

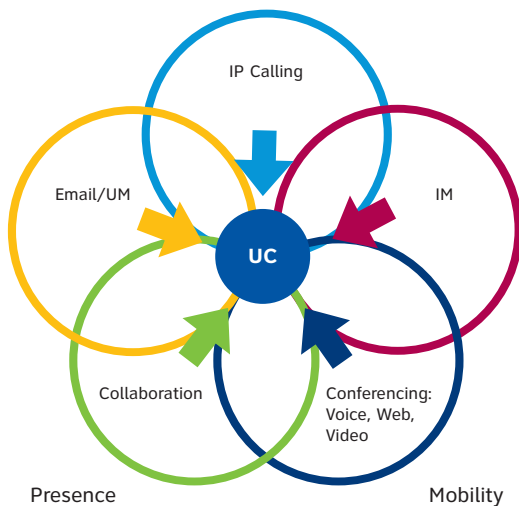
Five Best Practices for Unified Communications

Background

To meet today's increasing demands, businesses need to communicate and collaborate more efficiently. Communication needs to be timely and effective, reaching people where and when they want to be reached, at the office, at home or on the go. Collaboration needs to include a broad sweep of individuals, cross geographic and organizational boundaries and be integrated with business processes. One way to address these needs is with Unified Communications (UC), which brings together the tools of voice, email, messaging and conferencing and integrates them with business applications such as enterprise resource planning (ERP) and customer relationship management (CRM).

UC can improve organizational efficiencies, while simultaneously empowering knowledge workers. The efficiency gains come from the integration and optimization of communication silos, supported by enterprise-wide standards and shared services. Productivity gains are harder to measure, but there's a clear intuitive benefit that could be realized by reducing human latency. It might be hard to quantify, but

Unified Communications



Unified Communications integrates multiple communication tools with presence behind a single user interface and contextually embeds communications within key business processes/applications.

we've all experienced the frustration of "telephone tag." With a UC platform, employees can see who's available at a glance, before placing the call.

Characteristics of Successful UC Projects

Enterprises that have begun migrating toward UC have been experiencing some challenges. For UC to be effective, the entire network must be prepared to manage the applications. The more complex the network, the more difficult it is to roll out UC. Limited platform choices and inflexible pricing models are making choices more challenging for network managers. Return on Investment (ROI) for UC is also hard to provide in dollars and cents, as much of the value comes from improved communications among employees and customers. Early Adopters of UC indicate that successful UC programs share the following characteristics:

- They are often inspired by IT, but are always driven by clear business needs – it's not just a matter of rolling out the infrastructure
- They are well supported by existing architectures, and their complexity is acknowledged – programs succeed when they're supported by detailed plans to manage both technical and organizational change
- They focus on the smallest practical set of technology choices to minimize interoperability issues

Five Best Practices

Enterprises that are realizing value from their UC programs are succeeding because they've followed some basic, common-sense practices. If your organization is considering a move in this direction, here are five best practices to consider:

- 1. Define a Guiding Vision that will Lead Toward Increased ROI**
UC depends on network readiness, network and application convergence and integrated wired and wireless access. It also involves a blending of software and platform capabilities, leaving most enterprises with a multi-vendor solution. Managing the integration of disparate communications tools and dealing with the associated re-training programs also makes for a complex transition. Developing the right strategy requires a long-term view, as well as an understanding of the short-term challenges.

2. Include Sufficient Up-Front Planning

A clear roadmap for a UC implementation can help businesses manage expectations and be sure that time frames are realized. It should recognize that UC is not a software-only concept, and include initiatives aimed at ensuring end-user acceptance. The plan should also consider whether some commodity services might need to be outsourced, so corporate knowledge resources can focus on strategic UC applications.

3. Clearly Align Business and Technical Requirements

Phased migration plans can maximize the value of existing investments in applications, messaging, voice and other supporting infrastructures. Vendor-agnostic product recommendations can help ensure that the design meets an organization's specific requirements, and UC migration planning should also consider next generation service architectures, such as IP Multimedia Subsystem (IMS).

4. Find the Right Champion for the UC Program

Some programs emerge from IT and seek to introduce new capabilities. Programs may also emerge from business units seeking to establish UC capabilities to support a new product, service or business initiative. Regardless of the champion, there must be a well-developed integration plan and a realistic level of funding.

5. Establish Cross-Functional Teams to Help Manage the Implementation

These teams can help deal with the complexity of a "meta-technology" environment that includes many different parts, and can develop a single methodology for planning implementation and introduction. Cross-functional teams can also be invaluable when it comes to communicating the benefits across the organization, as well as to customers, partners and suppliers.

AT&T Consulting offers independent and holistic UC services that include strategy, architecture, integration and deployment of UC technologies. AT&T can help enterprises realize the promise of UC using a cost-effective, phased process that includes the evaluation and integration of premises-based and hosted solution alternatives. For more information on UC, visit www.att.com/networkingexchange or contact your account representative.

Seeing Benefits

Once a UC program is under way, reaping the benefits is ultimately up to the users. An enterprise can make all the right decisions and deliver on a well-thought-out strategy and still not benefit from UC. Employees must be willing to make changes in the way they conduct business and communicate. UC can increase the efficiency of virtual teams, while reducing travel time and expenses, and can also eliminate some communication barriers, reduce cycle times and improve the quality of day-to-day communication. UC can support the re-engineering of business processes and accelerate process improvement, but only if process owners are willing to evolve. If not addressed, user resistance to change can be a deal-breaker for an otherwise well-planned UC program.

Despite the great promise of UC, it remains a challenging prospect. Standards are still emerging and different vendors offer different approaches. Independent advice can help companies select the strategies, architectures and deployment plans that make sense for them.

For more information contact your AT&T Representative or visit us at www.att.com/business.