

What do skateparks,
lettuce harvesting and
real estate businesses
have in common?
Savvy small businesses
are cutting overhead
costs and growing
their business by better
utilizing communication
technologies.

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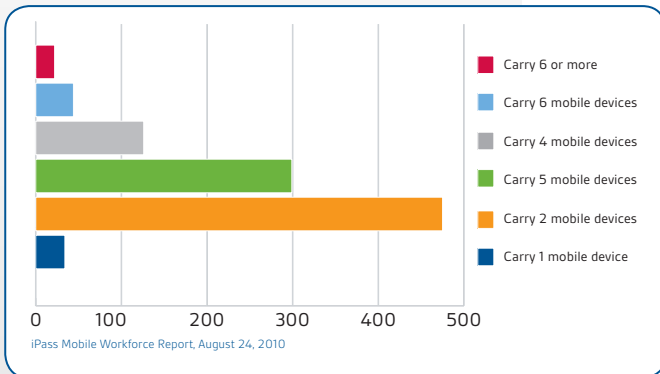
Five Ways for SMBs to Succeed Using Unified Communications

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NEARLY 97% OF MOBILE EMPLOYEES CARRY TWO OR MORE MOBILE DEVICES AND ALMOST 50% CARRY THREE OR MORE.



THE CHANGING COMMUNICATION LANDSCAPE FOR SMBs

Communication in this complex world needs to be simple and intuitive; as technology advances the need to connect with others becomes even stronger — especially for small and medium sized businesses (SMBs). Small and medium businesses, defined as companies with fewer than 1,000 employees, have unique needs, and must be competitive with other companies of their size, as well as large enterprises in order to succeed.

Changes in the workplace present challenges and opportunities for SMBs. Today 90% of people work at least some time outside of their office¹. The multitude of devices and communication channels most of us use in our daily lives can make it even more difficult to communicate efficiently and easily. To meet these challenges, leading-edge companies are turning to Unified Communications (UC) to let workers be effective both outside and inside the office, by connecting to all different devices, applications, and other communications systems they use, while making communications richer, easier, and more intuitive.

The good news is many SMBs have been using elements of UC without even knowing it. Today, thanks to new products and services aimed at the SMB market, companies of all sizes can use these solutions to improve their business communications.

WHAT IS UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS?

UC can be summed up in six simple words — *Communications integrated to optimize business processes*². By integrating real-time and non-real-time communications with business processes and presenting a consistent unified user interface and user experience across multiple devices and media types, UC lets people connect, communicate and collaborate seamlessly. The results are improved efficiency and effectiveness, reduced costs, increased revenues, and enhanced customer relationships.**

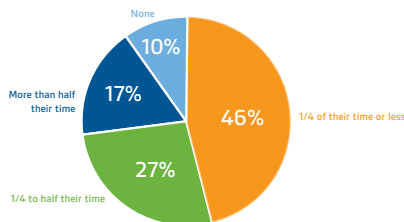
UC mobilizes the workforce, making it easier for information to reach the right people at the right time. Integrating various individual communication capabilities, UC solutions provide a unified user experience. Many elements of a UC solution have been around for years, and companies have been “doing UC” in a piecemeal way without even realizing it, utilizing capabilities such as IP telephony from the desktop, conferencing tools such as Skype, IM, find me/follow me, and more.

With UC, voice communications no longer requires a telephone handset — all you need is to connect to a UC client — whether on the desktop, desk phone, or mobile device — and you are good to go. Using the UC client (also called softphone or “dashboard”), users can view the presence information and status of colleagues and coworkers and see if someone is on the phone, out of the office, or available for a web chat. They can initiate a communications or collaborative session by simply clicking on a person’s name and then selecting how they want to communicate — IM, audio, audio conference, video conference, etc.

Many companies are throwing away their desk phones and opting for softphone capabilities on their PC in conjunction with a headset, allowing workers to work hands free, while eliminating the cost and maintenance of desk phones. One company, **Monterey Bay Property Management (MBPM)** removed all of its physical desk phones to clear up some of the desktop clutter, and installed

WE’RE WORKING ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, ANYPLACE.

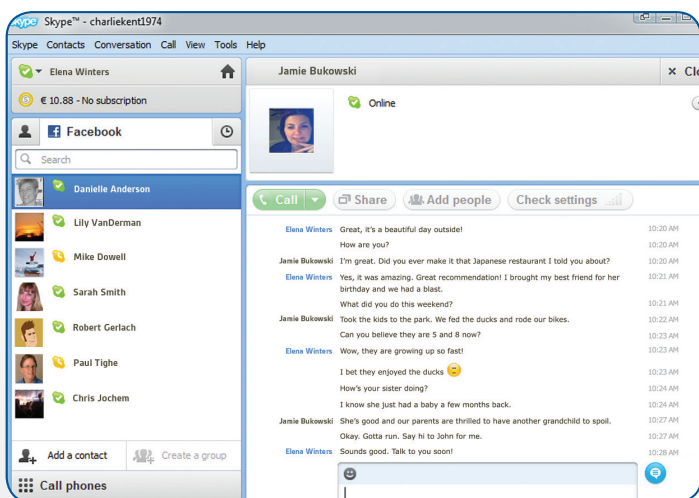
90% of Enterprise Employees in the US work off site some of the time



How We Work: Communication Trends of Business Professionals, Plantronics, 2010

**SEE TABLE AT THE END OF THE PAPER

1. HOW WE WORK: COMMUNICATION TRENDS OF BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS, PLANTRONICS, SEPTEMBER 2010
2. UCSTRATEGIES



Skype Presence

“As a small company with 50 employees, we have a very limited number of salespeople, and lots of sales that have to happen first thing in the morning – it’s fast and furious until noon as people get their orders in, since there’s not a long shelf life for lettuce.”

**Eric Knorr IT Manager
Chieftain Harvesting**

Cisco® IP Communicator to let its 15 workers use the click-to-call capability via their PC softphones with headsets.

HERE ARE FIVE WAYS FOR SMBs TO SUCCEED USING UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS.

1. SMBs’ UNIQUE NEEDS TRANSLATE INTO BENEFITS FROM USING UC OR EVEN “UC LITE”

When UC was first introduced, most of the solutions were very complex, aimed at large enterprises with large IT organizations and big budgets. That’s no longer the case. With the rise in hosted services aimed at SMBs, as well as new bundled and packaged offerings that take away much of the complexity, it’s easier than ever for SMBs to access full-featured UC and collaboration solutions. In many cases, these companies are already using elements of UC without even knowing it! They may have started with Skype or WebEx® for conferencing, a public IM service such as MSN, or unified messaging from their Exchange inbox. Many companies may not think of what they’re doing as UC. They have different names for it or focus on the capabilities it provides, such as forwarding calls to their cell phone, or having a unified inbox to store all types of message.

Skatepark builder Wormhoudt Inc.’s Principal Landscape Architect, Zachary Wormhoudt, pointed out that while the company has a small in-house Avaya® phone system, they primarily use Skype, which enables them to communicate via chat, voice, and video with their global partners. While he doesn’t think of this necessarily as “UC”, he knows that it provides the capabilities his staff needs in order to communicate and collaborate.

SMBs have even more to gain by moving to UC systems than large enterprises for a multitude of reasons. In today’s world, brick-and-mortar is no longer critical, and size doesn’t matter; a small company can look as big as a large company. How effectively companies communicate with customers, suppliers, business partners and employees can be the difference between business won and business lost. A breakdown in communications could easily send a customer to a competitor, and for SMBs, each and every customer is important.

IT Manager Eric Knorr of Chieftain Harvesting, a grower/shipper of fresh vegetable products, notes, “UC lets us coordinate different inbound phone numbers for complaints, inquiries, etc., and we can have those numbers ring to a specific desk, and can easily change that when needed.” He adds, “As a small company with 50 employees, we have a very limited number of salespeople, and lots of sales that have to happen first thing in the morning – it’s fast and furious until noon as people get their orders in, since there’s not a long shelf life for lettuce.”

2. DON’T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF VOICE

UC technologies have changed the way many of us communicate, now that people can view someone’s presence and availability status before calling them. The use of voice messaging has decreased tremendously. The increased use of instant messaging, as well as social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, means that we can get the information we need via text quickly and easily without having to reach for the phone. But contrary to many pundits, voice is not dead. In fact, it’s very much alive, and the role of voice communications continues to grow. A study conducted by Plantronics in 2010 called “How We Work:

LOST IN TRANSLATION

% of people with Business email and IM issues solved by a phone call



How We Work: Communication Trends of Business Professionals, Plantronics, 2010

"Being hands free lets people multitask while on the phone, meaning they can spend their time more productively and get more accomplished."

Wormhoudt – Skatepark

Communication Trends of Business Professionals," that surveyed more than 1,800 SMB and enterprise employees across the globe, found that 81% of the respondents said that phone calls are "critical/very important" to their overall success and productivity, outpacing everything else (with the exception of email) by 20 percentage points or more.

While email and IM are the preferred means of exchanging information, voice communication is still the method of choice for getting real-time answers and immediate attention. A study done by UCStrategies found that even with increasing use of non-voice UC tools, voice remains the medium for real-time communications most commonly used to settle and make progress on business issues. Respondents unanimously agree that IM is useful for a quick comment or question, but not for lengthy discussions or conversations, and that email while obviously useful, has its limits.

3. EVALUATE YOUR OPTIONS

Options abound when it comes to choosing technology and software vendors that unify communications. The first choice boils down to rent or own – do you choose a premise-based solutions or hosted service offerings? There's a gamut of choices for hosted voice and UC service providers: traditional service providers such as carriers, as well as new hosted providers that focus on the SMB market, and several premise-based providers that also offer hosted UC. And of course emerging vendors such as Skype and Google, which began as consumer-oriented services, are stealthily moving into businesses of all sizes, especially SMBs. The number of businesses – of all sizes – using Skype and other public services is skyrocketing, as these services are free or very low cost, with no barrier to entry, and no equipment to be purchased. On the premises side, the battle lines are drawn between the primary switch/telephony vendors, including Avaya, Cisco, NEC®, and many others, and the desktop application vendors such as Microsoft® and IBM®.

Whatever combination of companies and solutions you choose, the key is understanding what your needs are first, to create the most streamlined and efficient long-term solution.

4. TALKING TO YOUR COMPUTER – CONSIDER HEADSETS AS ESSENTIAL TOOLS

UC lets computers – PCs, laptops, and tablets – become audio devices, which requires the use of quality headsets. Often overlooked, headsets are key elements of a UC solution, enabling many of the benefits that UC provides, particularly mobility and the ability to be productive and effective regardless of location. Chieftain Harvesting found that with wireless mobility, "Employees are not tied down to their desk and can get more done, which really boosts morale."

For Skatepark builder Wormhoudt, "The nature of our communications is that we may be sharing a screen and drafting diagrams while talking, or panning through a 3D drawing to make sure everyone is seeing the same thing. The visual component is important – we have to be hands free to operate the computer. Being hands free lets people multitask while on the phone, meaning they can spend their time more productively and get more accomplished. We can focus 100% on the objective at hand."

Aside from the obvious benefit of mobility, headsets also provide ergonomic benefits – workers don't have to cradle phones on their shoulders, straining



their necks and backs. This obviously benefits the worker who doesn't get a sore neck, while also saving the company money in terms of fewer workers compensation claims and sick days – and it make for happier workers. Monterey Bay Property Management's (MBPM) Managing Broker Jan Leasure noted, "I didn't want to see anyone on staff with a phone receiver cradled on their shoulder, which is a precursor to a Workman's Compensation claim. When we started using headsets, I felt really reassured that I won't have someone come to me with neck pain."

A good headset also provides superior audio quality, especially when paired with a mobile phone or when in a conference. MBPM found that "Privacy and noise abatement are also benefits in an open space environment. It can be very noisy and the headsets let people hear better, and it keeps them from raising their voices."

5. PICK THE BEST TOOL FOR THE PERSON AND THE JOB

Offering a range of communication devices for companies of all sizes, Plantronics offers a variety of hands-free solutions for the office as well as consumers. The company's products are used around the world – and were even used on the moon! Plantronics technology, such as WindSmart®, AudioIQ2™ and Wideband, delivers noise-free and more natural sound everywhere sound travels: from offices to homes, from PCs to cell phones.

Offerings include wired and wireless headsets and speakerphones for mobile phones, UC applications and softphones, office telephony systems, and contact center workers. Plantronics has several products aimed at SMBs to optimize their communication tools – whether a full-blown UC solution or basic elements and components of a solution. Each of these also offers UC Standard versions built for UC applications and softphones from Avaya, Cisco, IBM and others.

One of the latest products, the Voyager® PRO UC, has smart sensors that know when it's on your head or not, and has a Bluetooth® adapter for wideband audio. If it's not on your head, you can accept call manually on your device, but when you put the headset on, the audio transfers to your headset without you having to do anything.

SUMMING IT UP: UC + HEADSETS + SMB = SUCCESS

UC provides a unified approach to SMBs for communicating and collaborating with anyone, anywhere from any device. Companies recognize that voice is still the de facto gold standard for real-time communications and will remain so for some time to come. IP telephony from the desktop, as well as tools such as click-to-call/click-to-conference, audio/web/video conferencing, IM, unified messaging, are increasingly being adopted by SMBs.

SMBs need to carefully evaluate the solution that best meets their needs based on their business requirements and what they're trying to accomplish. The key is to find a solution that is simple, reliable, and cost-effective.

While often an afterthought, endpoints such as headsets need to be part of your UC solution. A high-quality headset that is optimized to work with your UC solution can make the difference between a good experience and a great experience, as well as overall business success.

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aimed at helping end-
user and vendor clients
both strategically and
tactically.*

TABLE 1 – UC PRODUCTIVITY BENEFIT IMPACT

UC BENEFIT APPLICATION	BOTTOM LINE IMPACT – DIRECT OR INDIRECT	POTENTIAL RESULTS
Contact management	Indirect	❑ Get information needed quickly based on availability and presence ❑ Increased employee satisfaction ❑ Reduced lag time
Remote access to individuals (ability to access individuals and teams who are not in the main or same office)	Direct and Indirect	❑ Improved customer service ❑ Reduced lag time ❑ Increased sales ❑ Crisis avoidance ❑ Shorten project cycle time
Access to experts and resources	Direct and Indirect	❑ Improved customer service ❑ Reduced lag time ❑ Increased sales ❑ Reduced sales cycle ❑ Faster time to market ❑ Faster product development cycle ❑ Improved employee satisfaction
Collaboration	Direct and Indirect	❑ Improved employee rapport ❑ Reduced travel ❑ Increased sales ❑ Improved management of workforce ❑ Faster time to market ❑ Reduced sales cycle ❑ Faster product development cycle ❑ Shorten project cycle time
Mobility (ability for individuals to work remotely and outside of the office)	Direct and Indirect	❑ Improved employee satisfaction ❑ Ability to attract and retain critical talent ❑ Increased sales ❑ Reduced lag time ❑ Crisis avoidance ❑ Improved customer service ❑ Shorten project cycle time

Source: UCStrategies.com (May 2008)

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