Unified communications and collaboration

Navigating the all-or-nothing misconception

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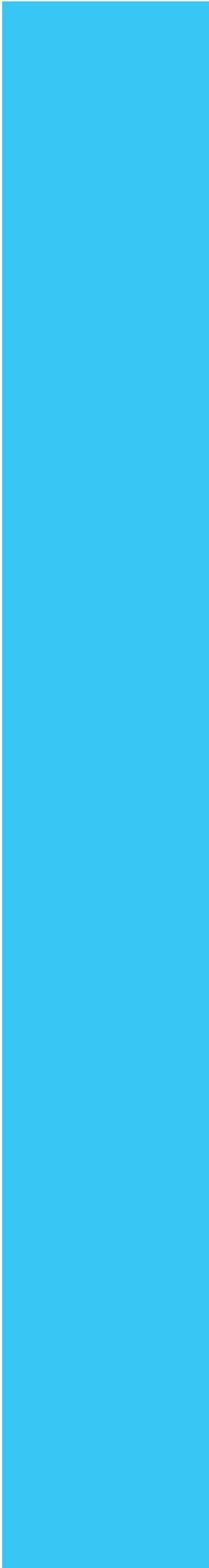
Summary

Let's try something. Stand up at your desk, or walk out of your office or jump on your instant messenger and ask two people to define Unified Communications and Collaboration (UC&C). What was the result? For most people in your shoes, the result is hearing multiple, sometimes disparate definitions of UC&C.

There's a good reason for that disconnect. But for our purposes, let's define UC&C in broad terms. UC&C is a common platform for communications, both internally and externally, within an enterprise. The components included in any UC&C solution — voice, IM, video and more — will vary from organization to organization. At any rate, UC&C brings all those communication lines together into a seamless integration for end users.

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The all-or-nothing misconception

Both external and internal end users sharing a communications infrastructure seems like a no-brainer for any enterprise with multiple branches. So why is it persistently a major headache for IT security and infrastructure teams? Here are two good reasons:

Many organizations still operate some of their communications using last century TDM infrastructure.

Employees and customers access the organization through multiple devices, on multiple networks, in multiple countries and time zones.

On the one hand, the network infrastructure team is trying to efficiently and cost-effectively migrate away from legacy systems to meet the expectations of modern business users and customers.

On the other hand, uprooting an operationally critical communications infrastructure that's been in place for decades can seem complicated and risky. It's a tall order for a number of internal stakeholders that, historically, don't have much downtime in any large enterprise.

The interisland roadway

Imagine your company is a group of islands, each with its own central government and communications infrastructure. With UC&C, these islands are connected by a unified network of interconnecting roadways, air routes and boat lines. Whichever way you need your information to travel, SIP can take care of it.

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Phasing UC&C into your enterprise

Migrating from traditional voice services to an IP-enabled solution is a multi-year project. If you don't want to end up stranded with a half-executed communications solution, it can be useful to consider the major phases:

Select a UC&C provider to match your organization's needs
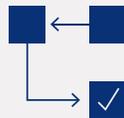
Establish a foundation for your UC&C strategy

Assess your enterprise's current state with your provider and design a transformation plan

Roll out SIP voice communications that will interact with an IP PBX or UC&C solution

Scale your UC&C services, rolling out at your own pace

Implement additional features and functionalities based on your communications requirements

Simply accessible

Remember the disparate definitions of UC&C that we discussed earlier? Chances are, one of these definitions included a tense reminder that updated technologies like UC&C are simply inaccessible to organizations maintaining legacy systems. Well, that's simply not true.

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With tools that allow legacy systems to integrate into the major UC&C applications, it's possible to bridge the gap between planning and final deployment while remaining fully operational. And in some cases, you might even find room for optimization during the transition.

Proving grounds

As with any new technology implementation, there's a learning curve. As you start to plug your organization into UC&C, you should begin by identifying a key user group that will help to test the limits of the new communications capabilities.

You might be tempted to evaluate your updated technology by rolling it out to IT security and infrastructure teams. That's a reasonable starting point, but consider the insights and internal support you will generate by using non-technical business units to prove the value of your new communications technology.

Completing the UC&C picture

The benefits of having an integrated communications infrastructure can only be fully realized once you've had a chance to define what UC&C truly means for your organization.

For instance, if you have a widely dispersed workforce, you will likely find value in applications that allow your employees to log in from various devices, identify when available and then seamlessly communicate and collaborate.

For a company with employees that are constantly on the move, a comprehensive suite of voice service applications that allows users to take their telephone numbers with them wherever they go will likely be an important piece of the picture. Whatever your needs and expectations, the right service provider will be able to tailor a UC&C service to your specific needs.

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SIP-enabled UC&C

Moving toward SIP services doesn't necessarily mean committing to UC&C. Establishing a SIP trunking solution, whether it's for a TDM-based legacy infrastructure or a more modern system, can unlock access to extensive standalone IP-enabled enterprise voice services.

Once you've transitioned to SIP, you'll have the option to unify your voice, presence, email, conferencing, security and other applications under a UC&C strategy.

But don't be fooled: It's SIP that enables UC&C, not the other way around. Attempting to establish a UC&C application without a SIP solution can result in an inefficient and cost-prohibitive infrastructure that won't scale.

Take the logical step

Despite all of the confusion about what UC&C represents, how it should be implemented and what its capabilities are, the truth is actually quite simple: UC&C is the logical next step for enterprise communications. And whichever way you look at it, failing to update your communication technologies is a surefire way to diminish your organization's operational and competitive capabilities.

Wherever you are in your journey to IP-enabled communications, Lumen has the resources to provide you with greater flexibility, enduring reliability and bolstered security.

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