

The Contact Center: The Logical Starting Point for Every Unified Communications Strategy

By Mike Sheridan, SVP of Strategy at Aspect Software

There are various definitions for UC, but all of them have a common theme – helping employees access the right people on any device at the right time:

“The combination of presence and availability with voice, video, email, and instant messaging, which makes it easier to communicate via the most optimal path with employees, customers, and suppliers and ultimately streamlines business processes.”

Forrester Research

How to Determine If Unified Communications Is Right for Your Business, June 7, 2007, Elizabeth Herrell.

“The unified communications concept involves breaking down [communications] barriers so that people using different modes of communication, different media, and different devices can still communicate to anyone, anywhere, at any time.”

“Unified communications encompasses several communication systems or models including unified messaging, collaboration, and interaction systems; real-time and near real-time communications; and transactional applications.”

International Engineering Consortium (IEC)

http://www.iec.org/online/tutorials/unified_comm/

Oh no!

Chances are your company is in the midst of deploying its unified communications (UC) strategy and your IT department is working hard to deploy new applications that unite telephony, conferencing, messaging and even collaboration tools. Their goal is to increase employee productivity and streamline internal processes. And, your business is seeing progress at the enterprise level. Thanks to UC, employees in your New York office now have the ability to instantly see if their colleague in the Tokyo office is immediately available for a quick telephone discussion or online chat to brainstorm about a new service offering. Your company’s engineers, based in San Francisco and Chicago, are posting specifications for new products in a central repository so that they can collaborate more efficiently. And, your corporate communications team is using a combination of calendars and presence to locate corporate executives wherever they may be for urgent media interviews. Everywhere you look, your company is starting to use presence, collaboration, calendaring and conferencing tools.

Has someone forgotten about your contact center?

Step Up

Your contact center can benefit from UC just as much, if not more than, the other departments across your enterprise. Your agents are on the frontline communicating directly with customers but, for 10.3 percent of the calls¹ handled by your contact center, your agents also serve as conduits between your customers and subject matter experts across your enterprise. Incorporating your contact center as part of your company’s overall UC strategy can help you drastically increase your agents’ efficiency. It can reduce the amount of time agents spend contacting knowledge workers for answers to customer inquiries, and potentially decrease the number of interactions your customers require to have their inquiries resolved. Instead of frantically running down a call list to reach someone with the technical expertise to answer a specific customer question, UC empowers your agents to instantly check the availability of a knowledge worker and quickly get their input with a few keystrokes and the click of a mouse. For more complex customer issues, UC makes the call conferencing process faster and simpler. Agents may no longer have to call the knowledge worker, explain the customer’s situation, conference the customer into the call and introduce the customer before they can finally transfer the call. Rather, they could potentially transfer detailed notes about the issue at-hand to the knowledge worker along with the call, shortening the transfer process and preventing anyone from having to repeat information.

UC brings a number of benefits to contact centers, resulting in happier, more productive agents, and reducing call handling times and associated costs. But equally or perhaps even more importantly, is the value that UC delivers to your customers. Increasing first call resolution and decreasing the amount of time your customers spend on hold greatly impacts customer satisfaction. The more satisfied your customers, the more follow-on business they will conduct with your company² and the more often they will refer your company to their friends, family and colleagues. Translation: higher customer satisfaction means greater top-line revenue growth.

¹ December 2008. An Evaluative Report of the Knowledge Worker’s Role in the Contact Center. Leo J. Shapiro and Associates.

² April 2007. The 2007 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index™ North America. Leo J. Shapiro and Associates.

“UC offers the ability to significantly improve how individuals, groups and companies interact and perform. UC enables multiple communication channels to be coordinated. In some cases, separate servers may be consolidated, but more frequently, UC adds value to existing communication servers. Key technologies include Internet Protocol (IP)-PBX, Voice over IP (VoIP), presence, email, audio and Web conferencing, videoconferencing, voicemail, unified messaging and instant messaging (IM).”

“Another key capability of UC is that it offers a method to integrate communication functions directly with business applications; Gartner calls this capability ‘communications-enabled business processes.’”

Gartner Consulting

Magic Quadrant for Unified Communications, 2007, August 20 2007, Bern Elliot.

Take Responsibility

There are various definitions of UC, but all of them have a common thread - helping employees find and access the right people on any device at the right time. UC benefits need not be limited to employee productivity. UC is a viable way for your contact center to lead your company to a whole new place...a place where each and every customer-facing process is drastically improved and your company's customer interaction strategy leads to greater customer loyalty.

As a contact center leader, it's incumbent on you to take the lead. Thanks to you, your center has already honed the technology and best practices associated with customer interactions. By applying what you've learned from your experience in the contact center to your enterprise as a whole, you can enable your company to shorten problem resolution cycles, enhance the effectiveness of collections activities, and increase cross-selling and up-selling of services and products. By employing proven technology to solve new problems, you can empower your customers to contact the right person at the right time with the right expertise via their communication channel of choice - chat, email or telephone. You can use contact center applications to more efficiently access knowledge workers, determine their availability through presence and calendaring, monitor and coach their interactions with customers and agents; and, track and report on the frequency of knowledge worker interactions, the type of interactions and ultimately the success of those interactions. Extending contact center capabilities beyond the contact center into the enterprise can deliver an increased return on your technology investment, but also drastically improve customer service, resulting in higher customer satisfaction levels and elevated customer loyalty, and translating into increased revenue - the ultimate goal of unified communications in the contact center.

Move Forward

Make no bones about it - UC presents tremendous opportunity for your customers, your company, your contact center, and for you personally. Too many of your competitors and IT colleagues are thinking narrowly about UC, viewing it solely as a way to enhance employee productivity and internal-facing processes. You understand the vision of how UC is a competitive differentiator for your business in a tough market because it can drastically improve your customer/company interactions.

It's time for you to take the lead on your unified communications for the contact center strategy to make sure that neither your contact center nor your customers are ignored. Here are the four steps you should take today to begin implementing UC in your contact center:

1. **Educate yourself.** There is an abundance of information about UC available on the Aspect Software Web site, as well as on Web sites of technology-related non-profit organizations, industry analyst firms, and industry-related publications. Take the time to read about UC and ask questions. Don't stop until you have all the answers you want and need.
2. **Close the yawning chasm** between your contact center and the enterprise by helping your company develop a well-rounded UC strategy that includes all facets of your business - not just those that are internally-facing. Businesses and consumers both gain when knowledge workers are part of the enterprise pool of customer-facing employees addressing consumer demands. To bridge the gap that most likely exists right now, it's up to you to initiate talks with your IT department to determine 1) how far along they are in their UC strategy development and implementation and 2) help them understand how the enterprise and the customer can benefit if IT leverages the tools and insight that the contact center can provide to the overall UC strategy.

There are a number of resources that can help you learn about UC. In addition to the reference materials posted on the Aspect Web site at www.aspect.com, you can find valuable information here:

- International Engineering Consortium (IEC) - www.iec.org/online/tutorials/unified_comm/.
- Forrester Research - www.forrester.com.
- Gartner Consulting - www.gartner.com.
- Unified Communications Magazine - www.tmcnet.com/unified-communications.
- Unified Communications Strategies - www.ucstrategies.com/.
- Aspect Software - www.aspectcometogether.com.

3. Use UC to foster collaboration between your contact center and the rest of the enterprise.

Employ the contact center's IT-ready tools that are extensible to the rest of the enterprise. It's important that as your organization looks ahead to deploying unified communications in the contact center, steps are taken initially to deploy IT-ready solutions that can be easily extended out to the enterprise. This means taking a unified approach - having all of the contact center applications on a single platform - which makes it very easy for the enterprise to leverage all of those capabilities. This also means taking advantage of services-based software that are standards compliant and highly reliable.

4. Proactively consider potential issues and address questions relating to how knowledge workers will be measured for customer-facing activities. Determine, if all customer-facing knowledge worker interactions will be recorded and monitored and how those knowledge workers will be coached to improve their customer service skills. After all, the satisfaction levels of roughly 10 percent of your customer interactions depend to varying degrees on the performance of these employees.

The bottom line is that, in order to take advantage of all that UC has to offer, your contact center is central in the development of your company's overarching strategy. Put simply, employee productivity is important, but customer satisfaction, increased collections, and enhanced sales are essential to the longevity of your business.

About Aspect Software

Aspect Software, Inc. founded the contact center industry and is now the world's largest company focused solely on unified communications for the contact center. Our all-in-one, IT-ready solutions help two-thirds of the FORTUNE Global 100 and a variety of small and medium enterprises to communications-enable their customer service, collections and sales & telemarketing business processes. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

Aspect Software
Corporate Headquarters
300 Apollo Drive
Chelmsford, MA 01824

978 250 7900
978 244 7410 fax
www.aspect.com

