

**\* FOCUS ON**  
UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

# The path to unified communications

EMAIL

FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN INCREASE THE EFFICIENCY  
OF YOUR TEAMS AND TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR  
WORKING DAY WITH UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

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BT's Ann Wood explains what unified communications is and how it enables teams to work more productively

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We take a look at the technology that delivers unified communications

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A search for more flexible voice communications led Lloydspharmacy to pilot Microsoft Exchange with BT

TEXT

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## 4 WAYS UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS CAN BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS

- 1 Business agility**  
Integrated communications are efficient and simple to use. Slicker team collaboration enables projects to progress quickly, irrespective of the geographic location of team members.
- 2 Individual empowerment**  
Individuals can prioritise and select communications to respond to, thereby avoiding unnecessary distractions and allowing a much greater focus on core activities.
- 3 Cost savings**  
Companies using integrated voice and web conferencing reported a 30 per cent reduction in conferencing expenses by making integrated conferencing facilities available in and out of office\*.
- 4 Productivity gains**  
Organisations using unified messaging have reported that employees saved 43 minutes a day from more efficient message management; mobile workers saved 55 minutes a day\*.

\*Source: Unified Communications Applications: Uses and Benefits, Sage Research Dec 2006.

### > Moving towards unified communications

Communication is key to business success. And unified communications is all about putting people – and their communications needs – at the centre of things, rather than technology.

As you may know, unified communications is not a product in itself. Rather, it is a range of solutions that can be tailored to deliver immediate benefits to your business in terms of cost, flexibility and increased productivity.

**Tailored to your need**  
The ultimate unified communications system would enable its end users to specify by what method they want to be contacted – be that

Instant Messaging, email, text or phone. These systems are sufficiently advanced that, if you see that your colleagues are available, you can organise a conference call at the click of a button.

However, most companies do not need such a comprehensive system at present, or aren't ready for the investment such a system refresh might entail. But they do require an efficient, cost-effective way to organise their communications now.

**Smarter working**  
For example, many businesses will have an under-used fax

machine with its own dedicated line. Although it is used less and less these days, it is still necessary as a means of contact with certain customers and suppliers. If you upgrade and integrate the fax to the same system as your telephony and computers, not only will you cut costs but you will also improve efficiency as you can send and receive a fax direct to your desktop. No more waiting by the fax machine for a vital document – it's delivered directly to the person who needs it.

As your business evolves you may start to need more advanced systems. Again, there

are solutions that will work with what you already have and still bring tangible benefits.

**Making life easier**  
For example, Microsoft provides a server that can integrate Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) into an existing telephony infrastructure. It enables you to launch a phone call by clicking on another user's name in Microsoft Office. No more searching for telephone numbers and, crucially, no need to throw out your current system.

For more on this type of communications technology, see the Lloydsparmacy case study on page 12.

# Stay in touch

Productivity falls when team members can't get hold of each other, but unified communications can help, says BT's Ann Wood



Each week, a staggering 56 per cent of employees are unable to contact co-workers on their first attempt, according to findings from Sage Research. The burning questions that this figure raises are: what damage are those missed or delayed conversations doing to your business? And can your business afford them?

This is where unified communications can help to make all the difference. It lets you integrate your applications, including telephone, Instant Messaging (IM), email, text, web and video conferencing, on a single platform or device. This means staff can contact anyone else in the business from a centralised desktop contacts list and choose the best communications channel with which to reach them.

One of the key technologies, Presence, allows your team to view the status of each staff member – who's available, and the best way to contact them. 'I might be in a meeting and find I have four voicemails and one call that comes up as private,' explains Ann Wood, BT's general manager of networked IT. 'Presence will display "Ann is on the phone now" and indicate as soon as I'm available.'

#### THE END OF TRADING VOICEMAILS?

The value of knowing when people are available and how to reach them is key in cutting out delay and damage to business processes. In fact, organisations using unified communications have reportedly saved an average of 32 minutes per employee, per day.

Wood says unified communications can

be taken up according to a company's requirements. 'It's simply about looking at what's there and not chucking everything in the bin and starting again.' There are technology solutions available that will work with your current telephony system delivering tangible and immediate business benefits. (See Moving towards unified communications, above.) It's a question of sitting down and working out what your business priorities are.

#### BRINGING ORDER AND SAVING COSTS

'For a lot of customers trialling it now, unified communications gives them some order to their communication. It saves money too,' Wood points out. For example, IM is personal and instant and it can save you

making a mobile phone call. Online collaboration, which gives unified communications users a shared workspace, can save costs and travel, and increase productivity as people work from home.

'Unified communications applications enable smarter communication,' says a spokesperson for Sage Research. 'Employees can consult the best method for reaching co-workers before initiating contact, thereby improving efficiency in their interactions with others.'

Put simply, unified communications can immediately save your business time and money as employees are more productive and communicate faster and more effectively. So, maybe it's time you thought about keeping your business talking.