

Avaya Integrations for Microsoft Lync & Beyond

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*Discussion Transcript**

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Patte Johnson:

Welcome to our Webtorials® podcast titled Avaya Integrations for Microsoft Lync & Beyond. I am Patte Johnson, and today, Larry Hettick, our Webtorials® analyst, will be speaking with Allan Mendelsohn. Allan is the Avaya Marketing Director for Unified Communications and Collaboration.

Larry, I will turn the discussion over to you.

Larry Hettick:

Thank you, Patte. And, Allan, welcome, and I look forward to an interesting discussion.

Larry Hettick:

We all know that unified communications is a really very competitive market. And Avaya and Microsoft both compete and interoperate. So let's start with the easy question first. How does Avaya differentiate itself against a Microsoft or a Microsoft-only solution?

Allan Mendelsohn:

We do start with the easy ones first. Well, you know, there's really I would say six to eight key considerations here. First, and probably foremost, is Avaya's proven enterprise voice. This is what Avaya's heritage is all about, it's our extensive feature set that's grown over the years, all based on customers demanding us to address very specific use-case needs. We're known for our five 9s reliability, which is absolutely key where real time communications is considered mission critical. It's what we call our -ilities, those things that really make something enterprise grade—scalability, reliability, manageability, and I'll include security in

there as well. It's our scale to 250,000 users, support for a truly geo redundant architecture for real time collaboration. It's the support that you get in terms of reliability that really meets your business continuity needs.

Security comes into play, such as (sounds like: VPN-less) access for remote workers, as well as our identity engine solution where people who are inside the enterprise premise, whether you're a guest, an employee, and so forth, can quickly get access to the network and only access the applications that they really should be being granted access to.

Our solutions are easy to deploy end-to-end. Again, in terms of real time collaboration, it's one thing putting solutions out there that are non-real time but the tolerances for real time is really where the extra might really comes into play.

It's our full stack solution starting with clients and devices, of course, what the users get exposed to. And then the complete suite of UC and Contact Center applications. It's the core platform, again, with the -ilities that I mentioned earlier and the flexibility to address a variety of use-case needs. It's lower total cost of ownership. It's here when you factor in not just the acquisition and support costs, but the operating costs inclusive of network and bandwidth consumption and power and datacenter costs. You'll find that Avaya has a lower total cost of ownership.

BYOD is a key requirement to be looking at today, and here it's about voice, video, content sharing, and UC capabilities supported across a wide array of tablets and smartphones. And it's not just the client software with features and user experiences that pleases the users, but it's the applications and security tools that allow IT to feel comfortable in their deployment.

It is our complete video conferencing capabilities with the recent Radvision acquisition that gives us strength in the shifting trend towards desktop and mobile video, while still addressing room and telepresence and executive desktops.

And I'd say the last couple of things really quickly is Contact Center. You know, we believe in helping our customers transform their businesses one great interaction at a time. We see our platforms being so simple and intelligent that customers can constantly stay ahead of their end-customer's expectations. And this includes a market leading portfolio for assisted service, self-service, performance management, and so forth.

And the last thing, it's about choice. It's the wide variety of mobile devices that we support the broadest array of interoperability when it comes to video endpoints, our session management supports among others Cisco, Siemens, Alcatel, and Microsoft. And as obviously we'll be talking about today, it's the choice to have Avaya voice and video services, but from inside the Lync experience.

Larry Hettick: Great. Well, it sounds like you've got a pretty long list of features that would give you a solid solution on your own. Why do you want to interoperate with Microsoft in general and Microsoft Lync in particular?

Allan Mendelsohn: Well, you know, we really look at it from the perspective that customers have, in the enterprise space, already made certain investments in terms of spending, IT infrastructure, user experience, and so forth. And we're really trying to strive to protect those investments; not just ours. Obviously we'd like to have the whole pie when we can get it. But, you know, when you look at what customer requirements are, you really have to deal with what they already have in place today. And unlike others who take more of a walled garden approach to unified communications, Avaya is really predisposed to open interoperability.

Larry Hettick: I understand. So if we look at, you know, the interoperability with Microsoft – and there are many people who do already interoperate – we have kind of different tiers and different methods of interoperability. Can you talk a little bit about which abilities are supported by Avaya and what you would recommend to customers who are considering an integrated approach?

Allan Mendelsohn: Sure. Actually, there's three ways of interoperating with Microsoft Lync. One is at the most rudimentary level and that is direct SIP. And this is really just a trunking interface that allows calls to go between the Lync system and Avaya. We don't recommend this approach because, one, it's expensive. At the end of the day, you're really setting up yet another voice system, real time communication system, so it's expensive to do that. It's complicated to implement and manage and maintain real time voice on the Lync infrastructure. And ultimately at the end of the day, if you're setting up yet another communication system, you're really creating islands of users. So that's ultimately why we don't like to recommend that approach. But we do support it.

There's also something known as Remote Call Control, or RCC. This is an early server site integration that Microsoft has had in one form or another in their product going back to the LCS, or the Live Communication Server, days with their 2005 release. This, too, unfortunately is quite complex. It does provide a click-to-call capability and so forth, but it is complex to set up and implement. And it's an integration that Microsoft has been depreciating over time. They really don't want to support it over the long term. They've pulled it out of the product and then they sort of put it back in because customers said, "You can't take it away." But ultimately, you know, from a Microsoft perspective, it's not here for the long run.

And the final way of going about it is what we refer to as a client side integration. And here we're using the standard Microsoft APIs. It's the same APIs that any of the many developers that Microsoft has extending Microsoft Lync. We're using the same set of APIs, the solution is really easy to deploy, and it works with both an on-prem Lync solution as well as their Office 365 environment. So ultimately it's so easy to deploy, it provides the most natural experience, and it works with both the hosted as well as the on-prem environment. That's why that's the approach that Avaya recommends.

Larry Hettick: I hate to be the one to tell you this, and you may already know this, but there are actually probably at least a dozen other companies that also interoperate with Microsoft. So how do you distinguish your integration from those other companies who may be in direct competition with you for some of the things that you're supplying?

Allan Mendelsohn: Avaya has invested considerably so that the Microsoft experience is maintained. Others that you're likely referencing here really do a transition from the Microsoft experience into their own experience. So it's not really as an elegant experience as what users and customers are really looking for. And, you know, yes, they have – in some cases they do have integrations, but is it really there to check the box on an RFP, or is it something that they really see as a solution for customers? I've heard in multiple forums, including the analyst firm Nemertes Research at Enterprise Connect, were noting that what they're hearing from customers is that the vendors are telling the customers, "Look, just go pick one and forget about doing interoperability." So, you know, yes, their solutions are out there, but I don't think that they're as heavily invested in making these solutions really practical for customers.

Larry Hettick: That makes sense. Let me turn for a minute to the end user. We talked a little bit about what you can do and what Microsoft can do. I want to talk a little bit about the user experience and why would the user want to use Avaya's integration for Microsoft as opposed to other options.

Allan Mendelsohn: One of the things is, as I was just suggesting, is the user experience. We preserve that user experience. We allow the user to have the Microsoft user interface on their PC with the Avaya quality of service and quality of voice and video underneath that. When you're using the Lync client, you will seamlessly move from a contact to presence to instant messaging to voice to video where, --- by the way, presence is aggregated with both IM and telephony presence. And the voice and video is, again, that enterprise grade coming from Avaya. And when you think about modal escalation where I just sort of described one typical scenario, now you can do things where consider this, where I have an incoming call but, you know, I'm on another call right now and I can't really answer that call. But now with modal escalation, I can answer that incoming call with an instant message.

With our integration, you can choose what you're going to use as your voice path. You can use your desk phone, and that's a great thing to do. In fact, that's what I'm using right now in recording this podcast today. Not only do I manage the interface through Lync, but I also have access to all of the many telephony features that are set up on my profile. So I still have those available to me on my desk set.

But at the same time, when I'm on the road, I can use my PC. So in that case, I'm using our integration really just as a pure soft phone. And if I'm having issues with that, I can really direct my inbound and outbound calls to any phone, so I can

send it to my cellphone, I can have my voice traffic going through my home phone and so forth without having to disclose that number.

And there's other features in there—the ability to transfer calls or create ad hoc conference from, again, within the Lync experience,— I mentioned telephony presence a moment ago, the ability to see that presence, to click to call or click to video from within Outlook, the Office Suite, SharePoint, or applications from your browser.

And, you know, real easy support for remote workers in a very standards-based manner where users can bring up their Lync client and seamlessly connect in without the need of a VPN or special implementation set up within their DMZ and so forth. We take a standards-based – SIP-based approach using an SBC.

And I mentioned the browser a moment ago. The idea here so even stepping away from Lync and Outlook for a moment, just think of using your browser and the ability to have really any application that you might be using through that, such as Google Docs, a web portal, a cloud-based application, any web page --- to intelligently be able to identify a phone number, identify what the dial plan ought to be, based on where you are at and the number that you're calling and so forth, have that all work for you and just click to communicate. It's just so natural.

Larry Hettick: Right. So we've talked about how you stack up both as an integration partner and as a competitor to Microsoft, and a little bit about, you know, the user experience. What about the poor IT department? You know, we all know that integrations can be pretty complex. How does your approach affect the IT department who's going to have to implement this?

Allan Mendelsohn: Well, actually, it's quite interesting because while we're talking about integration, the reality is to set up a Microsoft implementation for enterprise voice, you need to pull together a whole series of third-party providers to make that solution work. So we're actually eliminating a lot of integration points.

And in addition to that we're solving a problem on that end, and then it's okay, we're still – we still need to deal with this integration. All it takes to make this integration happen – as I said earlier, it's a client site integration. We provide a configuration tool that IT will use that effectively takes about a minute to use. And it'll define all the information that you need, creates a file, and you will then just silently push that out to all your users; and, when they bring up Lync and they go to click to call, they're now going through the Avaya Aura environment.

Larry Hettick: So it sounds like you've got complexity managed well there. What about total cost of ownership, you know? Somebody's going to have to pay for this and we've always got to get it past the guys in finance. Can you tell me about licensing and the TCO?

Allan Mendelsohn: Sure. So, again, here, you know, some tremendous benefits in the sense that to do the integration on the Microsoft side, you only need their basic entry-level license. On the Avaya side, you only need our basic entry license,

We have been shown to have a lower TCO. I mentioned Nemertes Research a moment ago. They recently surveyed 190 end customers. They did that in the January to March timeframe this year. And this was vendor-independent research. They don't have vendors sort of reaching out to them saying, "Could you go do this exercise?" and point them in a direction. They've got access to end customers, they do the polling, and then they just publish what they find. And what they found is that Avaya has the least expensive real world costs for enterprise customers. And, by coincidence, Microsoft just happens to have the most expensive. And while Microsoft licensing may seem attractive, much of the Microsoft expense is really attributed to their higher operating costs. And, you know, I would encourage our listeners on this podcast to go to the NoJitter.com site and look for a blog there by Robin Gareiss of Nemertes Research. And she really just sort of summarizes the findings in their latest research.

Larry Hettick: So, one more question as we kind of wrap this thing up. To kind of summarize where we've taken this discussion, what are the top three things you want people to remember about your integration with Microsoft?

Allan Mendelsohn: First, if you're interested in using the Microsoft Lync experience on Windows desktops, Avaya can preserve that user experience while embedding Avaya enterprise-grade voice and video services within that.

Second thing, I suppose, is that Avaya can provide a lower total cost of ownership, as we were just discussing, for achieving unified communications.

And lastly, you know, customers need to plan for change. Avaya provides a platform and an architecture that's designed for interoperability. We help customers evolve from what they've got today to what they need today to meet current business requirements, and to maintain the agility that's required really to address tomorrow's requirements. So you – it's a lot about investment protection and future-proofing.

Larry Hettick: Well, great. I thank you so much for your time today and for your expertise. It's been a very informative discussion. With that, Patte, I'll turn it back over to you.

Patte Johnson: Well, thank you, Allan and Larry. It was a very informative discussion today. We would also encourage our audience to visit the Webtorials® website and post your comments and questions related to today's podcast. We appreciate your attending today and thank you very much.

THE END

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