COLLABORATION GOES
MOBILE

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November, 2006

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The New Workforce

Attitudes have changed about where "work" takes place, and organizations that have embraced the move to a mobile workforce are realizing the improvements in productivity. Technology has been the driving force behind the trend. Sales of cellular phones and handheld devices are reinforcing the wireless mindset, and by 2010, there will be 7.3 million broadband wireless subscribers in the United States.[1] The proliferation of wireless networks and easy Internet access make information available to mobile workers from nearly anywhere.

It's no longer only sales reps, real estate agents and maintenance workers that are out of the office or have offices at multiple locations. By 2008, the U.S. business market is expected to support nearly 51 million telecommuters, nearly 14 million of which are expected to work from home full-time.[2] Organizations need to manage this shift by creating a communications plan that supports collaboration with easy, effective communication. This means providing mobile workers with services like e-mail, wireless phones, and access to what were traditionally in-office applications like file servers, enterprise software, and conferencing and collaboration tools.

Improved Conferencing Services Pave the Way for Mobile Collaboration

In the past, conferencing was primarily used for telephone conference calls, Web-based meetings to share PowerPoint slides, and providing face-to-face interaction via video conference. While conferencing helped many organizations reduce travel costs and increase productivity, ease-of-use and reliable technology still lagged behind. Today networks are more robust, the customer interface has greatly improved, and equipment costs have dropped significantly. These changes spurred greater adoption of conferencing, and as users became more comfortable with the technology, they recognized how it could be used for multiple business functions besides meetings, and it became a part of everyday office communication.

Today audio conferences can be set up from anywhere in the world by simply dialing into a call. There is no longer a need for operator intervention, unless it is requested. The quality of the audio is clear, regardless of the number of people on the call.

The use of Web and data conferencing, which provides a deeper level of collaboration by viewing and manipulating data, has exploded. Valued at $725.4 million in 2005, the Web conferencing market is projected to reach $2.9 billion by 2011.[3] Web conferencing is being integrated with audio and video conferencing and is a growing part of unified communications, allowing people to truly collaborate with the click of a mouse. Web conferencing is becoming an accepted tool that is part of everyday business communications because it is easy to use and cost effective.

Video conferencing has also seen significant changes with technology available from the desktop, (at very attractive prices), to high end communications (with the advent of high definition and improvements in telepresence) that make meetings truly "like being there." Improvements in audio and video quality, display devices, camera designs and user interfaces have made the experiences users had only a few years ago (i.e. jerky video, dropped calls, poor sound and images) a thing of the past. Now users can select a wide

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[1] *Yankee Group, 2006, Fortune Magazine ad, page S5.*

[2] *Source: In-Stat/MDR press release; July 19, 2004*

[3] *Source: Frost & Sullivan*

range of video conferencing technologies to meet any communication need, including the ability to hold video conferences on mobile devices.

The shift toward using mobile devices as the primary means for communication will take shape in the next two to three years as wireless data capacity grows. By the end of this year it's expected that one fourth of the two billion mobile phones used worldwide will be broadband enabled.

But for the mobile worker to be effective their communication technology must provide the same efficiencies and ease-of-use as their desktop counterparts. The average worker already spends 6 hours a week working outside the office and 40% of conference calls are made from mobile phones. But workers are also demanding collaboration that crosses multiple communication devices so they can escalate conferences from informal Instant Messaging to Web conversations, then group audio and video events, all with simple "clicks."

Bringing It All Together

The Holy Grail of frequent, easy and effective collaboration is commonly referred to as Unified Communications. It promises new levels of usability, manageability and productivity, regardless of whether a worker is stationary or mobile.

Interest in Unified Communications is not new, but the current state of business communication is driving demand, namely:

- The increasing complexity of business and personal communications,
- The use of multiple devices and endpoints to work effectively (i.e. office phone, cell phones, PDA, laptops, etc.),
- Multiple applications (i.e. e-mail, instant messaging, conferencing, collaboration, etc.),
- Multiple access methods (i.e. wired, wireless, VOIP, TDM, etc.), and
- The proliferation and convergence of voice with IP-based data networks.

Ironically, the variety of communications devices used to connect around the clock is actually slowing down employee productivity. The proliferation of communication options and applications, coupled with workers becoming increasingly mobile, leads to people having to try multiple methods of reaching coworkers. This results in employees being unable to reach coworkers on their first try, which inevitably results in project delays and missed deadlines.

A unified approach promises simplicity for the end user.

- Intelligent devices help route people to the correct device based on one's availability and proximity.
- Integration allows for more efficient use of applications, within the context of workflow and business processing, leading to a reduction in human latency.
- Much of the integration occurs "behind the curtain" simplifying the process for users.
- This unified approach results in a return on investment (ROI) to support further proliferation of IP based voice and data networks.

The Need for Business Continuity

Organizations need to develop contingencies for when communications cannot be conducted as usual. Regardless of whether the issue is a natural disaster, terrorism threat, medical pandemic, or routine problem (i.e. broken bone, loss of power, traffic accident, etc.), in today's world planning for business continuity must be a priority. There is a growing need to communicate with others without being in the same room and often times without being available 24 x 7. Collaboration tools will be key to the success of any plan and the ability to make the tools mobile will be a requirement for many workers. People need ways to communicate from the simple (i.e. dial a pre-determined number and listen to a pre-recorded message) to the elaborate (i.e. install "war-room" type locations that have redundant and varied bandwidth capability and allow users to communicate face-to-face when needed). Clearly, the needs will vary depending on the organization, but the importance of a plan, known to all within the organization, cannot be underestimated if business continuity is to be achieved.

Mobility – The Killer Technology

Under the umbrella of Unified Communications lies mobile conferencing, the next big application in the workplace. It reduces costs, increases employee mobility and productivity, and improves overall communications. Mobile solutions securely extend office connectivity and services to employees working at home or on the road. Unified Communications prioritize, store, retrieve and forward communications to help improve overall working effectiveness. At a time when businesses are focused on reducing expenses and increasing revenues, reliable conferencing is a key low-expense mobility and productivity tool.

Mobility solutions make it easier for the mobile worker to stay in touch with fellow employees and customers through:

- Feature-rich softphones, conferencing and collaboration tools,
- Plug and work teleworking tools for business continuity, and
- Low-cost audio conferencing collaboration tools with recording capability.

Workers today want to strike a better work-life balance and employers recognize that they need to provide the technology alternatives that allow them to attract and retain top talent. Mobility solutions that facilitate and encourage information sharing, as well as expedite decision-making, will increasingly become differentiators to help employers retain their best workers.

Workers want all the business communications functionality they have with their office telephone systems and computer-based products in a mobile environment. For meetings, users want such features as participant lists, identification of the active speaker, the ability to push a PowerPoint presentation and share interaction with an application, and systems that also allow question and answer sessions. Meeting attendees want to know who is on the conference and by what means they are attending the conference. Conference service providers have the technology infrastructure, partnerships with service developers, and 15 years experience making communications more collaborative.

InterCall: Ease-of-Use Will Drive Mobile Conferencing

InterCall, the largest conferencing service provider in the world, is leading the conferencing industry into the mobile market with its suite of services tailored for the changing needs of the workforce. InterCall recently launched Mobile Assistant, which allows participants to quickly join conference calls with the single-click of a button, by storing preset conferencing numbers and access codes. This push-to-talk conferencing feature is free and available for InterCall customers using a Blackberry® or Windows Mobile® phone. InterCall's Mobile Assistant allows workers to meet on the move, safely.

Ease-of-use drove conferencing usage on the desktop and InterCall believes it will be the force behind mobile conferencing too. Mobile employees will realize many other benefits, including:

- Always connected
- IM/Presence/VoIP enabled
- Encourages proper etiquette with no intrusive calls
- Ensures federated secure calls and IM/Presence for Internet Telephony
- Click-to-call conferencing
- Extended coverage on the road and at home
- International coverage and revenue

How Does Mobile Assistant Work?

Use the device to:

- Point and click
- Choose from a pre-defined list of frequently dialed numbers
- Control your conference from your mobile device
- Initiate, join and manage conference calls from multiple mobile devices
- Download the FREE application from the web to any pocket PC, BlackBerry or SmartPhone
- One-click access to your conferencing information

Where Do We Go From Here?

As the U.S. workforce moves further away from the traditional office arrangement the demand for conferencing services and ability to escalate a conversation through multiple communication devices will increase as well. Customers expect reliability and ease-of-use, and this will drive service providers to continually enhance these aspects of conferencing.

The "Employees of the Near Future" will still have an office but will spend a greater proportion of their time in the field, either with clients or other vendors. They will be expected to produce more results in less time because of the greater speed and reliability of communication but will also demand more quality-of-life perks from their employers, so time-intensive travel will be limited and they will work from home more frequently. Early adopters of conferencing that saw the benefits of reduced travel are likely to lead their competition into mobile

conferencing because they've seen the bottom line benefits, but now that conferencing has become widely accepted the rest of the business world will be following closely behind. .

About TRI

Telemanagement Resources International Inc. (TRI) is a 24 year old management consulting firm specializing in marketing, communications, and training with an emphasis on design, assessment, project management, promotions, and training for collaborative conferencing systems. More information about TRI can be obtained at www.TRIInc.com.

About S. Ann Earon

S. Ann Earon has been a researcher and consultant in multimedia communications for 24 years. She holds a Masters in instructional technology and educational administration from Northeastern University, and a Ph.D. from Boston College in business, speech and communications, and education. Dr. Earon is the Chairperson Emeritus of the Interactive Multimedia & Collaborative Communications Alliance (IMCCA), the non-profit industry association for conferencing & collaborative communications. She can be reached at AnnEaron@aol.com.

About InterCall

InterCall, a subsidiary of West Corporation, is the largest service provider in the world specializing in conference communications. Founded in 1991, InterCall helps people and companies be more productive by providing advanced audio, event, Web and video conferencing solutions that are easy-to-use and save them time and money. Along with a team of over 500 Meeting Consultants, the company employs more than 1,500 operators, customer service representatives, call supervisors, accounting, marketing and IT professionals. InterCall's strong U.S. presence, which includes four call centers and 26 sales offices, is bolstered by a global reach that extends to Canada, Mexico, Latin America, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, China, India, Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan. For more information, please visit www.intercall.com.