is often the case with new technology the main driver for the development and application of unified communications is the pull of customer demand. As organisations have started to adapt to an economy that is always-on, global and without boundaries of time and space, they have looked for ways to integrate technology to deliver a better working experience for employees, reduce costs both for themselves and their clients and improve their competitiveness.

What is Unified Communications?

Unified communications (UC) is not a specific technology but rather a principle that defines the integration of a range of communication services in real time such as instant messaging, telephony (including IP telephony), video conferencing, data sharing as well as non-real-time communication services such as voicemail, e-mail and SMS. It is not dependent on a single product, but rather applies a range of products to provides a consistent user interface and user experience across multiple devices and types of media.

From the perspective of the individual, UC allows them to send a message in one medium and have it received in another for example by accessing voicemail messages through email or text. It also allows the individual to access resources and facilities quickly and easily. Systems automatically detect online presence and will communicate in the most appropriate format or stored to be accessed later.

From the perspective of the organisation, UC offers the opportunity to integrate a wide range of business processes and optimise them according to the specific objectives of the business. By definition, this is depends on a broad approach that will vary according to the needs and wishes of each organisation and evolve over time.

At its heart, however, is the core principle of providing the organisation and its employees and other stakeholders with a single, common technological platform. Ideally, it should optimise the processes of the organisation and create a culture that allows people to take full advantage of modern working practices and helps them to communicate more effectively and intuitively with colleagues, clients, suppliers and work in better ways with the physical and technological infrastructure of the business.

There are already a number of manifestations of UC in the business world. Many of the world's most high profile technology firms are developing broad based solutions to the issue of how to provide their customers with holistic unified communications strategies. The most high profile example of the form this new world will take came with Microsoft's acquisition of Skype for \$8.5 billion in 2011. This represented a major move for Microsoft into the IP communication sector with the added attractions of a huge user base and advanced technology such as Skype's peer-to-peer video chat.

We can expect to see more of the same because while most organisations have some unified communications capabilities as part of the organic development of their technology infrastructure, they often lack the all-encompassing strategic approach needed to combine all of the elements into a common and intuitive framework.

In practice what this has meant over the past decade is that the increased choice we are now offered in the ways we communicate with each other has often made collaboration and communication more difficult. The irony is particularly apparent to the new generation of knowledge workers who would like to enjoy the same

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approach at work they routinely use at home. Yet while at home they can intuitively integrate the various social media, mobile telephony, messaging, email, video chat, VoIP, wikis and blogs they use in their daily lives, they are often frustrated in their attempts to enjoy the same approach in the workplace.

IT staff are also looking for new

approaches to the conundrum of how to make different systems and different devices work together, including on a global scale. For them, the challenge is both technological and strategic; to be able to deliver the right tools for individuals, but also to deliver them in a way that meets the objectives of the organisation.

That is why we are seeing a convergence of the disparate elements of the communications mix into an intelligent technological architecture, delivering applications and functions in an integrated way across a range of endpoints.

The growth of telepresence

According to recent research from VoIP specialist BroadSoft, published in its Mobile Enterprise of the Future Survey for 2011, which polled 400 IT decision makers in the US and UK, we may now be at a tipping point in the adoption of videoconferencing. The technology has been widely acknowledged as an important tool for businesses, but its adoption has been far slower

than many would have hoped.

According to the BroadSoft survey nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) of IT departments are currently expanding their enterprise's UC capabilities and the service that most are looking to support is video conferencing. Their finding is backed up by an additional survey of the same market by ABI Research which reported that the total value of the telepresence, video infrastructure and endpoints market would hit \$5.5 billion by 2016.

This is an issue that will transform the way we do business around the world. And the main driver for the wider adoption of videoconferencing is baldly commercial because when applied in the right way it can offer organisations and employees a viable alternative to expensive and time consuming face to face meetings. Technology researchers Gartner have predicted that within three years, high-definition videoconferencing solutions will replace 2.1 million airline seats annually, at an annual cost to

the travel and hospitality industry of around \$3.5 billion.

This transition is coming about so quickly that the travel industry is also looking to adapt what it offers to clients. Sabre, one of the world's largest business travel operators is now offering videoconferencing as an alternative to flights. There is a lot of money at stake, not least because it is estimated that a transatlantic round trip for business typically costs around \$5,000. These journeys will not be rendered completely unnecessary by a unified communications



strategy, but they will certainly become less frequent.

The case for telepresence isn't based solely on hard economics however. It helps to reduce the carbon footprint of the organisation, offers more flexible working arrangements for staff, improves communications with many remote workers, allows people to reduce their time spent travelling to meetings and opens up the chance for many people to work together more regularly across boundaries of time and space.

One thing it won't do is entirely replace the face to face meeting. A report published earlier this year by Zibrant claimed that within five years a fifth of all meetings will be virtual. There is every reason to suspect it may be true, but it is also true that in a more collaborative working culture, the overall number of meetings

The Benefits of Unified Communications

Improved collaboration. Because UC creates a platform for employees, customers and other stakeholders to collaborate using advanced data and communications devices it is easier to share ideas, data and documents in real time. It is an essential tool for helping teamworkers make the best use of the technology at their disposal.

Improved communications. UC enhances business communications by integrating all available devices and systems. By using UC, people can make an easy transition between a range of technologies so that with a click of a mouse they can escalate a phone call into a videoconference call or a data exchange.

Improved Access. Because UC operates across all communications devices, users enjoy near total remote access to the system so that they can connect to the company's internal network via phone, laptop or other device. Unified messaging ensures that all their messages reach them in their chosen format and that they are able to employ other resources including the ability to book rooms and access customer relationship management and supply change management systems and so on. Unified communications allows people to view the availability of colleagues and the best ways in which to communicate with them improving response times.

Reduced costs. There are a number of cost savings associated with unified communications. The most obvious manifestation of this is in terms of a reduced need to travel to meetings which has the dual benefit of not only reducing the actual costs of travel but also changing the physical infrastructure needs of individuals who are able to book smaller meeting rooms and videoconferencing suites. There are also cost benefits associated with reduced software licencing fees, simplified dealings with suppliers and so on.

Increased productivity. It is the unique appeal of UC as an idea that it improves productivity with the tools people already have at their disposal. It helps them to get the most out of technology, collaborate in new ways, improves access to information and resources, reduce the amount of time they spend travelling and improves communications with remote colleagues.

Better environmental performance. Because a well developed unified communications strategy helps to reduce the overall need for travel, it automatically shrinks the firm's carbon footprint.





will rise. We are only human and the need for face to face interaction will not go away. It will be supplemented with new forms of communications.

Reducing budgets

So at the same time that videoconferencing systems – including desktop applications such as Skype – are now increasingly commonplace, the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) announced in May 2012 that the travel budgets of companies around the world are increasing for the second consecutive year. Meanwhile hotels and

conference centres as well as companies such as Regus continue to enjoy healthy businesses by providing venues for clients to meet. What will change is the way that meetings are handled, the policies firms have for travel and virtual meetings and – crucially - the technological and physical infrastructure they demand.

This will manifest itself in a number of ways. For example, multinational corporations must look at the provision not only of videoconferencing system and its integration with other

technologies but also how videoconferencing suites and meeting rooms are specified to deal with the new mix of meeting types. Having 8 employees travel to meet in the corporate headquarters demands a certain type of meeting space. Having them meet in virtual space but with each in a separately booked large meeting room in 8 different locations makes little or no sense and can only counteract the positive economic benefits of videoconferencing.



So it will be important to understand not only the mix of meetings, but also the spaces needed to support them. Measuring and monitoring how spaces are used and booked will be essential in developing a new physical infrastructure that takes account of the wider range of meeting types associated with a unified communications strategy. Smaller videoconferencing suites and desktop video conferencing will become more important.

For the organisation, this means developing the technological and physical

infrastructure of the business to match supply with demand. It also means establishing a culture that encourages people to look for and book the best spaces for their particular needs.

There will also be a shift to using spaces from external suppliers, especially serviced office suppliers such as Regus as well as people's homes and public spaces. This will result in more and more talk of 'endpoints' rather than locations. This is not only reliant on a sophisticated unified communications strategy but also an integrated

booking process for users who must be made aware of the availability of spaces, the global technological infrastructure available and their application for each specific type of meeting. The fact that this can all be hosted in the Cloud makes this a cost effective and scalable solution.

To facilitate this, organisations must offer employees solutions that encourage them to immerse themselves in this new framework. There should be no technological barriers to embracing the strategy, so access to infrastructure must be easy through products such



as Microsoft Outlook, and there should be no barriers to its use and no silos within the organisation.

The entire architecture of the UC strategy should be founded on tested and accessible endpoints. There should be no temporal or physical constraints on how people communicate with each other. The organisation's approach to delivering unified communications will not be worthy of the name until it is fully integrated into every process of the business.

In practice this will further erode the walls between three of the organisation's core disciplines. Because a unified communications strategy is dependent on the links

between people, place and technology, it is essential that there is a consistent approach from the IT, HR and FM teams within the organisation. Any

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silos that there are must be eradicated to allow the system to flourish.

For those firms that get it right, the business benefits can be truly remarkable, not only saving costs but greening the business, helping people to be

more productive and happier and creating a culture that delivers better services to customers. All based on a simple principle that

disentangles one of the more complex challenges faced by modern organisations – how to help people to communicate in better ways.

How Condeco can help

Not only can Condeco help you to manage meeting rooms and resources in a way that will help you and your employees enjoy all of their potential benefits, it will also help you to make decisions based on data that can ensure that you will also be able to develop them over the longer term and as part of a fully integrated unified communications strategy.

Condeco's world class software and services mean that help you to develop an intelligent unified communications architecture that allows you to:

- Integrate Condeco seamlessly into booking and resource processes across a wide range of technological platforms.
- Integrate room booking systems and other resources effortlessly through the most commonly used proprietary software such as Microsoft Outlook.
- Develop a fully integrated and scalable solution.
- Offer meeting room bookings and other resources including videoconferencing as a service for everybody. This service can also be extended to clients and other stakeholders for relevant organisations
- Match meeting and conference rooms and hospitality to specific needs, so that people have the ideal working environment for the size and nature of the meeting
- Allow people to know which rooms are available remotely and in real time
- Using autobump technology, empower employees to know which rooms that have been booked are not being used and reallocate them within 15 minutes of a no-show for a particular room.
- Provide access to meeting rooms and all support services to mobile working staff, customers and other visitors where appropriate.
- Generate space utilisation reports to feed into strategic decision making about property, either by business group and location or by user.
- Feed information into policy formulation for property and facilities functions
- Facilitate strategic decision making into key issues such as the divestment of underutilised or unused space or the allocation of space as the organisation expands without taking on more property
- Understand current and future space usage to allow better informed decisions when negotiating leases.
- Integrates seamlessly with videoconferencing applications from third parties such as Cisco, BT Engage and Tandberg to allow the easy management of VC facilities and infrastructure and so develop a progressive strategy on travel.



About Condeco

Condeco Limited is an enterprise software company dedicated to the development of workplace management software, services and business intelligence solutions. Its award-winning Condeco Workspace Management software suite provides large enterprises, SMEs and public sector organisations with the ability to maximise the potential of their real estate, reduce costs, improve efficiency and encourage a greener workplace.

Condeco offers a recognised and unique global workspace management solution that combines meeting room management, visitor management, desk booking integrated digital signage and business intelligence solutions within a single application.

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