



# Why, What, and How of Unified Communications (UC)

*Deepak Chebbi*



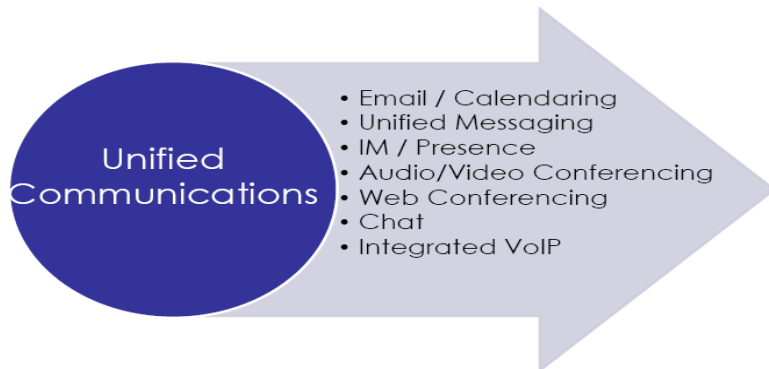
# A Typical Day

- You are on business travel
- Customer of yours leaves an important voice mail on your work phone, stating that they have to make a purchase by close-of-business today, so that it will hit the corporate books this month rather than next-month
- You call your work phone or “800” number after 5:00pm and access your voice mails
- You come to know of the important voice mail from the customer (after the close-of-business)
- You have lost a “great” opportunity



# Unified Communications (UC) Changes Business

- Higher efficiency and improved productivity
- Streamlined network functions
- Optimized business processes
- Enhanced response time
- Improved communications with partners, customers, suppliers, and employees
- Increased collaboration
- Improved customer service



**With Unified Communications, employees—whether in the office or at a remote location—can manage, send, and receive voice mail, text messages, faxes, IMs, and emails; set up conferences; share documents; and access corporate Web portals and third-party applications, as long as they are connected to the corporate network via a mobile device, PC, or even a desktop phone**



# When and NOT to Use Unified Communications (UC)

## ➤ Categories of employees will benefit the most from unified communications

- Sales personnel who spend most of their time in the field
- Senior- and executive-level personnel who spend a lot of time on the go
- Consultants who travel between branch offices
- Corporate workgroups
- Remote workers/teleworkers

**➤ Employees who spend the majority of their time at a desk in one office will probably not reap as many benefits, since they should have access to the corporate portals and messages from their desktop**



# 6 Questions to test your Unified Communications readiness

## ➤ Employee Profile

- Companies should profile their employee base to determine the need for a unified messaging solution

## ➤ Technology

- Vendors are still perfecting voice recognition and text-to-speech technologies, and the limitations in these technologies may hamper the effective use of Unified Communications. For example, emails sent by employees who use abbreviations or shorthand when composing their messages may not translate using text to speech. In addition, presence technology is young and no standard exists

## ➤ Integration

- Integrating disparate platforms is always challenging, although SIP is making it easier for vendors to create interfaces between their systems. However, the growing number of partnerships among complementary solution providers exemplifies the industry's commitment

## ➤ Security

- Vendors are debating security risks posed by Unified Communications in general and VoIP in particular. However, they are also developing technologies to stop hackers

## ➤ Increased Burden on Resources

- Unified Communications technologies can place an additional burden on IT resources, since the system transforms messages into different formats and must be stored until they are viewed. Companies must also have the necessary storage space for emails that have been converted into sound files and voice mails that have been converted into text files, etc. Maintaining quality of service could also be a challenge

## ➤ Implementation, Integration, and Management Costs

- Enterprises need to integrate several messaging platforms and applications into the Unified Communications system to reap benefits from an operational and efficiency standpoint, but integration costs can be expensive unless offset by soft and hard ROI savings.



# Who are the Market Leaders?

- Alcatel-Lucent offers OmniTouch Unified Communication
- Avaya offers various Unified Communications Editions
- Cisco describes its Unified Communications portfolio as "an integrated solution"
- IBM offers Unified Communications and Collaboration (UC2) middleware solutions
- Interactive Intelligence is the smallest company that is considered a market leader in this segment
- Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007, which can manage realtime (synchronous) communications, including IM, VoIP, and conferencing
- Through alliances with Microsoft and IBM, Nortel offers Unified Communications solutions to the enterprise
- Siemens offers OpenScape which can integrate with a company's current infrastructure and be deployed as either a hosted or on-premise service



# Your Next Steps

- Unified communications will undoubtedly dominate business communications in the next decade
- Plan to implement unified communications with their business goals in mind and invest in the applications that will cause their individual business processes to improve and their productivity to increase
- Enterprises considering a unified communications system should consider tying in as many critical business applications as possible in order to create a return on investment
- Administrators and CIOs should assess all available options--both premise-based and service providers--before making a selection

