

The Cost of NOT Implementing Cloud-based Unified Communications

Executive Summary

In today's world of fiercely competitive business practices, CEOs, CFOs and boards of directors must continuously fine-tune their enterprise's practices in order to optimize the all-important bottom line. As the world flattens, the true importance of open and easy communication -- not just between the enterprise and its clients, but also vendors, competitors, and even in between departments -- becomes blatantly apparent.

Moreover, as communications take a wider and wider variety of forms -- what used to be limited to phone calls, letters, and personal visits in the last decade has blossomed into a myriad of media including (but not limited to) text messages, instant messages, faxes, emails, and tweets -- the cost for a corporation to support communications across those media has expanded as well. Traditionally each form of media that you wish to be able to accept messages in has had its own unique protocol (if not a unique interface) to handle that reception, with the net result being that each additional media added more complexity, expense, hassle, and time sunk into its use.

At the same time, executives have had to balance those costs against the benefits of being able to reach customers on the level that they are accustomed to communicating at. A business that took IMs was much more likely to get a real-time cross-section of consumer opinion than one that could only be reached by phone. Every method of communication has its own benefits, and but for those nagging costs, every corporation would strive to be able to transmit and receive in all of them.

Enter the telecommunications concept known as Unified Communications -- the notion of a single hardware/software platform capable of getting messages out to your workers no matter what the source, no matter where they happened to be. Unified Communications revolutionized the telecom industry, and it left the business elite asking not "do we switch to Unified Communications," but "WHEN do we switch to Unified Communications -- and how?"

Those last two words are the critical question addressed herein. There are a few competing media by which UC platforms are being offered today; each has its own benefits and disadvantages. Below, the proof is given that a cloud-based UC platform offers greater benefits, fewer disadvantages, and does so at a measurably lesser cost than other competing methods.

In short, getting your Unified Communications infrastructure through the cloud -- where a dedicated company hosts the communications service off-site and your workers access it through a secure Internet connection -- keeps money, effort, and time costs to a minimum without sacrificing any meaningful amount of benefits. In conclusion, an introduction to PanTerra Networks, the industry leader in cloud-based Unified Communications -- and its unique futureproof cloud-UC concept -- will show you an easy and powerful path to integrating Unified Communications into your business practices.

Unified Communications Overview

One of the greatest challenges that modern businesses face is the continuous desire of clients, vendors, and co-workers to communicate in different ways -- with messages coming in by phone, fax, email, voicemail, instant message, text message, video-conference, letters, and smoke signals, getting everything sorted out and in the right inbox (and the right format!) at the right time can be a complex and nigh unto impossible to process. Moreover, sometimes the right format for the sender, who might be sending a text message from the middle of a crowded movie theater, isn't the right format for the recipient, who might be driving and unable to read that message at the moment.

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Unified Communications is the art of addressing those problems -- though, in doing so, it must also address a host of other issues ranging from call-center services to data storage. It turns out that the process of moving ideas around between groups of people is a fantastically complex and far-reaching one, with filaments that reach into almost every business endeavor in which we participate.

To that end, a Unified Communications platform requires hardware and software elements, and the most basic of them have a host of basic features:

Incoming Message Management

When messages arrive, they do so from a huge variety of media. That means that a truly Unified Communications infrastructure must have a number of "funnels" that guide messages into the system. Most offer robust phone support to rival a Private Branch Exchange in features, and then back that up with a unified inbox for email, text messages, instant messages, faxes, and more.

Translating Formats

Unified Communications platforms universally provide a set of conversion services -- a voice-recognition program that can turn a voicemail into a text message or email along with OCR-to-voice software that can do exactly the opposite. This allows messages to be given in the format best for the platform, and then delivered in the format best for the receiver, instead of a single inbox, which may not be the best format.

Follow And Find

Of course, having the message in the right format is only the beginning -- it has to actually reach the recipient. Sometimes, an inbox just isn't enough. With Find and Follow technology, your typical Unified Communications platform can follow a variety of rules that will reach out to a recipient's computer, work phone, cell phone (text or voice), home phone, and even more exotic devices like their iPad or TweetPeek.

The most amazing part is that all of this is really just barely scratching the surface of what it means to have a Unified Communications system installed at your workplace. More advanced features abound, from powerful conferencing software to integration with the most popular existing communications software, and more are being developed every day.

Cloud-Based UC Overview

Cloud computing, in short, is a computing strategy that moves the servers, software, stress and expense out of your facility and into a dedicated vendor's domain. With cloud computing, rather than you and every other Pan business in town installing your own hardware and software in order to provide a service, one company (the vendor) installs it, and gives access to it over the Internet in a business model called SaaS -- Software as a Service.

This has some very powerful advantages, as you might imagine. Because the vendor only maintains one system, but offers the service to multiple clients from that one system, the vendor is able to be more efficient from that one installation than the client would from having the same installation in their office. This, in turn, allows the vendor to charge less over time than the client would have to pay in order to keep their system functioning and up-to-date. The ability of the cloud vendor to transparently provide continuously up-to-date software is often overlooked by companies examining the ongoing costs of their communications infrastructure. With cloud-UC, the very term "obsolescence" becomes obsolete. As technologies and new innovations become available, cloud- UC vendors can instantly deploy them to their customers. No fuss, no muss, and most importantly, no

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cost!

Cloud-based computing is also receiving a lot of good press as a green business practice. By utilizing the cloud, as mentioned, you avoid duplication of electricity-consuming machines across multiple businesses (or multiple sites within the same business).

When it comes to Unified Communications, delivering it from the cloud is as natural as putting milk on cereal. Every significant part of the UC platform works flawlessly as a SaaS; from the call center tech to the real-time presence tracking, everything can be accessed from a single online point-of-entry that is reachable from any Internet connection anywhere in the world. Administration can be performed over the same portal, though obviously with a higher degree of security.

The advantages of being able to access all of your communications systems from any Internet-enabled computer seem intuitively obvious -- after all, we take for granted that our email inboxes will be waiting for us when we get home just as they are at work. But there is a startling difference between having access to your email, and having access to every piece of communication delivered to you.

Because cloud-based UC platforms convert even voice and fax communications into digital format and store them in your personal part of the cloud, you can go through and review every memo, every client voicemail, even (if you're conscientious about saving them) all of your outgoing files and paperwork from anywhere in the world. This means that no matter where you are, not only will a cloud-based UC platform find the right way to get messages to you (see Find and Follow and Translating Formats, above), but it will also give you the power to do whatever research you need to do into your past communications in order to solve any problems that crop up without needing anything except your smartphone to do it.

Cloud-based UC is particularly advantageous for multi-site organizations, since a single pay-as-you-go cost provides access to the services from any number of sources.

Communications Infrastructures In Today's Businesses

Within the category of telecommunications, there are a few different ways of executing the system that supports your company's needs.

On-Premise Solutions

Many traditional companies will enter your place of business, install a complex mess of hardware and software, and then hand you the instruction manual and vanish, leaving you to make it all work the way you want it to. That's called an 'on-premise' UC platform -- because it physically exists where you work, and your workers have to keep it operational.

On-premise telecom solutions have only a few limited or perceived advantages over cloud-based solutions, the two most often-cited being improved security and greater control over the final result. Improved security, however, is a misnomer -- after all, if a cloud-UC provider had security any worse than you would give your own business, they would be putting dozens or hundreds of clients' information at risk. The truth is, a cloud-UC vendor spends more money, time and resources on security than virtually any of their customers do. It's their business to be secure. In almost every respect, the only real advantage to an on-premise solution is precise control over every aspect of the system -- but if a cloud-based system is less expensive and does everything you need it to, what does that control actually get you other than increased expense?

Increased expense really is the name of the game when it comes to on-premise solutions. You have a sometimes absurdly high capital investment in order to get all of the hardware and software installed and everyone trained on the new system. You have operating costs that include regular upgrades if you intend to keep up with the latest protocols and innovations. And if you

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don't pay for those regular upgrades, you have a profound risk of your entire investment suddenly becoming obsolete and requiring a new capital investment to get your company back on track.

Multiple Hosted Solutions

In this infrastructure setup, multiple vendors, each with their own section of the overall solution, will come in and install their particular hardware and software, and then they will maintain it and make sure it works for you. Very rarely will you ever find a single vendor who can and will hold down an entire UC platform in this manner, which is why the term for this method is the "multiple hosted" platform.

In many ways, a multiple hosted solution is somewhat of a middle ground between the on-premise solution and committing fully to the cloud. Like an on-premise solution, a multiple-hosted solution gives you immediate physical access to the equipment, though generally you must sign a contract that says you won't manipulate it without your host's knowledge. Like the cloud, you don't have to worry about maintaining and upgrading your goods, though the upgrades and maintenance aren't performed invisibly and with zero downtime like they are on the cloud.

The disadvantages of multiple hosted solutions are simple: you don't get the control of an on-premise solution, but it costs more than the cloud. You don't actually own the equipment, so you can't make changes without going through your host -- but you do actually have the equipment on-site, which means you have to pay for the fact that you are the only group using the equipment.

Hybrid Solutions

Hybrid setups are simply conditions in which your company purchases and maintains (on-premise) some elements of its telecommunications setup and has other elements hosted externally. No matter how they are arranged, hybrid solutions always suffer from all of the problems of both on-premise and hosted solutions -- just on different parts of their telecommunications setup.

The Cost of NOT Using Cloud-Based UC

Cloud-based UC platforms offer a dramatic reduction in overall costs compared to on-site, multiple hosted, or hybrid methods. Not all of these costs are obvious, however -- the greatest sacrifices a corporation makes by choosing a non-cloud-based UC platform aren't in the increased number of dollars spent -- they're in the failure to increase the number of dollars earned.

Competitive/Responsiveness Cost

Sales impact

It's not hard to see, upfront, how important a solid UC platform is to sales -- if you have a potential client who wants to get in touch, and their message for whatever reason isn't properly addressed, you just lost a client. Unified communications goes a long way to make sure that this never happens by making sure that every incoming message reaches a set of ears (even if just in the form of a "you have a message in your inbox" message).

Cloud-based UC goes a step beyond this, however, and ensures that your UC platform -- and thus your messages -- are available 24/7/365 from anywhere in the world, even if your office building is closed, even if it has lost power -- even if its phone and data lines have been cut! Giving your workers the ability to make sales under any circumstances is the hallmark of the cloud.

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Customer satisfaction impact

Of course, everything about the sales impact applies to customer satisfaction as well -- when customers' messages reach available ears, and when the respondent can reply in whatever format the customer prefers, your employees' ability to serve your existing customers is maximized. Keeping an existing customer happy in today's competitive world can have a great impact on the bottom line. With the cloud, as your clientele advances and adds new innovated methods of communication to their repertoire, the vendor adds those methods transparently off-site and your business picks up on it without missing a beat.

Productivity impact

Now extrapolate that same effect discussed above to the internal communications of your business. All executives are aware of the inefficiencies created by internal communications that don't reach all the right ears -- or don't reach them on time. Unified Communications platforms perform function after automated function to ensure that all messages reach all recipients, no matter where they are -- and give the recipient the ability to reply from anywhere, in any format. A cloud-based UC platform backs this up with an always-present online storage that acts as a message history, allowing employees and managers alike to reference relevant past communications and quote, attach, or annotate them on the fly without having to be at their office in order to do it. Productivity improves, and with it, so does the bottom line.

Dollar Cost

With all of the responsiveness benefits that cloud-based UC offers, the idea that it could cost less than an on-premise, multiple hosted, or hybrid solution is somewhat startling -- after all, this is the business world; you get what you pay for, right? Well, remember the biggest advantage of the cloud -- multiple clients can access a single vendor's cloud system without the need to duplicate equipment. The fact that your business is in effect time-sharing a system with several others means that the service you're paying for is notably less expensive than paying for dedicated equipment -- even after you take the vendor's profit margin into account.

IT Cost

And then there's the cost of running the UC system. As mentioned, on-premise and hosted systems both involve dedicated equipment -- and that means a higher capital investment as well as a virtual guarantee that the day will come when you have to pay for an upgrade. Moreover, you either pay your own staff to maintain the system or you pay your host to come in and perform regular maintenance and repair.

When you use the cloud to get your UC, the vendor handles all of those expenses. And once again, because the vendor ameliorates those costs across all their clients, each one pays only a fraction of what they would have to pay to keep their own system up to date. Moreover, because the cloud vendor upgrades and installs new features with a "click of the mouse", your services never have to suffer any downtime in order to stay current.

PanTerra Networks: Futureproof cloud-based Unified Communications

That single simple fact -- the notion that, if you choose to use the cloud to get your Unified Communications platform, you never have to worry about upgrades or downtime -- is exactly why PanTerra Networks is able to call their UC platform "futureproof". Unlike any other form of UC infrastructure, PanTerra's cloud-based UC platform will never leave your business on anything oth-

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er than the cutting edge of telecommunications ability.

By combining the basic functions mentioned earlier -- Incoming Message Management, Format Translation, and Find and Follow -- with a host of other features including a powerful virtual PBX, versatile collaboration services, dedicated CallCenter services and a browser-based unified command center for easy management, PanTerra Networks has built a Unified Communications platform that is powerful enough to serve corporations of any size, but nimble enough to keep up with businesses of any speed.

What, then, in the end, is the true cost of choosing a Unified Communications platform that isn't PanTerra Networks? Lost or delayed messages. Fewer sales. Frustrated customers. Greater costs both upfront and ongoing. Reduced flexibility. More hassle. Lower productivity. Contrast that to the power and grace of PanTerra Networks' cloud-based Unified Communications platform, Streams, which will save your business time, money, and effort while improving your responsiveness, efficiency, and bottom line.

There is no business that cannot benefit by implementing a Unified Communications platform. The choice is not between having UC and not -- it's only between which UC infrastructure will serve your business best, and the answer is clearly and universally that cloud-UC is the platform of choice. PanTerra Networks' Streams cloud-based UC platform: it's not a UC solution -- it's the right UC solution for you.

About PanTerra Networks

PanTerra Networks, Inc. delivers the most comprehensive cloud-based unified communications service through its Streams solution. Streams makes companies more competitive by making them more responsive and includes all services and unlimited usage for unified business communications including voice, unified messaging, fax, video, instant messaging, email and calendaring, file transfer, mobile text messaging and presence integrated into its Unified Command Center (UCC). Streams also includes group communications including desk sharing, web conferencing, IM conferencing, and audio conferencing. Streams also integrates with Outlook and Salesforce as well as other commonly used CRMs through its included application programmers interface (API) enabling communication-enabled business process (CEBP) environments to flourish.

Streams stores all your communications in the cloud, enhancing security and allowing you to access them with just an Internet connection and browser. The company is headquartered in Santa Clara, California, with Research and Development based in Hyderabad, India.

For more information, please visit <http://www.panterranetworks.com>, call us at +1 408.702.2200 or email us at info@panterranetworks.com.

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