

## ComputerWeekly – Integration is the Key to Effective VoIP

By Clive Longbottom, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

We seem to be well along the way to converging our voice and data networks, utilising voice over IP (VoIP). As we bring everything together and allow a single group of techies to look after the voice and data, surely we will achieve efficiency and effectiveness gains?

Today there are plenty of those who would say, "Well provided that we go in with the right thought process, the answer is yes." However, I have seen many organisations just "doing" convergence because it seems the right thing to do - and forgetting the need to sort out the strategy and the policies and procedures behind having a converged communication and collaboration infrastructure.

Just bringing voice on to the existing data network may not be the right thing to do - many small and medium companies have found that whereas VoIP looked good at the demo stage, the quality of voice calls can be pretty ropery in real life with 40 people all trying to make calls down one ADSL line at the same time.

There is a strong need for a fully managed service for VoIP - using quality of service (QoS) and multi-protocol labelling switching (MPLS) techniques to give voice quality guarantees.

Then we have to look at how organisations have rapidly moved to multiple means of communication and collaboration - and work out how we can ensure that required tools are provided and enabled in ways that mean that the organisation can meet compliance needs.

For example, for many years, organisations depended on the telephone, fax and e-mail alongside face to face meetings. Telephone calls were often logged into computer systems, faxes were scanned in and attached to customer records and face to face meetings were entered as records. Overall, things were nominally under control.

Now, we have to look at instant messaging, SMS messages, web conferences - a whole raft of different technologies - many of which have crept into the organisation almost unseen.

When our company asked respondents to a recent survey whether instant messaging was

allowed within their organisation, the vast majority came back with a resounding "no". When we asked whether instant messaging was in use within these organisations, we got a "yes - it is hard to stop it".

Here lies the rub for organisations - the easy availability of consumer-based collaboration tools makes it difficult to proscribe usage. However, there are lots of enterprise-class tools that enable users to have access to such functionality, but in a way that still enables a full audit of what is happening.

Lotus Sametime and Microsoft's Live Communication Server provide fully integrated, traceable systems which are available from any application, and FaceTime provides a tool that audits instant messaging client usage and allows fully granular policies to be applied.

Similarly, organisations need to look at how other communication and collaboration tools can be fully integrated into the infrastructure as services and usage can be tracked and placed within audit trails.

This has to be the case for VoIP as well - just putting voice onto the data network is not enough. To gain the real benefits, VoIP has to be fully integrated - it must be usable from the data side, and it must be able to feed data back into the systems where it matters, such as customer relationship management systems and supplier management systems.

In many cases, recordings of VoIP streams may be required to demonstrate what happened during a conversation, but this has to be with the agreement of the other party on the call, even if this is just implicitly through the obligatory "calls may be recorded for training purposes".

There is also the correct usage of multiple tools: corporate policies must reflect some form of advice to users as to what makes sense. For example, contractual agreements should not be made over instant messaging or the phone, but should be more formal via e-mail attachments or Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) transactions.

Where something needs dealing with immediately, telephone or instant messaging

makes more sense. Fax usage should be minimised, with any need for a physical signature being based on scanned and exchanged images via e-mail or EDI, so maintaining audit trails. Guidance needs to be given to ensure that professionalism is maintained and that the organisation's brand is safeguarded.

Convergence has the potential to have a huge positive impact on the success of a business - if it is done correctly.

However, by merely converging, rather than integrating systems, all we end up with is multiple chaotic systems which cannot be managed at a technical level successfully, nor can they support the business in the correct manner.

Sit back, think it through, look at which tools make sense and how your organisation needs to use them. Write down your policies and procedures, and then make sure that you bring in the right enterprise-class systems that will enable, not disable, your business for the future.

## 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, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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