Building the Future

UC is gradually taking center stage and replacing the conventional communications environment

Unified communications segment has risen to the forefront in the recent months, thanks to the ongoing economic turbulence. Organizations were forced to curtail unnecessary expenses, and adopt technologies enabling corporations to work seamlessly irrespective of the geographical locations.

According to a research report from Wainhouse Research, the unified communications industry will grow to $30 bn in just five years. While the market will actually experience negative compound annual growth on the product side, it will be mitigated by a robust positive growth.

2009 saw an increase in the adoption of UC technologies by enterprises for business continuity. Although, there has been a significant exposure to advanced UC technologies due to recession and other factors, basic IP telephony (both greenfield and replacement) has still dominated the market, followed by the growing deployments of rich media collaboration (audio/video/web conferencing; mobility solutions that allow for fixed mobile convergence delivering single number reach/single mailbox; digital media delivery; and presence solutions.

Technology In Demand

Over the last one year, hosted contact center offerings are driving the adoption of UC in the mid market enterprises, while the larger enterprises are largely influenced by private and customized deployment of collaboration technologies.

Video conferencing was largely adopted by enterprises for eliminating the need for face-to-face business meetings or travel related expenses. In addition to this, adoption of videoconferencing helped organizations reduce their carbon footprint, and become more environmentally responsible.

Traditional communication vendors embraced IP telephony as the future standard for enterprise communications. Along with the advantages of flexibility electronic communications between employees, customers and partners. With heightened emphasis on security and compliance, enterprises are seeking standard, flexible and policy based solutions that they can use to consistently manage, enforce and audit access to their infrastructure.

Today, enterprises are looking forward to leading edge technology, on-demand conferences, flexible deployment, common management suites, highly scalable solutions, secure VoIP conferencing, embedded multi-points options and more videoconferencing.

Major players in this space are ready to introduce new technologies in the UC portfolio. Cisco has recently introduced technologies like Intercompany Media Engine, Unified Presence 8.0, Unified Communication Manager 8.0, Show and Share, Enterprise Collaboration Platform, and Pulse.

Some new technologies that HCL Comnet is to come up with include af-
TIPS FOR CIOs

- The first step towards UC deployment in an organization is to patiently plan towards it. Unfortunately, this is overlooked by many companies and lead to problems at a later stage.
- It is worthwhile for CIOs to evaluate between continuing with the existing infrastructure for communication or upgrading to UC. Before taking the plunge and deploying UC, ensuring a check on the application and network architectures is another idea.
- Establish a benchmark for collaborative success.
- Focus on the end goals. Build a UC plan based on the long term and short term goals.
- Combine ingredients to create a complete experience. Effective collaboration is not just about data or video or voice or mobility, it is about how the tools are combined to create a collaborative experience within the organizations.
- Big leaps often begin with baby steps. Educate users about instant messaging, desktops and mobile voice calls, audio, web and videoconferencing technologies to achieve value.
- Partner with the best. Partner with a solution provider that can integrate multiple technology platforms for best success.
- Be inclusive. Good collaboration goes beyond organizations.

In the next three years, a lot of large deployments of UC technologies will enable collaboration from across verticals, with major buyers being BFSI and government tools without compromising on security, reliability and policy of their networks.

Employee concerns along with the competitive environment have put an increasing pressure on business executives to quickly embrace collaborative processes and tools. But current technology alternatives are difficult to deploy and integrate. Most have long deployment cycles, don’t scale to mobile workspace, and lack business controls.

As a result, people can’t connect and communicate across firewalls or corporate boundaries. This leaves companies with the challenge of how to combine the reach, speed and flexibility of web 2.0 with the ease of voice.

Another demand is to make enterprise communication system robust, secure and survivable. Deployment and operation cost have always been focal concerns of CIOs apart from RoI figures. CIOs are demanding engagement models based on controlling and lowering of the enterprise costs.

The advent of UC will pose a number of significant challenges. It is evident that UC enhances business processes, but it also poses challenges like:
- One of the largest challenges in the UC implementation is application performance, which is of utmost importance as it directly affects the end user’s experience.
- Another big challenge is the availability of skilled labor for supporting the network infrastructure and troubleshooting.
- Interoperability of UC solution like in the case of videoconferencing being compatible with similar other party products.
- Scarcity of bandwidth is another hiccup in the smooth functioning of the UC solutions.
- Need to streamline information delivery, and maximize the value of existing/planned IT infrastructure.
- An increasingly mobile workspace making it necessary to build a strong communication system for ensuring inter-employee productivity.
- Business processes mandating the need for teams to collaborate across functions, organizations and geographies.
- High communication costs, multiple communication service providers, and difficult charge back.

Organizations are concerned about the ambiguity in government regulations, especially regarding rich media communications on private WAN and integration with public telecom infrastructure. Also the inability to seamlessly integrate dual mode devices over public cloud is a concern and a stumbling block for UC deployments.

The Green Edge

Some early adopters of UC have already reported a worldwide 20% reduction in their travel cost due to the usage of
advanced videoconferencing technologies. It is a great way to reduce enterprise costs and employee fatigue while lowering carbon footprint significantly. Deploying compact consolidated UC solutions help organizations save power and cooling resources vis-à-vis traditional analog environments.

Advanced collaboration technologies like telepresence and WebEx are helping organizations reduce their carbon footprint and variable cost by allowing them to conduct rich experience meetings and seminars.

Server consolidation and virtualization can reduce the space necessary for servers, PCs and storage equipment; and allow to tap into the roughly 85% of computing capacity commonly left unused. Cloud based computing and applications save investment in costly equipments associated operational expenses, and can scale to meet the fluctuating demands of the business.

Focus Verticals
All organizations today are looking to optimize their operations, and collaborate more effectively. Naturally, the larger the organization, the greater the benefit that can be gained from the deployment of collaboration tools. But all organizations that focus on technology usage to improve collaboration can realize the benefits. However, major verticals include finance, retail, government, education, manufacturing, healthcare and energy apart from the IT sector which has been one of the early adopters of UC.

A lot of traction can be seen from cross-vertical of start-ups and new age enterprises especially in the retail, media and service industries. These highly mobile organizations depend almost entirely on their communication infrastructure to do everyday business, and the UC industry is nurturing a highly symbiotic relationship with these industries.

Also with approximately 50-60% of IT spend in the country expected to come from the flourishing SMB segment, it is clear that there is a huge market waiting out there to be tapped, and companies are focused on addressing it.

THE UC ADVANTAGE
- Organizations using UC applications saved an average of thirty-two minutes per employee on a daily basis because of the presence of technology enabled staff to reach one another on the first try
- Organizations using unified messaging reported that employees saved forty-three minutes per day from efficient message management, while mobile workers saved fifty-five minutes
- Companies using integrated voice and web conferencing reported a 50% reduction in conferencing expenses, and an average savings of $1,700 per month in travel costs
- Use of softphone resulted in an average savings of $1,727 per month in cell phone and long distance charges

Adoption Scenario
Green IT and its emergence will propel the growth of UC within global and country-wide enterprises. Organizations will be more open to the concept of UC. Use of conferencing facilities will reduce the commute time and long distance travel giving rise to emerging technologies like WebEx and telepresence.

With the increasing globalization and thinner time boundaries, presence functionality will play an important role in communication solutions. Today, with increasing number of touch-points such as multiple phones, email, SMS, instant messaging, the workforce is increasingly getting closer and geographical boundaries cease to exist.

Deploying compact consolidated UC solutions help organizations save power and cooling resources vis-à-vis traditional analog environments

Rise in web 2.0 technologies and proliferation of social networking websites have increased so much that Twitter and Facebook conversations have become more real-time than emails.

The Coming Years
As the Indian companies grow bigger and expand globally, it will be imperative for enterprises to deploy UC to enhance productivity and reduce costs. It will enable new capabilities such as effective business communications, employee mobility, streamlining business processes and improving profitability. Indian organizations are beginning to realize that they will be left behind if they don’t make a decision on UC as the future.

It is expected that UC adoption will happen in the overlapping stages. In the next three years, a lot of large deployments of UC technologies will enable collaboration from across verticals, with major buyers being BFSIs and government. This will be followed by small enterprises’ UC revolution that will include a lot of opportunities on innovative, and flexible UC deployments across thousands of enterprises through hosted UC models.

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