



Meeting the collaboration challenge

“In isolation, some new technologies simply replace one product with another, without bringing about significant change. Now, the world is waking up to the transformational possibilities offered by unified communications and collaboration, and related areas such as communications-enabled business processes.”

Ian Parnell
UCC Sales Director
BT Global Services

BT leads the way in using UCC to its own advantage

Collaboration is key

Organisations today are increasingly judged on their ability to collaborate, both within themselves and with external partners. As a global solutions provider, BT must be seen to be a leader in such communications-led phenomena: nothing less will do. The company was, for example, one of the forerunners in allowing its people to work flexibly. However, implementing the requisite technologies within existing business frameworks was proving difficult. Looking back a couple of years, time was being wasted struggling to contact and co-operate with people working from home, out on the road, or in other time zones.

Ian Parnell, Sales Director for Unified Communications and Collaboration in BT Global Services, explains: “In isolation, some new technologies simply replace one product with another, without bringing about significant change. Now, the world is waking up to the transformational possibilities offered by unified communications and collaboration, and related areas such as communications-enabled business processes.”

Unified communications and collaboration (UCC) enables people to communicate – and be communicated with – in the way that suits them best at any moment in time. To achieve this, UCC employs two

fundamentally important concepts. It gives a single identity to individuals wherever they are – for example, on the desktop, on the move, or on the web. And it also confers the concept of presence, which enables people to know the mode in which someone else is operating and offers the communications tools that are exactly right for that context.

Implementing UCC

The suite of products and services that BT is leveraging to facilitate its own UCC transformation brings together a number of different technologies. These include Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 (OCS) and BT's own iBridge UCC middleware. Enabling BT to integrate different telephony and messaging applications, iBridge gives the company aspects of UCC functionality without necessarily upgrading every system.

With many overseas offices and acquisitions, there are an equally large number of legacy systems. Steve Masters, Head of Global Convergence Propositions at BT Global Services, says: “We have to be able to work with everything. For example, we have Cisco, Nortel, Microsoft, and IBM domains, and one can't simply waste all that investment. But an absolute prerequisite in allowing these disparate parts to function coherently is an IP-based converged infrastructure.”

Case study

BT Unified Communications and Collaboration

“We can very quickly and easily pull together the right people with the right skills to deliver what we need to our customers and to the business. Equally importantly, that means that the speed and aptness of our response outstrips our competitors.”

Steve Masters
Head of Global Convergence Propositions
BT Global Services

Integrating disparate technology islands to create an end-to-end unified solution is one side of the equation, but it is too easy to think of UCC as a solely screen-based facility set. In fact, voice communication is a critical component. Ian Parnell points to where the BT advantage lies: “We know the voice component inside out. In isolation, things like OCS are very smart applications, but we can really light them up and make them sing when we integrate voice into them.”

The BT UCC platform is dimensioned to handle 50,000 users, but is being deployed in phases. Mark Summerson, General Manager, UCC at BT Global Services, advises: “This is not a one-stop destination – there’s a long route to navigate in becoming a fully UCC-enabled business; and it’s absolutely critical that you benchmark where you are when you first start.” So, following a comprehensive self-audit, BT set up a trial platform for 1,000 users. “The key thing as we roll out OCS across BT,” Mark continues, “is an understanding of our own use and costs so that we can actually measure the impact it’s having.”

Offices worldwide

The services described in this publication are subject to availability and may be modified from time to time. Services and equipment are provided subject to British Telecommunications plc’s respective standard conditions of contract. Nothing in this publication forms any part of any contract.

© British Telecommunications plc 2008.
Registered office: 81 Newgate Street, London EC1A 7AJ
Registered in England No: 1800000

Initially, the 1,000 trial users will have access to all UCC facilities including presence; voicemail, email, and calendar management; instant messaging (IM); voice over internet protocol (VoIP); audioconferencing and video conferencing; and document and application sharing. Other users will have access to IM and presence.

Realising the value

The most immediate UCC benefit comes from reduced travel, as audioconferencing and videoconferencing replace face-to-face meetings and flexible working becomes more efficient. In fact, BT saved approximately £229.3 million in one year, largely through the increase in teleconferencing. The reduction in office space created by around 64,000 flexible workers and more than 13,000 staff working from home saves BT around another £60 million a year. Ian Parnell observes: “You can’t really bring about a truly flexible working culture without having rolled out UCC technologies. The two are intrinsically linked.”

Interoperability between voice and data domains is one of the keys to BT’s UCC success, enabling services to be integrated to offer new business functionality. For example, BT people in the UCC pilot can access their email inbox by telephone; receive voicemail as emails, allowing them to annotate and file messages; and manage their calendars by phone. And they can access all of these services worldwide.

“If I can save myself 45 minutes a day does that mean that BT can hire less people? Well, no, actually. But it does mean that I can get more into my day, or I can get things done on time, or I can go home earlier. Those twin benefits of better customer service and an improved work life balance make the company immeasurably better.”

Mark Summerson
General Manager, UCC
BT Global Services

A reduction in call costs has been seen through the combination of IM and presence. Mark Summerson says: “If I need to find something out, I’d much rather use IM. However, if I do have to phone someone, presence information allows me to see which of the team’s available before I make the call, to get the right person first time.” He instances other savings: “From a hotel abroad, what I don’t do now is use my mobile; I’ll take advantage of the hotel Wi-Fi and use a soft phone to make a call.”

However, reduced expenditure is not the true value of UCC. Mark Summerson explains: “If I can save myself 45 minutes a day does that mean that BT can hire less people? Well, no, actually. But it does mean that I can get more into my day, or I can get things done on time, or I can go home half-an-hour earlier. Those twin benefits of better customer service and an improved work life balance make the company immeasurably better.”

Furthermore, UCC makes collaboration more efficient. Document and application sharing mean a group of people can work on a project without emailing multiple versions back and forth. Ian Parnell notes: “You can see who has contributed to a document and check their presence. So, if you’ve got a question you can just instant message them.”

Such UCC services can be expanded to cover external relationships with clients, suppliers, and partners. Mark Summerson elaborates: “I spend the vast majority of my day working with partners, so we’ve federated our platform with Microsoft and others. That means that I can extend contactability into a broader ecosystem, rather than just internally.”

Returning to the opening theme, BT is thus demonstrably better able to collaborate through its use of UCC, and that improves sales. As Steve Masters concludes: “We can very quickly and easily pull together the right people with the right skills to deliver what we need to our customers and to the business. Equally importantly, that means that the speed and aptness of our response outstrips our competitors.”

