How to...

Unify your communications

Are you puzzled about Unified Communications?

UC may seem like just another case of technology jargon, but it's far more than the latest IT buzzword.

UC can make a real difference to your small or medium sized business operations. It can cut costs, improve efficiency and productivity and enable more flexible working arrangements.

Simply put, UC consolidates all of your different types of communication devices – desk phones, PCs, smartphones and tablets – into one integrated data and voice network so they can talk to each other digitally. With UC, you can experience calls along other collaboration tools such as e-mail, instant messaging (IM), web and video conferencing and fax through the convenience of one interface.

UC in action

Let's say you are in the midst of finalizing a sales contract for your business, but you are out of town. While you are on a commuter train from the airport to your hotel, a call comes into your office desk phone from your customer letting you know the contract is ready for your signature.

Thanks to UC, the message is routed to your smartphone through your email.

You listen to the message and send a reply text to your customer asking them to send you an e-fax of the contract. You receive the e-fax on your smartphone within minutes. You read it but wait until you arrive at your hotel to digitally sign the document from your PC and send back to your customer. That saved you enough time to make a quick Skype call to your family before calling it a night.

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3 big benefits of UC

Cost Savings

UC results in significant cost savings in infrastructure and network management costs. Also, calls made over the company network to employees wherever they are or across the internet are free. Today's communications systems also offer such capabilities as fax, voicemail, automated voice messages and conference calling so there's no need to subscribe to additional services or buy standalone equipment.

Increased Flexibility

A UC solution enhances flexibility so you can work wherever you are. Depending on your location and need, you may want to use your mobile phone, home phone, PC, desk phone or tablet. With the range of devices, you can choose to send a text, email or fax or place a call.

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Heightened Efficiency

UC also makes it easy to shift from one mode of communication to another. If you're on a phone call and want to share a presentation, you easily can launch a web conference. Or you can get an email and listen to the message — converted to speech — on your phone. The good news is that even with all these options, you won't have to remember different phone numbers or check messages across a range of devices. All your communication tools are available in one place to simplify communications.
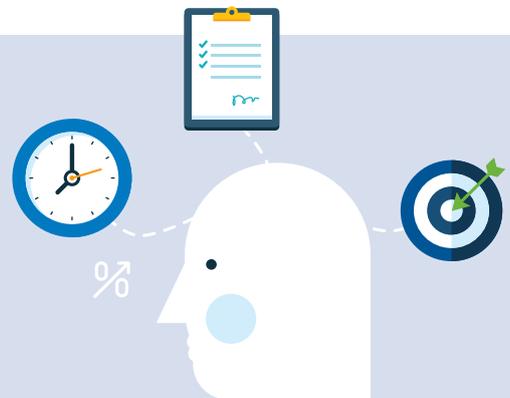
> " Spending by small and medium sized businesses is helping to fuel the market for unified communications (UC) applications and will continue to climb over the next five years.[1] "

5 must-have UC features...

Unified messaging:

With one inbox, you can check messages from all your various communication devices - email, voicemail, video messages, SMS, and more. For example, you receive an email notification in your universal inbox that you have a voice message on your desk phone. You can use your headset to play an audio file of the message attached to the email or read a transcribed text of the message sent in the body of the email. If you want to share the message with someone, you can easily forward it on.
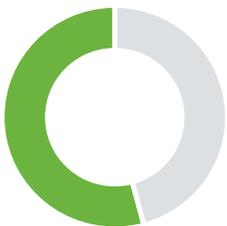
Presence:

You can email someone in your company who works remotely or even in another part of the building, but you have no way of knowing if they are on or offline to get your message. Presence changes that. It lets you know the status and availability of the person you are trying to reach – and vice versa.

Integrated conferencing:

Web conferencing enables you to share a presentation between meeting participants, conduct training, give a lecture or host a virtual event. By integrating audio conference capabilities with web conferencing – and increasingly with video conferencing – you make it easier for everyone involved to participate.

Instant messaging/chat:

Sometimes the terms IM and chat are used interchangeably. Chat often occurs in a virtual room where participants focus on a topic and text comments to the group. Use chat to bring your team members together, wherever they are, to discuss a new product or service or marketing campaign, for example. You even can add video or share a desktop during your chat session.

One number reach:

Often called Find Me/Follow Me, this UC capability lets you choose one number to give out – it can even be a virtual number. When someone dials that number, the IP telephony system routes the calls to numbers you have selected – office phone, mobile number, home phone or other – at the same time or sequentially. If, after routing the call to all the numbers, you still don't answer; the system will leave the call in your voicemail.

54%[2]

of businesses currently use UC or plan to implement it by the end of 2014.

4 steps to getting started

1. Trial offers:

Many companies, such as Avaya, Cisco, Microsoft and ShoreTel, have UC solutions for small and medium sized businesses. Take advantage of free trial offers from these companies and others before making a purchase. You also can experience the capabilities of UC by subscribing to a free/nominal charge solution, such as Skype or Google Voice. They provide voice, videoconferencing, screen sharing, instant messaging, status indication and more.

FREE
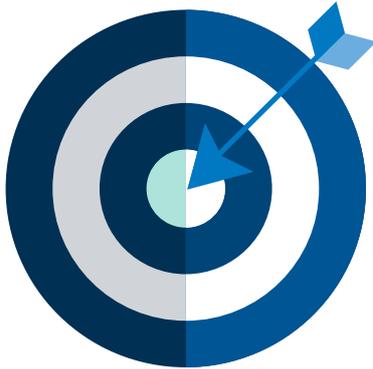
2. Find the right partner:

A technology reseller or consultant who specializes in UC can assess your needs and get you the right solution for your business. If you don't already have a trusted reseller, ask around, read reviews, and interview potential resellers to find out what services they offer.

3. Technology-enable your business:

Don't expect UC to work on its own. Enable it with ever-popular devices like smartphones, PCs, and tablets which make your employees more efficient no matter where they are. And when it comes to audio communications, don't get lost in translation, invest in quality audio devices like headsets and speakerphones.

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4. Implement security:

Take steps to secure your Unified Communications. Have a properly configured firewall in place, ensure employees use strong (not easy to access) password on all their devices, and update security software regularly. Also passwords for remote workers who use the public internet, use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to secure their connection to your corporate data.

[1] Source: **InfoTrack five-year forecast** on IP Telephony and Unified Communications 2012.   [2] Source: **3rd Annual Spiceworks survey** commissioned by Plantronics. November 2013.

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Stay up to date with the latest communication technology to help your business run smoothly and keep your employees happy. Learn more about how to provide the right workplace tools at **plantronics.com/smb**

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