

# Unified Communications Pervades the Enterprise



*An Analysis by Steven Taylor and Joanie Wexler*

## Introduction

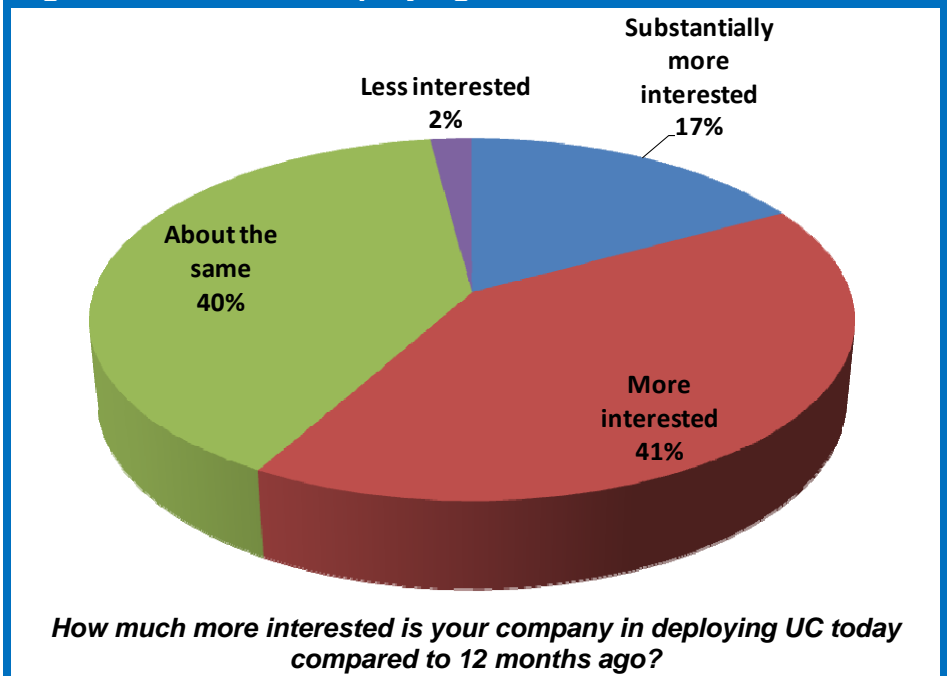
Unified communications (UC) is a top priority for the vast majority of today's enterprise organizations. In a May 2008 Web-based survey of about 800 members of two large Nortel user groups, 58% of the respondents indicated that they were "more interested" or "substantially more interested" in deploying UC than they were 12 months ago (**Figure 1**).

The increase in respondent interest is particularly noteworthy as only 8% of the respondents described themselves as being among the first to implement new technology. Rather, 84% of the respondents were more mainstream adopters: 36% described themselves as early adopters who tended to wait "until we see the problems others have had" before implementing, while 48% described themselves as those who tend to do so once a new technology has become widely accepted. UC, then, is making its way into the planning fabric of traditional IT organizations.

In fact, of those specifying a timeframe, 78% of the respondents indicated that they already have deployed or will begin deploying UC within two years despite a number of challenges such as tight budgets and complex internal decision-making processes.

UC was defined for purposes of this survey as "presence-enabled communications that integrates telephony, desktop, and business applications to deliver a

**Figure 1. Interest in Deploying UC**



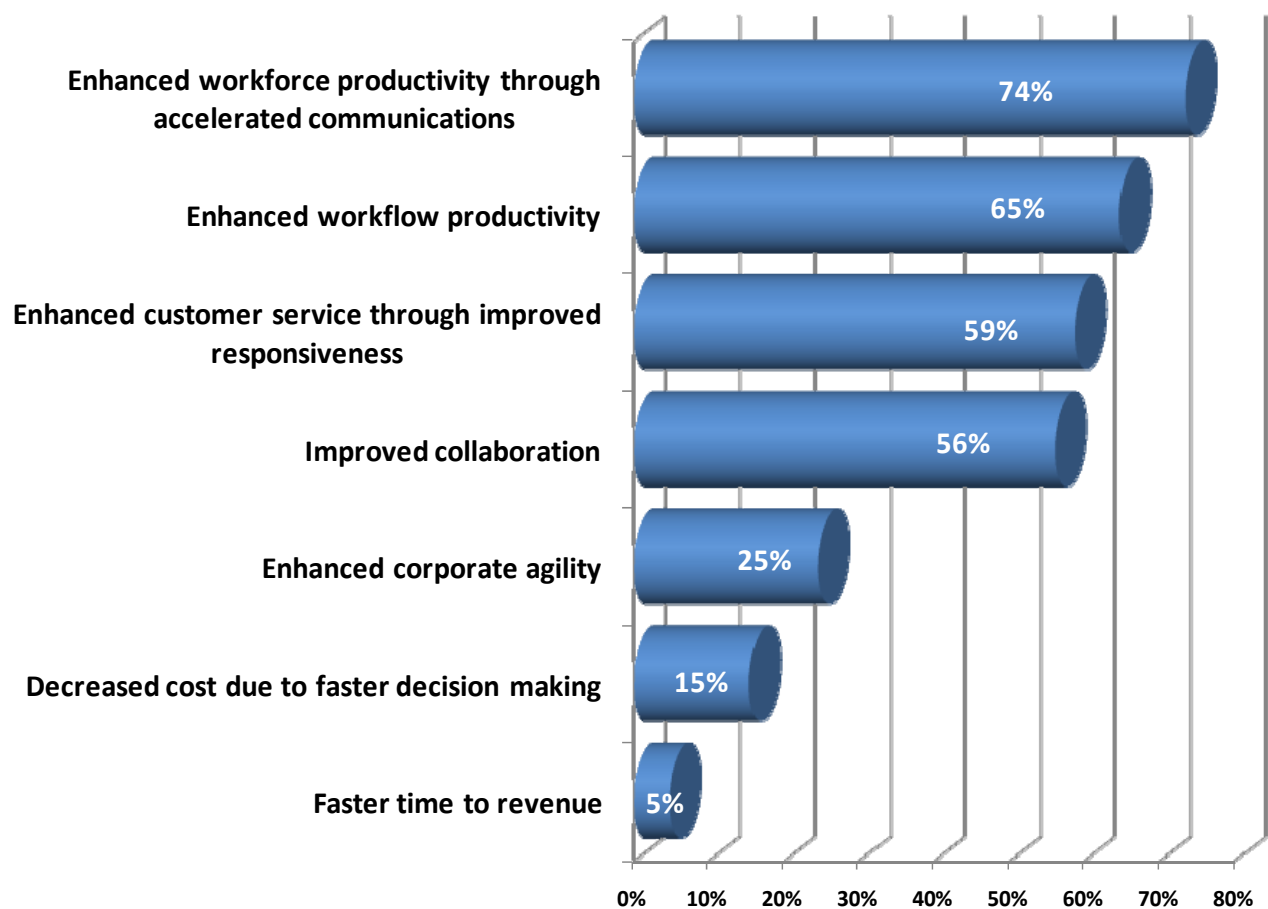
unified user experience and to streamline desktop and business processes.” Roughly 90% of the survey respondents were located in North America, and all were members of the International Nortel Networks Users Association (INNUA), the Nortel INSIGHT100 large-campus user group, or both. Respondents in the education, healthcare/pharmaceutical, government, and financial industries comprised the largest number of respondents (60%, collectively), though users from oil and gas, telecommunications, manufacturing, retail, and other industries were also represented in single-digit percentages each.

## Deployment Drivers

Survey-takers ranked being able to improve productivity and deliver enhanced customer service as the major anticipated benefits of rolling out UC projects. Nearly three fourths, for example, selected “enhanced workforce productivity through accelerated communications” as one of the top three benefits they foresee with UC (**Figure 2**).

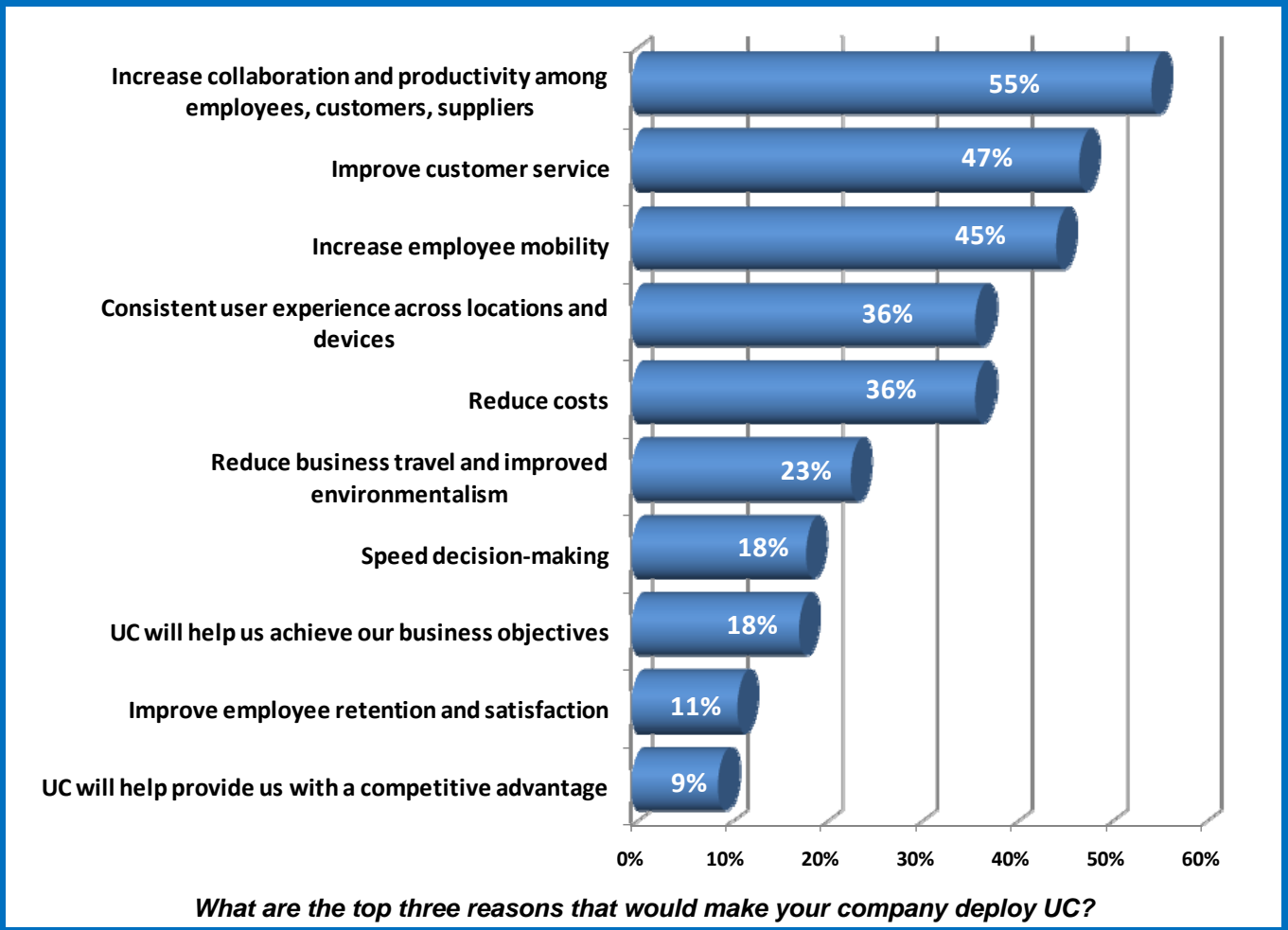
More than half selected the potential to “increase collaboration and productivity among employees, customers, suppliers” as among the top three reasons to deploy UC, followed

**Figure 2. Benefits of UC**



*Please select the top three benefits your company will reap from implementing UC.*

**Figure 3. Reasons to Deploy**



closely by the ability to “improve customer service” and “increase employee mobility” (Figure 3). The improved productivity and responsiveness benefits, of course, lead indirectly to lower costs and greater revenue generation by enabling more efficient work processes.

**Working Smarter and Better.** As Figures 2 and 3 reflect, anticipated UC benefits revolve around the idea that integrating disparate forms of communications and applications will step up users’ ability to communicate effectively with internal colleagues and external customers. Using UC, employees quickly become armed with relevant information that will improve the speed and quality of their responsiveness.

Respondents were also asked in what areas of their organizations it was an extremely high priority to deploy UC and to check all that applied. Far and away the highest-priority area for UC applications was for internal collaboration (cited by 85% of respondents), followed by customer-facing applications (34%). Partner-facing UC applications trailed the priority rankings at 9%.

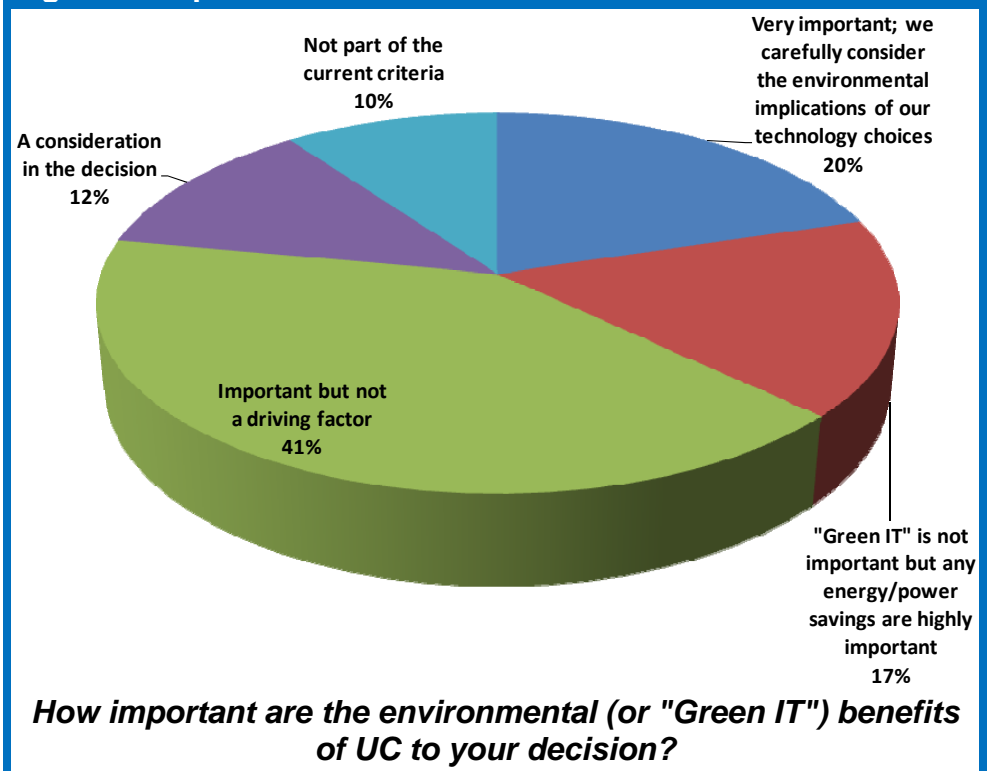
While it is challenging to put a hard dollar value on “faster, easier, and more efficient” communications, it is intuitive that such benefits improve business processes and accelerate work flow, ultimately enabling individuals to do their jobs better and the organization as a whole to grow stronger. For example, users having to check just one electronic message inbox instead of two or three (business voicemail, cellular voicemail, and business email, for instance) alone has

been shown to save at least 20 minutes per user per day, and some studies claim savings of over twice that much time. This is time that employees can spend instead interfacing with customers or otherwise accomplishing “real” work. In fact, using conservative estimates of time savings per day and number of days worked per year, this easily recovers two weeks of work per employee per year.

**Green IT.** Environmental aspects of UC were important in some way to 90% of respondents (Figure 4). Though 41 percent said environmental benefits were not a specific driving factor in deploying UC, the same group also described it as “important,” and another 20% described it as “very important.” Seventeen percent said that any energy/power savings were highly important, and another 12% said Green IT was a consideration in their UC decisions.

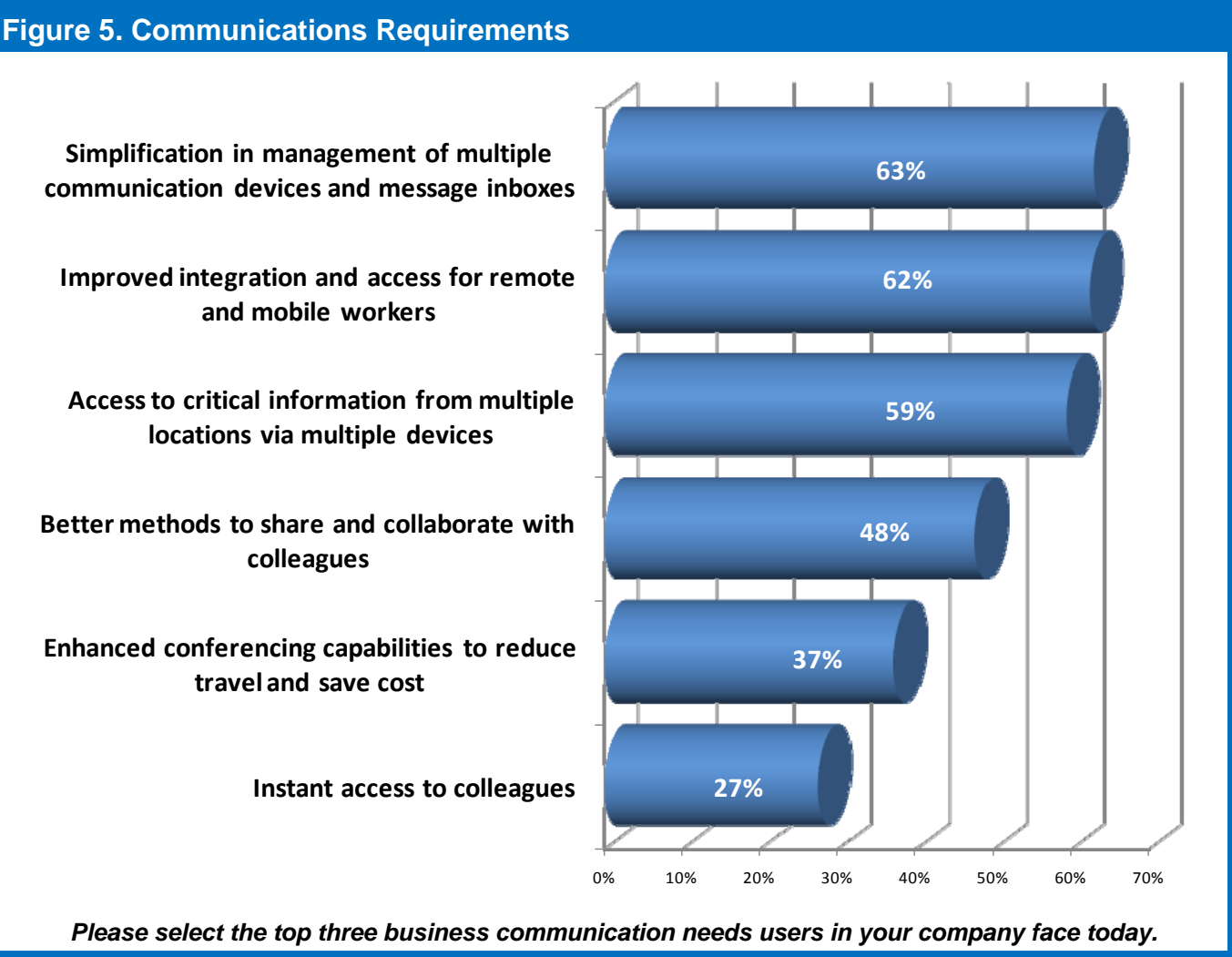
**The Mobility Factor.** The benefits of UC become particularly attractive as mobile work forces grow common and allow certain groups of employees to operate closer to their customers, employees, and processes. If users were forced to give up information access and communications capabilities to be in closer proximity to the people and processes they manage, the tradeoff would quickly discourage mobile behavior. In this respect, employee mobility - driven by the advent of quickly proliferating high-speed Wi-Fi networks, 3G cellular capabilities, and smartphones - is a huge motivator underlying UC. As employees roam on and off public and private wireless networks, they are demanding consistent capabilities for making phone calls, sending text and email messages, and accessing contact lists and unified message inboxes.

**Figure 4. Importance of Green IT**



Sixty-three percent of survey respondents cited “simplification in management of multiple communications devices and message inboxes” as one of the top three business critical communications needs of today (Figure 5), followed closely by “improved integration and access for remote and mobile workers (62%) and “access to critical information from multiple locations via multiple devices” (59%). These answers all point to the trend toward user mobility, coupled with the use of a variety of data access and telephony devices to match the user’s location and situation, as driving the need to unify communications and information access across computing platforms and networks.

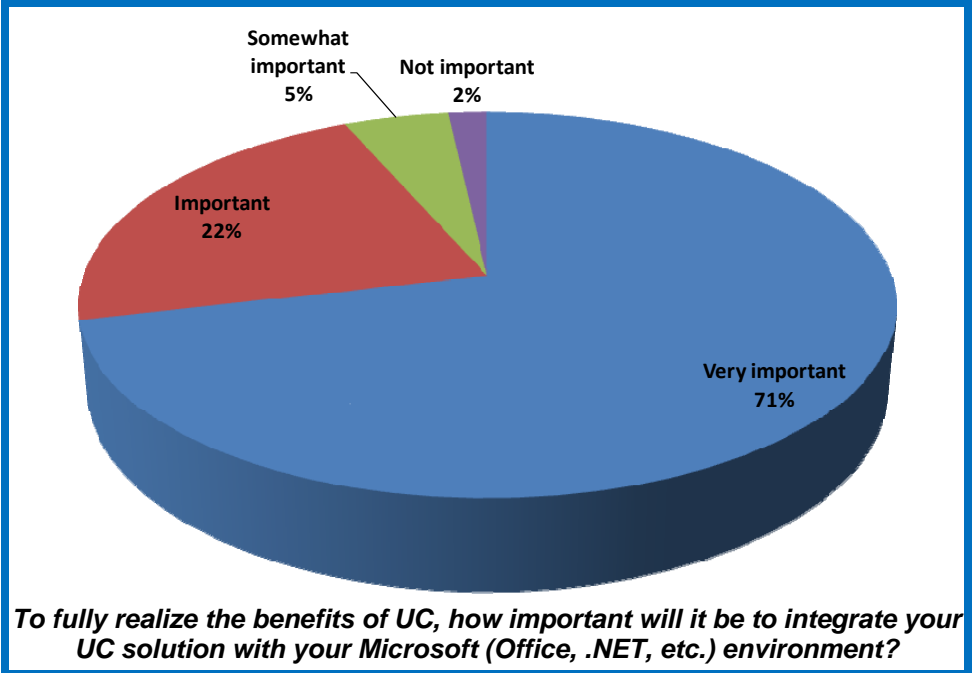
**Integration with the Office Environment.** The survey indicated that respondents don’t see UC as a “bolted on” solution, given that UC integrates the computing and desktop environment with the communications infrastructure. When queried about these functions, the respondents overwhelmingly desired close integration with a Microsoft-based environment, as shown in Figure 6. In fact, 93% found this to be either “important” or “very important.” Microsoft integration proved even more important to respondents than compliance with open standards (84%).



## Deployment Challenges

There are a lot of projects on IT and telecom managers' plates these days, as data centers move toward virtualization, employees grow increasingly mobile, and security issues threaten to have greater impact on corporate data privacy and resource availability. Finding the appropriate priority for UC projects, then, is a challenge that was reflected in survey-taker responses.

Figure 6. Integration Expectations



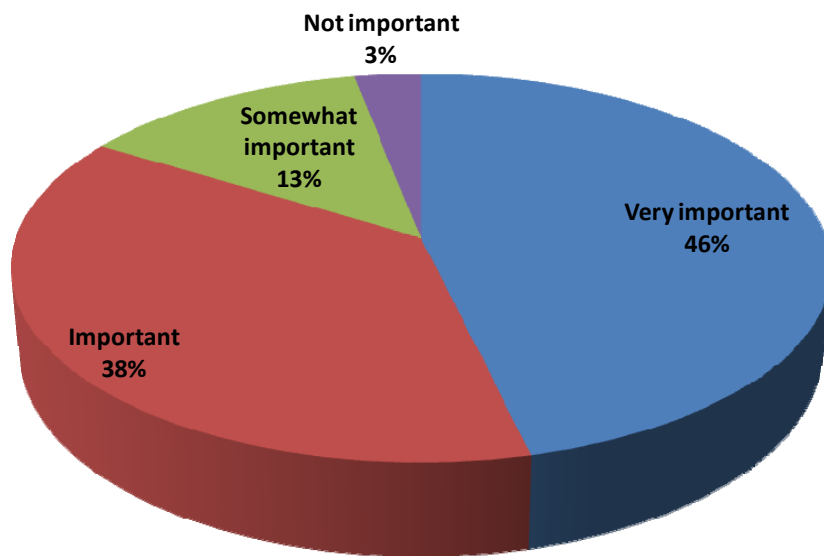
**Budget.** Respondents identified insufficient budget for UC projects (45%) as the primary challenge facing them in deploying UC. One probable reason is the predominance of North American respondents and, in particular, those in the United States, which accounted for three-fourths of respondents. The current economy is in a slow-growth phase and, as such, is more likely to encourage projects that directly save money or generate revenues in the short term. In addition, as mentioned, there are a number of other, related projects competing for IT budget dollars as the melding of consumer and business technologies picks up its pace, social networking and Web 2.0 capabilities invade corporations, and network infrastructure and security technology evolve to account for those trends.

**IT Integration and Standards.** Beyond coming up with the money needed to fund UC, the top challenges had to do with technical concerns about integrating new UC capabilities with the existing IT environment and figuring out how integrated decisions should be made within the organization. For example, 38% of survey respondents named “proven interoperability with existing IT investments” among their top three challenges. Other challenges were “complex decision-making process within the company” (36%), the “need to more fully understand security implications” of UC (34%), and the perception that the data network would need upgrading (33%) for a successful UC deployment.

As might be expected with any IT or network projects, well over three fourths of the respondents (84%) said that vendor support of open standards will be “very important” or “important” to fully deploying UC (Figure 7).

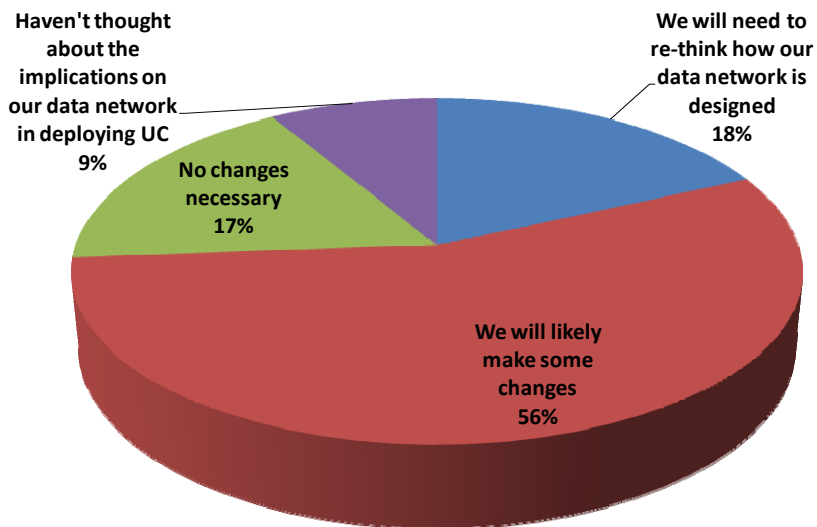
Meanwhile, more than half (56%) said they will likely change their data network design to support UC applications such as voice over IP (VoIP), video, and real-time collaboration (Figure 8). This finding could be directly related to the budget issue, in that organizations might perceive that not only must they find the dollars for UC-specific tools, but that they must also consider network infrastructure changes before they are able to roll out the UC applications.

**Figure 7. Standards Impact**



*To fully deploy UC, how important will it be for vendors to deploy open standards?*

**Figure 8. Plans to Change Data Networks**



*Will you change the way you design your data network in order to support UC applications such as VoIP, video, and real-time collaboration?*

## Conclusion

Unified communications applications and technologies have clearly emerged as a top priority for the enterprise. This will ultimately fulfill the need for users to work more collaboratively with their internal colleagues, who are increasingly mobile. Helping solve the challenges of mobility with UC - including unifying the myriad networks and devices associated with the state of being mobile - will help avoid the creation of an unwieldy number of redundant interfaces, message inboxes, and electronic contact lists. Additionally, UC will help organizations address needs for capabilities such as Web collaboration, softphones, unified messaging, and conferencing, leading to the fully networked enterprise.

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