

## Straight Talking - Unified comms - can it really make you more productive?

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Terms like unified communications (UC) look great on vendors' marketing slides but what do they really mean to prospective customers? Frankly, not a lot.

The soft and intangible vendor promises that accompany UC don't always translate into the real benefits that most customers are actually looking for. After all, in many job roles 'productivity' is down to employee attitude and time management rather than the clever use of the latest communications tools.

Such tools are not always what they seem once the shiny marketing veneer has been rubbed off. While it is true that many communications technologies are converging through the sometimes grudging acceptance of common standards, most vendors are still trying to add that extra bit of differentiation or 'value add' that makes their products unique, or as some might term it, 'proprietary' and in some cases 'incompatible'.

Is this a problem? Well, not for customers who believe a particular vendor's products will fill all their current and near term needs, or that communications technologies will not advance too quickly or get overtaken by other changes to the business.

That may be the case for a select few but it's pretty likely that whatever UC products are implemented will have to fit in with other products, be upgraded or replaced from time to time; to do this there must be a fair amount of flexibility.

### Ask the right questions

So what should potential customers of UC do?

The first question they should ask vendors is: 'what will it look like for us?' This is often a tricky question when tabled directly at a product vendor, as it is often difficult to demonstrate the

fit of its products with others. For example some vendors focus on the desktop, others on IP phones and others on hosted services.

It doesn't matter whether these are all competitive or complementary but a suitably equipped reseller or integration partner ought to be able to showcase multiple vendors' products and offer an integrated UC product.

This is all very well - if all the customer needed to do was look at the technology - but to really understand the impact of UC, they need to feel it and see it applied to the needs of their specific and probably complex environment.

This demands more from the channel partner than the ability to showcase, sell and support various vendors' technology. The partner has to demonstrate the ability to integrate them, not only with a customer's legacy communications tools, but also with that customer's existing processes, people and working practices.

In an ideal world part of the sales process would be to run a pilot where the customer makes a significant commitment with its own systems and people. But this uses up precious resources - and times are hard so more upfront justification is usually necessary.

### Where to get help

Another option is to get help from a systems integrator and managed services company such as Logicalis, which has taken a more direct approach.

Logicalis has built a proof of concept staging environment that brings together technology from the major unified communications vendors and allows them to be connected in a variety of ways. The setup is distributed, making use of several locations. It has the capacity for building a simplified model of a prospective client's current communications system - and then

demonstrating how different technologies could be applied to support UC. Diversity of product and technical knowledge helps but by far the most important success factor will be how well Logicalis understands and models the communications processes of its customers -i.e. its 'value add'.

Positive approaches have been adopted by others. Managed communications company Azzurri has recognised businesses tend to look for PBXs and telephony from established telephony vendors and IT products from traditional IT vendors. Because of this, Azzurri starts by asking, 'what type of users do you have?' - not, 'how many?'

Meanwhile systems integrator 2e2 thinks beyond UC in isolation and looks at how communication enables and optimises business processes - for instance, encouraging businesses to view UC as more than simply a phone system replacement.

Communication ultimately is between people, not devices. Joining up the gaps between media and modes of communication in the way that unified communications proponents promote is therefore only worthwhile if it makes a positive change to employee behaviour, streamlining processes, boosting productivity and reducing costs.

But without a demonstration of specific impact in a particular business, these are vague marketing statements. Any company looking to invest in unified communications should seek out those channel partners (value-added resellers, integrators or service providers) who can help with the details of integration - not just between technologies but between.

## About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

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