



OPINION PIECE

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May , 2011

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UC can benefit SMEs too, if solutions eliminate architectural complexity

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Rapid rise – in the enterprise

Unified communications (UC) is enjoying accelerating adoption in the enterprise, based on its inherent efficiencies, cost savings and business process improvements.

Partly thanks to the rise of tablet PCs and smartphones, it is one of the great success stories of ICT, and many vendors have come to the party with excellent functionality.

But mostly passes SMEs by

But the benefits of UC have mostly been denied small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The underlying architectural complexity of many platforms has driven the cost of solutions up and frustrated easy adoption and operation.

What few in the market seem to know, and not many vendors care to mention, is that UC can benefit organisations of all sizes, if architectural complexity is eliminated.

There are numerous documented cases of companies saving 15% to 30% by aggressively cutting complexity - Motorola's 'War on Complexity', for example, has saved the company \$2.6 billion in two years.

How UC can benefit SMEs

It's evident, therefore, that complexity is a major destroyer of value, and SMEs in particular stand to gain from simply-architected UC solutions. Some vendors are ahead of the curve in that respect, and they offer the following take on SME-friendly UC.

What you want

Companies of all sizes want the following from UC, but the benefits take on particular significance with SMEs:

- Reliability (SMEs are particularly dependent on fail-safe solutions);
- Ease of use, training, deployment and management (to suit SMEs' modest skills base);
- Low TCO (to suit SME budgets);
- Full-featured functionality as the standard (to let SMEs run with the big dogs); and
- Scalability – upwards, outwards and downwards (to leave room for growth without being over-engineered).

Simplified architectures address all these issues.

- Cutting-edge appliance-based, distributed UC solution architectures require fewer servers, presenting fewer possible points of failure.
- A single-image deployment configuration and a hybrid on-premise / cloud delivery model provides further redundancy, assuring 99.999% uptime.
- Low ongoing maintenance and support costs, coupled with an IP-based reduction in network and long-distance call charges, lower total cost of ownership.



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- Simplicity (legacy-free builds, all-in-one application functionality and an all-IP blueprint) cuts through the clutter of having to learn, manage and use multiple interfaces and platforms.

User-centric UC

The abovementioned full-featured UC encompasses voice, unified messaging, presence, video, conferencing, Web collaboration, mobility, office apps integration, and business process integration. All of this may seem too high to come by for an SME, but uptake of all these features is an increasing reality among midrange, and even smaller companies, thanks to the affordability of some solutions – in turn a function of their simplicity.

Another aspect of user-centric UC is its anywhere-access. Whether at home, on the go, at a hotel, airport or restaurant, SMEs can take the cost out of business and be more responsive to customers by being able to communicate and collaborate on their choice of device, with multiple case-based call handling options and presence management.

Or you could go back to struggling...

The alternative is a life with multiple, un-integrated communication and collaboration channels.

Consider how many outbound calls you make in a day, how few of these are answered, how long it takes for them to be answered and the time your people spend looking for other numbers or leaving voicemails.

Now consider the number of in-bound calls your staff field every day, including unsolicited calls, missed calls and call transfers. Multiply this by your number of employees, and you'll understand that you are far better off with UC and its productivity, accessibility and control.

Architecture is central to UC

Architecture is vital to ensuring the benefits of UC are accessible to companies of all sizes. Its effects filter through to every feature and benefit, drawback and consequence of UC.

Customers must choose a vendor with demonstrable simplicity of architecture, low TCO, standard full-featured functionality and free choice between a full range of devices.

** Tellumat is the South African distributor of ShoreTel systems.*