Unified communications' productivity promise to SMEs

By Kyle Woolf   15 Dec 2016

Unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) promise mobility, productivity and scalability, but why should business owners and IT managers of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) care and what are the real business benefits to them right now?

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One of the biggest efficiency challenges faced by businesses today is scattered communications. Ineffective meetings and fragmented workflows are causing productivity to drop as staff switch between multiple applications, tasks and devices.

This is where unified communications (UC) steps in. The term describes the integration of real-time enterprise communication services such as Instant Messaging (IM), presence, voice, video and data sharing with non-real-time communication services such as e-mail.

Communication is rapidly moving from a fixed line infrastructure to the mobile handset through UC, aiming to make the workforce as mobile as possible.

The fact that employees want their cellphones to be the centre of their world means that tools and applications, both from a personal and professional perspective, need to sit on a central device. If they don't, employees will figure out a way around a company's systems to meet their communication and productivity needs.

Redesigning organisations

Deloitte's Human Capital Trends Report for South Africa 2016 found that executives see the redesign of organisations as a critical priority. The report states that companies are moving their structures from traditional, functional models toward interconnected, flexible networks of teams to become more agile and customer-focused.

This trend is fuelled by the need to adapt and innovate to stay closer to customers in the face of digital disruption, by changing talent demographics, including the influx of Millennials in the workforce, and the growing number of contract and part-time workers.

The need to communicate is always there and companies now do this through UC. However, the way we communicate is changing. With UC, presence status enables staff to know exactly what someone's current online status is. Having IM means staff don't have to escalate to a voice call as quickly as they would have in the past.

The 2016 edition of Deloitte's predictions for the technology, media and telecommunications (TMT) sectors states that while there is a decline in the proportion of people making voice calls on smartphones, IM has seen the most rapid uptake among consumers since 2012. The proportion of adults using IM has more than doubled from 27 percent in 2012 to 59 percent in 2015 and volume has increased from 7 trillion in 2012 to 43 trillion in 2015.

Impact of UC&C for SMEs

But what is the real impact of UC&C to SMEs with 50 to a 100 users?

UC&C enables mobility and efficiency, as staff are not required to come back to an office environment to be productive. They can function as long as they have internet connectivity.

As businesses expand into other regions and markets, a mobile workforce allows a business to have a very soft landing in a new territory, and there is no longer a requirement to acquire an office or hosting space for a new division that doesn't have a track record yet. A business can employ one or two people that work from home, allowing it to gauge the market and consider what can and can't be done.

Twenty-first century SMEs are required to have bold appetites for change. They need to say goodbye to legacy systems and embrace new technologies and processes that will enable them to improve their interactions with their customers.

UC's next step is to integrate enterprise messaging, cloud applications, contextual intelligence and other real-time communication and collaboration services, to empower teams to reach new levels of productivity from any network, device, and place.

Business owners and IT managers with the flexibility to adopt new technology now, will future-proof their companies for the next bout of change.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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