

Unified Communications Deployment Models

Don Van Doren, UniComm Consulting
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We are starting to see some patterns emerge in how unified communications is being deployed and used in enterprises. These patterns link who gets the capabilities, how are they being used, and what is the benefits accrue to the enterprise. This column suggests a better way to deploy UC, built on these two current strategies:

Personal Productivity. UC provides many tools which can assist an individual in communicating with others. Presence awareness, linked directories, access to any communications device, integration with Office applications, and many more. It's easy to understand these UC tools and the ease-of-use benefits users will experience.

Deployment is simple: purchase equipment and user licenses for most of the employees in the enterprise, roll out the capabilities and, with minimal training, users began to incorporate these tools into their daily activities.

Presence becomes an integral part of communicating. Jason needs to talk to Nicole about her memo. He mouses over her name him a, checks presence availability, and initiates a call that is routed automatically to her cell phone.

Business Process Integration. Most business activities do not run with assembly-line efficiency. The steps in a business process are frequently interrupted by the need to obtain information, approval, or consensus from one or more individuals. These communications "bottlenecks" introduce delays into the process of completing a sale, designing a new product, constructing a building, approving a loan, etc. UC capabilities can eliminate the bottlenecks by integrating communications directly into the process.

The deployment approach identifies those processes where delays are caused by communications bottlenecks and have the greatest impact (frequency, duration of delay, dollar value). Survey processes within a division or throughout the entire enterprise, then determine which UC tools can best address the most important opportunities discovered.

In some cases, UC functionality will be provided by adding software within the workflow application that drives the process. The application itself "understands" that an approval is required as the next step, uses skills-based (not name-based) presence capabilities to identify an appropriate, available resource, and launches the communications event. The communications starts automatically; the employee doesn't initiate the process.

Justification Challenges. Personal productivity deployments are easy to understand, and it's easy to show people how to use the new tools. Therefore, we see many sales presentations, and much of the supplier marketing collateral, focused on personal productivity issues.

The challenge, however, is that the personal productivity story often fails to generate much excitement among the protectors of the corporate purse. Too often, the benefits are reduced to "improving productivity" of those enjoying the UC tools. It's difficult to develop believable "hard dollar" justifications based on accruing 17 minutes a day times 842 employees times average pay per minute.

Business process justifications, on the other hand, are often easily developed. Most line-of-business managers can tell you the value of reducing cycle times, speeding a business process, cutting out steps, or reducing staff requirements to complete the work in their departments. Justification is simply understanding how integrated communications eliminates bottlenecks to achieve these improvements.

In our consulting work, we do ROI studies on UC implementations. Consistently, we find that cases driven by business process integration have order-of-magnitude better ROI than those focusing on personal productivity deployments.

A New Approach. It turns out that, for different reasons, both personal productivity and business process integration are important. Done correctly, business process integration is a big deal. In addition to the work of using SDKs to connect applications to UC APIs, and perhaps in re-engineering a business process, there is the challenge of getting users to change their behavior. One way to assist in the change management issues is to get the users enthusiastic about the tools in advance of implementing the new techniques.

This leads to a deployment approach I'm calling "familiarization". Enterprises do an evaluation of business process opportunities, determine the best approach, and roll out the UC infrastructure. The early emphasis is on showing the users how they can use the tools to improve their own efficiencies. While those gains may or may not trickle down to the bottom line, they help the users make the transition to the use of UC.

When we subsequently introduce the new business process improvements, the users will be familiar with the tools and how they help enable innovative communications. This approach will help enlist the users to become involved in the change process. Moreover, the users will generate ideas about how to further improve the targeted business processes, or suggest other applications for improvements.

Don Van Doren is Principal of UniComm Consulting, an independent UC consulting firm, and a co-founder of www.ucstrategies.com. Don is also President of Vanguard Communications. Contact Don at dvandoren@unicommconsulting.com.