Unified Communications:
Making Video a Part of the UC Equation

A New Era Technology White Paper

Executive Summary

2014 has been an exciting year for the Unified Communications (UC) industry, which after remaining relatively dormant from 2011 to 2013, has sprung back to life. Enterprise adoption of UC has been growing in leaps and bounds, as more and more companies are beginning to see the importance of collaboration in today's increasingly global marketplace. They are realizing the need to support a virtual workplace where globally dispersed employees can collaborate quickly and easily irrespective of where they are located.

While UC isn't a new technology, its recent resurgence can be attributed to the changing enterprise landscape, where connectedness is the top priority. Businesses going virtual are at risk however of losing a critical component of successful business communications – the human element. Video conferencing can fill the gap, allowing users to see each other, make eye contact, and get the real feel of face-to-face interactions virtually. Enterprise video adoption hasn't been nearly as prolific over recent years as it should have been due to several issues, including interoperability, complexity in terms of use, and management. UC integrated with video conferencing capabilities can help enterprise get past these issues. When video is tightly integrated in the unified communications environment, companies using it can maximize the key benefits of reduced management overhead, consistent user experiences across devices, higher quality of service, and easier integration into business applications.

Let us explore the value of UC and video as an integrated service in the context of the current state of business, highlighting the key barriers to video adoption, and underscoring the importance of making video a part of the UC equation. We will end with a discussion about how organizations can, and should, optimize their UC-video integration.

The Past, Present and Future of the UC Market: An Overview

Over the past decade, there has been a huge shift regarding enterprise collaboration. Ending the era of old communication models such as the one-size-fits-all PBX telephony systems, the new paradigm is to match communications technology with the specific needs of modern workplaces. Unified Communications, or UC, steps onto the scene as a viable option for today's businesses. By providing a single infrastructure that can effectively manage multichannel communications across a given enterprise, UC is fast becoming a standard communication model, as well as an important investment for businesses.

While the concept of unified communications first showed up in the mid-90s when messaging and real-time communication started converging, the evolution of UC as a technology hasn't been rock steady. In recent times, its adoption has also been inconstant. If we look at the trend, we see that the UC market took a dive with the economic downturn during 2008/2009, hit the bottom in 2010, and bounced back to life in 2011. According to the study, *Unified Communications & Collaboration Market* 2011-2016, the global premise-based UC market in 2011 was $12.2 billion, up 8% from 2010, while it was estimated to grow to $20.8 billion by 2016. Another study by a leading tech research group, Radicati, predicted UC adoption to rise to $7.7 billion by 2015.

The good news is: enterprise tech adoption is living up to its expectations and the UC market is flourishing beyond the initially predicted numbers. Information Week's annual study, *2014 State of Unified Communications Report* shows the upward trending of the global UC market – UC deployments rising from 38% in 2013 to 44% in 2014. The recent *Global (UC) Unified Communication Market 2015-2019* report has predicted the global UC market to grow at a CAGR of 14% over the span of 2014-2019. In addition, there are quite a few other studies and reports that are pointing towards a significant growth in UC uptake; it would be redundant to call attention to each. Evidently, the UC industry is headed for a bright future.

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Video – Driving UC Adoption as the New Face of Communication

Why is UC Poised for Such Explosive Growth?

The most obvious reason companies should adopt UC is that it combines communication services such as video conferencing, data sharing, and electronic messaging into one platform, enabling users to manage their digital communications through a single infrastructure.
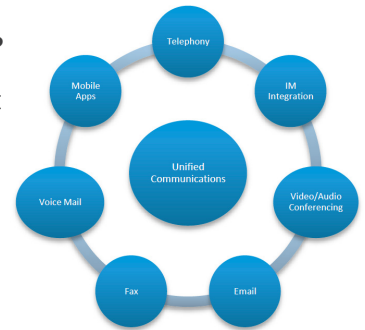
Factors such as BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) policies, enterprise mobility, and proliferation of mobile technology mean that staying connected is no longer just an option – it is one of the primary functions of enterprise. The secret of today's burgeoning UC adoption lies in the fact that UC helps meet enterprise collaboration needs by offering businesses exceptional collaboration solutions without blowing their budget limits.

One of the most essential features in the UC repertoire, cost-effective video conferencing, is contributing to enterprise UC deployments. According to the *UC Cloud and On-Premises Strategies and Vendor Leadership: North American Enterprise Survey* (2014) by Infonetics Research, 88% of businesses intend to deploy video as part of their unified communications solution within the next 12 months.

How is Video Leveraging UC Adoption?

Organizations have long been wrestling with the high investments involved in traditional video conferencing systems. But the investment concern becomes less of an issue since the advent of consumer-grade free video services like Skype, which has paved the way for similar solutions to arrive in the enterprise market. Today room-based video conferencing has a more cost-effective substitute in video solutions embedded within the UC framework.

The fluxing business environment that is beginning to promote the BYOD culture, remote workforce, flexible working, open office environment etc. is molding collaboration needs, which require the ability to collaborate pervasively – from anywhere, at any time, on any device, and over almost any network. Source: Frost & Sullivan

Moreover, as business units are becoming increasingly dispersed, there is a wide-spread need for an alternative to in-person meetings. With the UC market bringing video conferencing under its umbrella, more firms are embracing UC as an all-in-one solution for improving collaboration within their organization as well as outside of it.

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Video Conferencing – Roadblocks to Deployment

In a consumer driven economy where video has become pervasive among consumers, the enterprise has been slower to adopt it. Though studies predict a growth in adoption of enterprise video conferencing *(see figure below)*, successful implementation is fraught with many challenges.

Conferencing, collaboration & social networking show strongest growth among unified communications apps
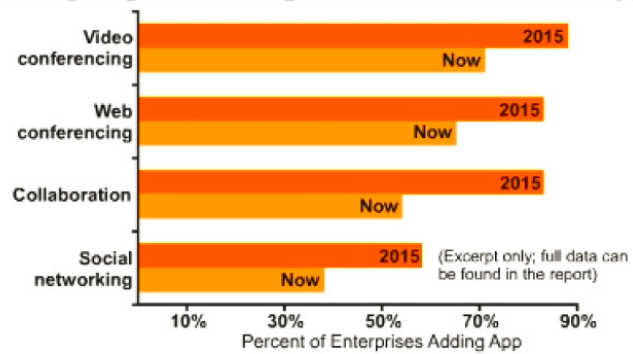
© Infonetics Research, *UC Cloud and On-Premises Strategies and Vendor Leadership: North American Enterprise Survey,* March 2014

In the case of video deployment, the three biggest barriers to entry have been identified as:

- Interoperability
- Lack of integration
- Complexity in use

These bottlenecks in terms of use and management are preventing enterprises from exploring the benefits of video conferencing as extensively as they should.

Interoperability

Problems with interoperability undermine the value of video conferencing to a great extent. Interoperability issues might not only thwart a single organization's video deployment plans, but in a chain reaction, they might also negatively impact the video conferencing habits of those organizations associated with it. For instance, when an organization drops their use of video conferencing due to interoperability issues, their business partners, suppliers and customers naturally seek other channels besides video to communicate with them.

Lack of Integration

The days of standalone video conferencing systems have come and gone. In current circumstances, standalone video conferencing can no longer match the levels of seamless collaboration required to connect globally dispersed teams, partners, and customers. Therefore, it is increasingly important to tie video in with the overall collaboration strategy.

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Complexity

It is a huge setback for enterprise video users to have trouble launching calls and connecting to meetings. When today's collaboration needs are gravitating more towards prompt and easy services, clunky and complex devices are pushing users towards consumer-grade video products like Skype or Hangouts. Moreover, many times video conferencing deployments require more time and inconvenience than ease of use.

UC-Enabled Video: Better Opportunity with Voice & Visual

Integrating video with Unified Communications is a natural progression for any organization that is looking to extend the reach of video to key business operations. According to *Nemertes 2014-15 Enterprise Technology Benchmark*, 54% of companies already have an enterprise platform for video capture and streaming, but nearly 67% are using it primarily for distance learning by making their library of video-ondemand content accessible to their employees regardless of location. There are so many other avenues waiting to be explored: creating and sharing videos for marketing use, video-based customer support, video for recruiting and hiring. The possibilities with video are immense, and the potential has been left untapped by many organizations.

When it comes to comparing dedicated video conferencing solutions with UC-enabled ones, the latter certainly comes out as the winner in terms of interoperability, manageability, and scalability. The table below shows the key differences between the two.

Source: Frost & Sullivan

Dedicated Video Conferencing	Video-Enabled Unified Communications
"Technology Island"	Video tightly coupled with key communication apps; Enterprise-wide Unified Communications architecture
Varied standards (H.323 vs. SIP)	Common standards (with interoperability)
Separate administration	Common administration
Limited user access; Not scalable	Ubiquitous access; Scalable to thousands of users
Limited interoperability	Fully integrated into Unified Communications media, presence, applications
Disparate user experience	Consistent user experience across multiple modalities and devices

Video will remain critical to enterprise communication, allowing businesses to do more with it for less. The marriage between video and UC will become imperative and almost inevitable. As the need for visual collaboration grows, UC technology will empower video with better and more enhanced capabilities.

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Making UC-enabled Video Work: It's All About Making the Right Choice

Before going down the road to UC-video integration, it is important for organizations to identify the features, applications, and tools that best fit their requirements. An equally important consideration is turning to the right service provider for those specific features, applications, and tools.

However, for most IT architects, finding the right vendor is still a struggle. When it comes to the choices available, they have the option to utilize the native capabilities in Microsoft or IBM Lotus desktop clients, deploy standalone desktop video capability, or use the capabilities of desktop clients such as Polycom or Vidyo with desktop UC applications.

Several key concerns lie at the heart of a successfully integrated video and Unified Communications system, and they include:

- network management and performance
- end-user applications
- growing demand for user-generated video
- need for adequate bandwidth
- interoperability with existing systems

Organizations should carefully assess these factors while planning UC integrated video deployments.

Conclusion

As companies veer towards an increasingly virtual workplace, they will look for technology that will support the transition. Unified Communication – with its all-inclusive nature – is poised to give businesses what they want: a collaboration solution that is cost-effective, easy to use, and delivers all the benefits of visual communications in a virtual space. By extending the use of UC across all business levels, organizations can ensure their global workforce collaborates from anywhere, and at any time. Once this is accomplished, organizations can meet the demands of the virtual workplace, stay competent and knock down the barriers to seamless communication along the way.

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Learn More

To find out how your business can optimize its gains from UC-enabled video conferencing, contact New Era Tech at our toll-free number, 877-696-7720 or visit www.neweratech.com for a detailed analysis.

About New Era

New Era Technology helps customers work faster, smarter, and more securely in a rapidly changing digital world. More than 4,500 customers worldwide rely on collaboration, cloud, data networking, security, and managed service solutions from New Era to accelerate time to market, speed innovation, increase productivity, and create better learning experiences.

Headquartered in New York City, New Era has offices around the globe, including in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

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Polycom helps organizations unleash the power of human collaboration. More than 400,000 companies and institutions worldwide defy distance with video, voice and content solutions from Polycom. Polycom and its global partner ecosystem provide flexible collaboration solutions for any environment that deliver the best user experience and unmatched investment protection. 1-800-POLYCOM | www.polycom.com

Resources

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