

Unified Communications Can Change Your Outlook — Making Your Business Better



A Frost & Sullivan White Paper

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of unified communications is simple: to make it easy and cost effective for employees to reach one another—as well as business partners and customers—as soon as they need to, wherever they are. The idea is to merge two or more communications into one user interface, allowing users to see whether someone is available for a phone call, conference or IM chat, and then to contact them in the most appropriate way. So the next time a customer calls your business with a question about your services, instead of playing phone tag trying to find the person who knows the answer, he can be routed to the right employee immediately, based on his or her availability and knowledge.

This paper highlights the key drivers and pain points for small and mid-size businesses, and identifies how improving communications can have a significant impact on the bottom line. It discusses the business benefits that are enabled by UC technology, and how to get them in a simple, cost-effective way. And it identifies several practical examples, to help you decide whether UC is right for your organization.

SMALL AND MID-SIZE BUSINESS OWNERS' TOP CHALLENGES

If you own a small or mid-sized business, you know that although you may often find yourself in direct competition with large enterprises, you face different business challenges—and you need the right tools to manage them in the most effective way. According to Frost & Sullivan research, as many as 50 percent of SMBs already use electronic means to communicate with clients.

- **Constant Pressure on Key Employees** Small and mid-size organizations often find themselves with a few “go-to” employees: everyone else in the organization relies on them for help and information. Because they are so important to the health of the organization, their time is at a premium. What they need more than anything else is a tool that can help them prioritize their communications.
- **An Owner Who Needs to Be Everywhere** If you own a business, you know that it demands constant care. You need technology that allows you to take important calls from anywhere, and ignore the interruptions that can wait for another day. Doing that requires tools that can identify important callers, properly route critical communications, and enable collaboration from anywhere.
- **Multi-Functional Job Roles** According to Frost & Sullivan research, two-thirds to three-quarters of employees at small and mid-size companies say they lead busy professional lives. They are juggling a wide variety of tasks and interface with a number of colleagues, partners, and customers. They need tools that will quickly help them find the right expertise and decision makers as they go.
- **Intense Competition for Customers** For your small or mid-size business, customer service is priority number one. Frost & Sullivan research shows that more than 50 percent of SMBs report that any product offered by one competitor is easily matched by another, so what matters most is their service. Success requires skills-based routing,

live-call recording, and other features that guarantee customers get the answers they need, the minute they need them.

- **Limited IT and Telecom Expertise** Small and mid-size organizations need advanced communications technology to meet their business goals, but they typically don't have the same resources and staff devoted to information technology (IT) and telecommunications as their larger competitors do. As a result, they need technology that is easy to understand and justify, and simple to deploy, manage and use.

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS: MAKING YOUR BUSINESS BETTER

By integrating voice and online communications, UC technologies make it easy for your employees to identify and locate the right person at the right time, get critical information, make faster and better decisions, and deliver exceptional customer service. UC can also cut the costs of communications, including voice, instant messaging (IM) and conferencing.

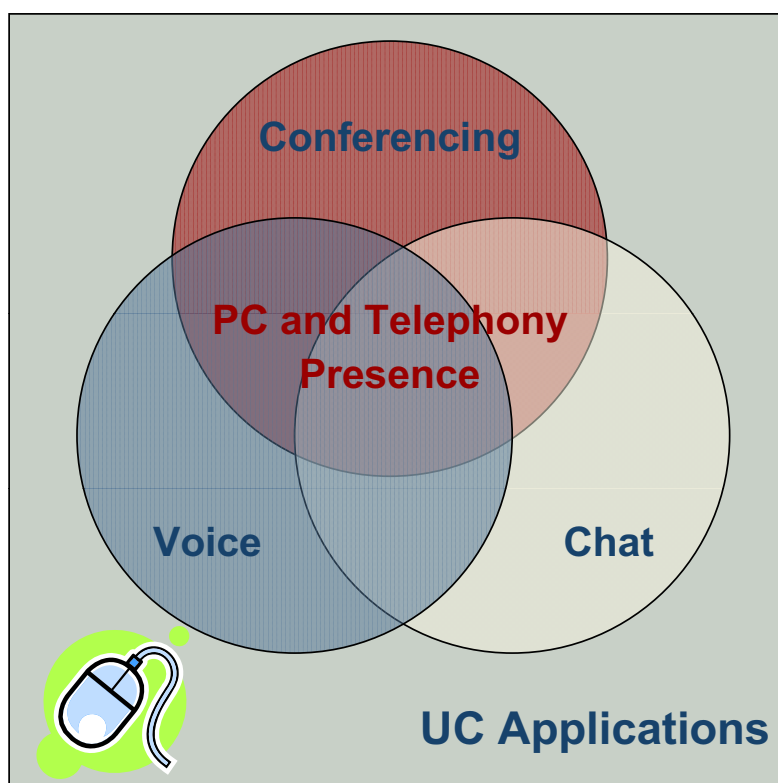


Figure 1: Defining Unified Communications

Communications Technology Made Easy

Frost & Sullivan research shows that there are certain key elements of UC that are most important to small and mid-size businesses:

- **Presence** – By seeing whether someone is around and open to a particular kind of communication, users can decide which tool to use at a given time.
- **Voice** – Frost & Sullivan estimates that about 30 percent of business telephony users are on IP endpoints; the vast majority of new telephony shipments are IP or converged systems.
- **Unified Messaging** – This technology lets users access all their messages—email, voicemail, IM, etc.—in one place, making it easier to see, sort and reply to them.
- **Conferencing** – Integrated audio, video and web conferencing lets employees collaborate from anywhere, without the costs and hassles of business travel.
- **Chat** – Used internally, chat allows employees to get the information they need exactly when they need it, speeding decision making and production cycles. Used with customers, it helps resolve issues faster, and more cost effectively.
- **Auto Attendant** – Allows for call screening, as well as other “administrative” capabilities.
- **Mobility** – Frost & Sullivan research shows that early UC adopters say mobility was one of the key factors in their decision, and they have realized significant cost savings, productivity gains, and improvements in customer service.

Focus on the Three Core Business Benefits of Unified Communications

Unified communications can deliver a variety of benefits, but Frost & Sullivan has found that SMB owners should pay attention to these three critical advantages:

- **Customer Care** – With skills-based routing, presence information and conferencing, unified communications makes it easier to stay in touch with your customers, and ensure they get the answers and support they need. Frost & Sullivan research shows that anywhere from 20 percent to 30 percent of SMBs are currently using a variety of UC tools for customer-related projects; those that do report a significant competitive advantage.
- **Better Productivity** – UC leverages presence information and click-to-communicate capabilities to get the right information to the right people as soon as they need it. Frost & Sullivan research shows that as much as 75 percent of small and mid-size organizations say collaboration is critical to their business, and UC can help make that collaboration faster and easier. That helps them make better decisions more quickly, speed development and production times, and fill orders faster.

- **Lowering the Cost of Communications** – Unified communications may sound expensive, but UC can actually help reduce your communications costs. IP telephony has been shown to save small and mid-size companies thousands of dollars on voice calls alone. Throw in decreased call volumes (thanks to IM chats) and reduced travel (thanks for audio, video and web conferencing), as well as lower costs for conferencing delivered on site rather than via a hosted service, and you have a technology that can quickly pay for itself. Frost & Sullivan research shows that anywhere from one quarter to one third of SMBs expect to invest more in unified communications technologies over the next 12 months.

Questions to Ask Your UC Vendor:

- Are all the applications I need included?
- Do you integrate easily with Microsoft Outlook?
- What, exactly, is required for deployment? How long will it take, and how much expertise do I need (or need to find)?
- How will I manage the technology once it's installed?
- Are you looking at incorporating next-generation communications, such as social media, wikis and blogs?

HOW UC CAN BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS

There are a number of ways in which unified communications can advantage your small or mid-size organization. Here, we identify a few, according to job role and industry.

Job Role Benefits

- **Business Owner** – As the organizational leader, spinning many plates at once, you need instant access to your key employees, wherever they are. But you also need to be able to hide from or postpone unwanted communications, so that you can focus on what really matters. And, of course, you need to know your customers are being served quickly and professionally, and that your staff is as efficient as possible. With integrated presence, IM, unified messaging, and conferencing, UC allows you to do all that, and more.
- **Customer Care** – No SMB can afford to lose a customer because it can't immediately address his needs. What if you and your staff could instantly identify a caller, locate the relevant information, route the call to the most appropriate employee, and satisfy every customer, every time? With presence information, chat capabilities, auto attendant and built-in conferencing, unified communications makes it possible to do just that.
- **Sales** – Sales people are focused on one thing: closing the deal. Being able to prioritize calls according to value lets sales people identify and pursue the most important

opportunities first. Being able to quickly locate information—especially when it resides in another person’s head—can mean the difference between a signed contract and a lost opportunity. And having mobile access to advanced communications and information means sales people can always be closing.

- **Knowledge Workers** – More than anyone else in the organization, knowledge workers rely on collaboration to get their jobs done. Those who can see whether a colleague is available, send a chat or place a call to get information, launch a conference to collaborate on key projects, and access messages from anywhere can shrink process times, speed decision making and boost the bottom line.

Industry Use Cases

- **Real Estate** – With UC, an office administrator can answer all incoming calls, then direct them to the most appropriate agent—whether that agent is in the office or on the road. If the agent is with a client, the admin can route the call to an assistant or another agent to answer any immediate questions; or to a mortgage broker or other business partner as needed.
- **Law Firms** – The lead attorney on any given case is tasked with juggling a host of other actors, including paralegals, researchers, witnesses, clerks, clients, and other attorneys—often from outside the office. The ability to screen calls and communicate with others based on their availability and chosen mode of communications is critical.
- **Retail** – How often has a customer walked into or called your store with a question about a particular item? How often have you had to ask the customer to call back or

When to Consider Unified Communications

If you’re moving to a new location.

If your old phone system will no longer be supported by the vendor.

If your business is growing and you want to “reach next level.”

If you’ve lost too many sales because opportunities are not getting to the right people quickly enough.

If you hear too many (or any) negative customer service stories.

If your employees work from the road or out of the office—and you can’t reach them when you need them.

wait as you check inventory or with your suppliers? With UC, you can turn inquiries into sales.

WHAT SMBs SHOULD LOOK FOR IN A UC SOLUTION

Small and mid-size organizations don’t have the time or money to spend on complex, costly technology implementations. They need tools that are easy to use and deploy, cost effective, and complete. An all-in-one appliance can deliver all those benefits and more. The right one will be easy to install, maintain and service, and it will be simple to use. It will contain a host of communications applications, all accessible through a single client. And it will be extremely cost effective.

Key elements to look for in an all-in-one UC solution:

- Support for up to 150 users
- Voice, fax, voicemail
- Audio, video and web conferencing
- Mobility (WLAN and cellular)
- Security (VPN and firewall)
- Customer care features, including presence, skill-based routing, screen pops, live-call recording, and easy licensing plans
- Carrier connectivity via broadband, digital, and analog lines
- A choice of client access points (Outlook, portal, auto attendant, etc.)
- Reliability from a vendor with experience in the communications market

Since the majority of knowledge-based employees spend most of their time within Outlook—composing and answering emails, scheduling appointments, and managing their contacts—integrating other forms of communication into that application makes enormous sense.

Finally, look for a solution that was built specifically for the SMB market, rather than a scaled-down version of a product originally designed for large enterprises. This will ensure that the technology is simple to deploy, manage and use—without the need for a fully staffed IT department, and without the costs and complexity usually associated with technology aimed at organizations with hundreds or thousands of employees.

CONCLUSION

Unified communications is a popular buzzword in business today, and small and mid-size organizations shouldn't assume it is meant only for large enterprises. With the right technology, SMBs can leverage UC to boost productivity, increase customer care and cut their communications costs. Look for a simple solution that delivers everything right out of the box. With the right tool from the right vendor, any company, regardless of size or revenue stream, can leverage the power of unified communications.

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