Unified Communications

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Written by:
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The day is gone where businesses just used telephone sets and fax machines to do business. We now see many different ways to communicate in getting through a day's work. Desktop computers, notebooks, IM (Instant Messaging), email, voice mail, PDAs, soft phones, mobile phones, video conferencing- well you get the picture- have become everyday tools. We no longer have conversations we have communications sessions.

While each is a very useful tool the many ways of communicating can be an obstacle course to productivity. While you are on the rope ladder your customer may be crawling under the barbed wire. Many valuable minutes are wasted leaving voice messages on the office phone, the cell phone, sending an email and doing everything short of sending out APBs. It has become a big challenge to overcome these obstacles before your competitors do.

The advances in technology have in many cases done the opposite of what they were intended to do which is to improve communications. A customer in Toronto who wants to reach their sales rep immediately might cancel an order if she is in Cleveland and hasn't answered her email. The consumer world is one of instant gratification. You can't improve the company's bottom line if productivity is down.

The solution to this latest problem is called Unified Communications or UC.UC has an official definition but by the time you read through it your eyes will glaze over. Simply put, it is using Internet Protocol (IP) to integrate all these tools so they work together. How the integration occurs can resemble a Lego set put together in the dark by a drunken sailor or it can be a nicely configured work of art that makes the technology work in your favor.

According to Sage Research, employees at organizations using unified communication technology with their IP communications platform save a full 32 minutes a day on average by being able to reach other coworkers on the first attempt. In addition, the average employee using unified messaging saves 43 minutes per day from being able to manage all emails, voicemails and faxes from a single inbox. As a result, you can accelerate decision-making while simultaneously cutting costs to deliver real business value.

The principle behind unified communications is simple: provide end users with the means to choose how, when and where to be reached and to access key data instantly. The decision making may not be as simple as just saying to a vendor I need a UC solution. There are many factors that go into the decision beginning with where are we now and where do we want to go. The existing equipment may need to be replaced depending on what path you take. Or there are solutions that could include keeping your legacy equipment.

The financial people will want to know about the economic feasibility. In most cases the ROI will be favorable for two reasons; the monthly costs should be less and the productivity should be higher. The important thing is to do what you do with everything else- buy what you need not what you are being sold. Getting a second opinion or using an independent consultant can be invaluable.

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