Webtorials

Thought Leadership Discussion on

Collaboration Anywhere, Anytime, Anyone

With Avaya

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Patte Johnson: Welcome, and thank you for joining us for this podcast on collaboration anywhere, anytime, anyone. I'm Patte Johnson from Webtorials, and I'm pleased to introduce another Webtorials Thought Leadership Discussion for you. Today we are joined by Gary Audin of Delphi, one of our Webtorials analysts on unified communications, and he will be speaking with Lawrence Byrd, the Director of Collaboration Solutions at Avaya. Gary, I will turn it over to you.

Gary Audin: Thank you, Patte. You know, we all hear about collaboration, and we've heard about things like telepresence, which is the high-definition version of it. We've heard rationales behind collaboration, like reducing travel costs. But I think we need to talk more about better working relationships and mobile collaboration. So, Lawrence, would you help me to define collaboration in today's environment?

Lawrence Byrd: Yes, certainly, and thanks, Gary. I think collaboration is about getting the right people together with the right information. It's really not about the technology. It's much more about people, and processes, and customers. And most organizations

today are faced with coming out of economic challenges. They've probably got reduced resources. They've got people scattered all over the place. And yet, they have to be sort of faster and meaner if they're going to compete in their marketplaces.

And so, the question is, what are the processes? Is it - do I have a development problem with my latest products and services? Is it a sales and distribution problem, where I want to automate how salespeople do things? Is it a customer service issue with how I treat and respond quickly to my customers? Depending on the processes, there'll be particular people who I want to empower; who I want to accelerate.

And then the question comes, how do I do that? Am I putting mobile collaboration tools in the hands of my sales force? Am I putting video collaboration tools across countries to accelerate development processes? Am I communicating better with my customers, perhaps with video or other conferencing capabilities?

So, I'm saying it starts with thinking about your people, your processes, your customers, that leads you to try and identify the hot spots, and then you're looking at the particular tools that will let them do their job better; but more important than that, will let them work with everybody else in the team. Find the right people; bring everybody together; get things done more rapidly. I think collaboration is about speed. It's about accelerating the speed of business.

Gary Audin: I've seen an awful lot of discussion over the years about telepresence rooms and how wonderful they are. But are they used very much? And if not, why not?

Lawrence Byrd: Gartner has an interesting picture where they draw the video collaboration space as a pyramid. At the top of the pyramid, in the, sort of, isolated top floor is telepresence - certainly useful for certain kinds of interaction, typically executive interactions. But very expensive systems; colossal use of bandwidth. As you come down the pyramid, you move into the more sort of classical room systems. Rooms connected together. The problem with room systems is, they typically only talk to themselves, and they're often difficult to use.

And then as you come down to the layers at the base of the pyramid, Gartner talks about personal video - video that I can just get access to at any time. And then, how does that become integrated into my unified communications experience? And at Avaya, we believe it's that base of the pyramid that has to grow. There are certainly usages for room systems, and sometimes for telepresence. But I think (sounds like: if I) didn't reach enough people, that it's difficult to get into, is always the challenge.

So, we're interested in making it as easy as a click to get into video, so that I just access video from my browser. And I can be coming into a room system; I can be coming into a telepresence meeting; but it's, how do I get other people in? How do I get the sales rep on the front line? How do I get the development person in another country? How do I get my partner or supply chain partner in? How do I get my customer into the call? So, we're interested in how you make it easy in the broad spread, and our Scopia Mobile and Scopia Desktop products, which came from our

acquisition of Radvision, really provide that anywhere, anytime access into videoconference rooms.

And our investment in unified communications is leading to the Avaya Flare Experience, making video just part of what I do every day. I see you on the screen. I can see your presence. I swipe you into my - what we call a spotlight. I bring a couple of other people in. We can be talking. We can be sharing content. And if we have video, we're just seeing each other. And it's just as easy as a swipe, and I don't think about it. It's a normal part of how I do business, using the unified communications interfaces that are in front of me.

Gary Audin: You've discussed some of what I consider market needs for collaboration. Are there any other points you want to make about that?

Lawrence Byrd: I think the market needs are reach and simplicity. If what I'm trying to do is to get the right people in the right places and quickly interact and speed things up, I have to be able to do that easily. Video can't be this special thing that when I walk into a room somebody has to organize for me; that there are people setting it up. Because what happens is that those are then underutilized. It has to be something that's just a normal part of how I do business - a normal part of how I interact with my customers or my partners outside the business.

And I would reiterate the point I'm making, is that I think the key business issue you have to look at is, what are the processes in your business that you're looking to accelerate? Don't start with the technology and then say, well, I wonder what I could do with that? Start with the people and processes and say, my bottleneck is this kind of customer interaction; this kind of distributed training; this kind of product and service development. And, based on those people and how they work, this is the kind of collaboration tool that would make that valuable.

And at Avaya, in fact, we have professional services where we help people evaluate user profiles, different needs, prioritize those, and drive an adoption model of how people are going to adopt and use this in order to drive ROI. And if you're not doing that in some way - and Avaya can help - if you're not driving it from user profiles and needs, and how people are going to work, and you're just looking at the technology and thinking it's good, then you're unlikely to get the business return that you're looking for.

Gary Audin: Lawrence, could you talk more about the problems facing businesses when they're considering such broad collaboration in their environment?

Lawrence Byrd: I think the key problem starts with just the speed of business today that we've already talked about, and competitive forces. It then moves into just the distributed nature of the business today - that the people I need to get things done are literally everywhere across the nation and across countries. They're often mobile and in motion. And I think mobility is perhaps one of the biggest things that you, I, and all of us feel every day in our business. We're constantly on the move.

And that means that there are new kinds of devices. I expect an awful lot from my smartphone. My tablet, an iPad or an Android tablet, is my pop-up office. It is my decision-making device. Much more than just getting access to me through my smartphone, I need to be able to make decisions. I need access to information. I need to be able to see who's available, if I'm going to meet these accelerated business needs.

And that brings us into the whole sort of challenge that IT departments are facing around BYOD, or bring your own device, which is, all these devices are appearing. Some of them belong to the enterprise, but more and more of them belong to the individual. It's my personal iPad; it's my personal smartphone; it's my corporate PC. And suddenly, security, authentication, your networking, the underlying sort of fabric of your network, become key IT enablers in order to be able to deliver the collaboration applications.

And I think that everybody has a BYOD problem. Whether you like the idea of people bringing their own device or whether you hate the idea and want to stop it, you have the same problem, that you have to control which devices are accessing your network; what rights and policies you're going to apply, not just to Lawrence, but to Lawrence on his iPad, versus Lawrence on his smartphone, versus Lawrence on his corporate PC, versus Lawrence on an internal desktop. How do I distinguish between those? How do I give Lawrence the right permissions so that he has the applications he needs, and can collaborate? So, there's a lot of underlying BYOD authentication security issues that IT has to tackle in order to enable the right applications that bring these people together to succeed at the business level.

Gary Audin: You've talked somewhat about the solutions to these problems, but what are the benefits? If I'm going to be doing all of this, I have to have some rationale behind why it's worthwhile for me to do this.

Lawrence Byrd: As we've talked about, what we're doing here is targeting specific processes. So, the immediate benefit on ROI comes from the fact that you are targeting a process that's important. If you need to develop your next product and service in half the time that you did previously, because your competitors are somehow managing to do that, that's going to be the benefit. And if I'm able to use video collaboration across countries between the participants; if I'm able to use mobile collaboration tools to make sure that the product managers are there; if I'm able to use various kinds of conferencing collaboration environment to meet more quickly with early customers, to dialog how we can improve things, I'm using the tools to drive a result, which is twice the speed of developing that next product or service.

Similarly, if I'm trying to close deals faster, and I'm enabling the sales force, or I have a distribution demand chain and I need to train them, so it's about training, and knowledge sharing, and information, I'm using collaboration tools to deliver those benefits.

So, there's an individual benefit for me as an individual, which is productivity. There's an individual benefit for me, which is, I feel better. Increasingly, we have Gen X, Gen Y, and I suppose there'll be Gen Z soon, coming into the business, and

they're expecting to use all these tools. I like to joke that it's not just BYOD; it's, kind of, bring your own IT. I mean, they're bringing Facebook and Dropbox and Gmail and Google+, and they're wondering: I've already got all my collaboration tools. What do you supply me with? To empower that generation, to encourage them - and they're also your customers - you have to be using these tools.

But those are all things that make me feel good as an individual. The ultimate benefit has to be that I brought together the right people with the right information and I accelerated certain key business processes, where typically the most important processes are ones that serve the customer. So, when I look at, how quickly did my front line customer relationship manager respond to these customer needs; how quickly could they find the expert; how quickly did they bring the expert in, and maybe on the initial call, have them talking to the customer; how quickly did they get that resolved? - that's the benefit that I'm looking for from the business. And if Lawrence feels happier doing it, that's good; but it's really the business results that I think businesses are looking for.

Gary Audin: I'd like to go a little bit more into the technology. When I first got into video collaboration, I worked through a Multipoint Control Unit. How does this work with your collaboration solutions?

Lawrence Byrd: We provide the Scopia Elite MCU, or Multipoint Control Unit, and I'll also talk about other products in our portfolio. MCU is the sort of anchor for video collaboration. It's an engine for processing video. The videoconferencing market has focused on high quality, on the room systems, on HD, on sharing content; but also interoperating. So, Avaya's solutions interoperate with all the major vendors, so that you can bring together investments you've already made in video.

But, to do that, you need to convert between different resolutions, different protocols. You have to work between the H.323 environment that dominates videoconferencing today; the emerging use of SIP. And to do that, you need to process the video. An MCU is an engine for processing video - for receiving a bunch of streams, gluing them together in some way, and sending back out other streams. So, it tends to require some acceleration. Classical MCUs are hardware-based. We're seeing the increased use of software, but you may need a mix, because it's a processor-intensive task.

But that's the anchor. The question then is, what does it connect to? Classically, it connected to a dedicated room system that was the endpoint. Today, we're looking at connecting to video anywhere, on any one of our UC clients, like our Avaya Flare Experience, or other UC clients that Avaya has. We're looking at anybody, anywhere in the world, who's on a desktop, a PC, a Mac, or on a tablet or mobile device like an iPad or an Android. They need to participate. They need to be part of the conference.

So, today, the MCU is becoming the meeting place for all sorts of different video needs, really opening the door, if you like, to video collaboration, to all these people inside and outside the enterprise, people who are customers and partners, and giving them a place where they can all meet. The Scopia Elite…

Gary Audin: I've heard of another term, Lawrence, called software media switching, as possibly an alternative to an MCU. And if software media switching is going to be something of the future, how does that enhance collaboration?

Lawrence Byrd: So, software media switching is a new technology, and Avaya has introduced this in our Avaya Aura Conferencing product. We believe you need both technologies. We have a phrase, and I'll explain what that means. You know, switch where you can; process where you must.

And what does that mean? Software media switching is where you try not to process the video - where you just try and move it around and get it to the right place as quickly as possible. And to do that there are codecs called scalable video codecs that give you sort of layers of signal, so that I can send a lower-resolution piece one place by just sort of slicing it out, and I can then send a higher-resolution piece to another place. That allows me not to have to process the video.

What I don't get is the high degree of interoperability. I don't get all the integration with existing systems I have. I don't get the richness and quality. I do get massive scale. So, for example, Avaya Aura Conferencing scales to 7500 simultaneous video sessions occurring across an enterprise, not all in the same, but in different conferences. We use a distributed media architecture, which means there are media servers scattered around the world. And that means I don't have to bring everything back to a central place. I can consolidate things locally. If EMEA, the European region, and the US region are having a conference, then they meet in one place, but only one stream of video needs to go to that central place. All the local interactions are happening locally. So, by having a broad, distributed architecture, the cascades that uses switching, we're able to achieve significant distribution and scale.

And why's that important? Because I want to put video in the hands of every knowledge worker. If they're sitting in front of their Avaya Flare Experience or their UC client, I want video just to be there. And for an IT department, I have to therefore do that at reasonable cost, I have to be able to control the bandwidth, and I want it part of an environment like Avaya Aura that controls bandwidth. I want it to be very efficient in how it works.

And so, that's what media switching does. We believe at Avaya you need both. And so, we have Avaya Aura Conferencing delivering broad media switching and we have our Scopia video portfolio processing video, delivering high levels of interoperability, and we're able to bring that together to really deliver the best of both worlds to the market.

Gary Audin: Scopia came from Radvision. I was looking at the website. It has a lot of products. How do the Scopia products help you expand the collaboration experience?

Lawrence Byrd: Well, the acquisition of Radvision has really greatly expanded our video capabilities. Radvision's been in the business 20 years. They've been supplying video technology to basically every vendor in the marketplace. So, they have a rich heritage of understanding how video works, and in the past few years they have

been building their own room systems, like the XT5000; their own MCUs like the Scopia Elite MCU. And this gives us a comprehensive portfolio of everything from telepresence, to room systems, to the MCU, to the gateways that allow you to access this through the firewall.

But something - this is really built on their heritage - that remains somewhat unique, has been their focus on tablets, on smartphones, on PCs, on Macs? And the Scopia Mobile and Scopia Desktop products are truly remarkable in how easy they are for people to join what Radvision called and partially invented the sort of virtual room, where I arrive in my room that I've set up, that has various parameters, and everybody just meets and arrives there very easily.

We have a campaign running at the moment where we'll give you free coffee if we can't connect to you in under ten minutes. And that's a sort of testament to just how easy it is to click on a link, end up in a videoconference. And this is a very, very different experience from what we're doing classically.

So, we're in a position now to sell a comprehensive range of video solutions, but also to augment video infrastructure that customers have, that may not be doing what they want. If they have a collection of older room systems, we can integrate with them through the Scopia Portfolio and then extend them outwards into the world through Scopia Mobile and Scopia video. And we think that's a compelling value proposition in meeting the collaboration needs we discussed earlier.

Gary Audin: Well, thank you, Lawrence. One more question. Do you have any resources or information that listeners might access, to learn more about this?

Lawrence Byrd: Absolutely. If you go to avaya.com, that is the starting point for everything. On avaya.com you can learn about the Scopia portfolio and you can learn about the Avaya Aura portfolio. And we have some excellent resources, if you look under Solutions, under Mobile Collaboration, which will cover BYOD and the issues we talked about earlier, and video collaboration—bringing people together where they can see each other, inside and outside the enterprise, across the world.

Gary Audin: Well, thank you very much, Lawrence, and I look forward to our next podcast. And Patte?

Patte Johnson: Well, thanks to both of you for an informative and insightful discussion. We encourage our readers to continue this interactive discussion at the Webtorials website by adding your questions and comments. Thanks to both of you.

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