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Communications
Cloud

How to Solve the Enterprise Communications Crisis with an Open Cloud Strategy

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There is a crisis in enterprise communications and collaboration, due in large part to the diversity of technology and application silos that create user complexity and confusion. As cloud and mobile become the convergence points for enterprise communications and collaboration, enterprise planners have to focus on a global open cloud strategy to facilitate effective internal and external collaborative business workflows.

Key Findings

- By 2020, over 60% of enterprises will adopt cloud unified communications and collaboration (UCC).

- As on-premises PBX solution contracts end, 2017 will see a large number of businesses make the move to the cloud.

- Over 90 percent of business leaders rank collaboration as a top priority.

- Business users are circumventing their IT departments by using a variety of third-party tools for team communications and collaboration. The buying center for communications and collaboration is increasingly shifting from IT to line-of-business.

- Traditional UC systems frustrate the promise of truly unified communications and collaboration, and lack integration into key business applications and workflows. Our research shows that 75 percent of on-premises UC deployment initiatives fail due to this.

- Integrating cloud-based communications into business applications and workflows will increase efficiency and improve the customer experience.

- Having the right collaboration tools in place to support various team collaborative interactions with internal and external participants helps increase productivity and reduce costs throughout the organization.

- Open cloud communications strategies enable conversational experiences that free up information silos in business workflows and seamlessly connect people, data and applications.

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Recommendations

- Understand user requirements, workforce work patterns and customer preferences in order to develop effective communications and collaboration strategies.

- Map communications and collaboration capabilities to actual business use cases.

- Evaluate open cloud communications approaches that allow integration via APIs into a broad range of mission-critical business applications.

- Ensure that cloud solutions support interoperability with disparate communications and collaboration tools and applications.

- Demand a single, global, open cloud framework that unifies communications, collaboration, contact center, business applications, and real-time analytics and is interoperable across clouds.

Analysis

Over 90 percent of business leaders rank communications and collaboration as a top priority. In fact, the number one goal cited by IT departments for investments in unified communications and collaboration (UCC) technologies is to improve internal and external communications and collaboration. However, UCC technology is valuable only when it's applied to how people work, the workflows they are involved in and what they are trying to accomplish. Over 95 percent of employees and business executives believe lack of effective communications negatively impacts team alignment and project outcomes.

Our research shows that 75 percent of on-premises UC deployment initiatives fail. The culprit is frequently poor end-user adoption due to workflow integration and interoperability problems. Most end users view their UC tools as "walled gardens" that do not provide a compelling value proposition, and many bypass them in favor of ad hoc collaboration tools such as cloud-based team messaging apps to get their jobs done.

An open cloud strategy that combines UCC services, persistent chat and messaging, Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS), business application integration, real-time analytics, and interoperability across clouds can address many problems that beset enterprise communications, such as:

- Low user adoption rates

- Disparate silos and fragmentation

- Poor interoperability and integration

- Shadow IT and rogue accounts

- Compliance issues and lack of accountability

Emerging Trends and Market Dynamics

The cloud is having a tremendous impact on communications and collaboration technology providers as well as enterprises. By 2020, over 60% of enterprises will adopt cloud UCC services. Enterprises that want to achieve a competitive advantage by helping their workforce interact more effectively to improve the customer experience are using cloud communications and collaboration as an enabler.

A combination of cloud-driven forces is now coming together to cause a paradigm shift in enterprise communications and collaboration. The emerging mobile team messaging and collaboration application space is converging with cloud UCC capabilities to form a broad-reaching extensible platform, wherein communications capabilities can be embedded into any application and workflow.

We use communications applications daily to collaborate with team members and get our work done. What the cloud brings is scale, flexibility, mobility and advanced communications features that are easily accessible from anywhere and anytime. Cloud approaches also enable easier deployment of communications tools in enterprises. It is in this regard, where business users will reap a myriad of benefits. Cloud communications technologies can integrate with other cloud business applications such as Salesforce CRM, to enable a high level of customer intelligence and insights from analytics that improve the customer experience.

Increasingly, businesses are shifting focus from command and control to become conversational enterprises. In this new environment, there will be a more targeted focus on conversational experiences for internal employees and customers and partners. There is a communications and collaboration continuum that only an open cloud approach can support. Traditional UC offerings focus primarily on a communications session that has a start and ending. Conversational interfaces and experiences powered by the cloud will support the entire communications and collaboration lifecycle that requires contextual data, information and the complete collaborative process to be persistent and captured to support better business decision making. It will include the internal and external people for an enterprise involved in key business workflows.

This brings enterprise communications and collaboration to a crossroad, with traditional methods and tools being challenged and disregarded for newer, more flexible, cloud-based and mobile first approaches. Cloud and mobile have become the convergence point whereby access to tools and information have been democratized. This trend, that has impacted people's personal and consumer lives has now raised expectations in the workplace for how individuals and teams want to work and the tools they need to get their jobs done.

Enterprises now have to deal with an extended workforce that is geographically dispersed and includes external partners, contractors and suppliers. This requires a dedicated overall collaboration workplace strategy. People management strategies also will need to be adjusted and updated to reflect this new dynamic workplace.

External collaboration is a natural part of doing business, and doing it successfully can improve your bottom line. This is because partners, suppliers and customers outside the company hold crucial information that can affect your company's finances positively or negatively, depending on how it is used—or misused.

Enterprise communications and collaboration strategies have to be focused on people and the business workflows they are involved in. The technology needs to be collaborative and enable the specific business processes that people care about. The cloud approach has to be centered on open APIs so that communications services can be customized to match specific business needs.

The Lack of Interoperability

A big roadblock to enterprise communications and collaboration has been the lack of interoperability between disparate platforms and systems. Despite many great technical innovations, most UCC offerings have failed to give users full contextual collaboration, or even provide much native integration or interoperability with other platforms and systems. This has especially hampered external collaboration with business partners and customers.

Initially, early enterprise communications and collaboration systems were designed to solve the intra-enterprise problem. None of these predominantly on-premises solutions were designed to effectively operate between enterprises. The result is a collaboration "archipelago" – thousands of islands that are completely disconnected from each other. We lack an open, standards-based architecture that eliminates these silos and connects them together in a coherent way.

However, rather than thinking through the interconnection issue completely, many UCC providers rushed to build their own proprietary cloud solutions – simply replacing isolated islands with isolated clouds. While the cloud has emerged as a promising vehicle to solve the enterprise communications crisis, proprietary platforms are a roadblock to true interoperability.

Many business leaders lament the fact that their collaboration tools are separate from their business applications. For example, users may have different IDs in their SAP or Salesforce applications than they have in their collaboration applications; they have to leave their business applications to access collaboration capabilities. This is a major barrier and requires too much context switching to be truly effective.

The Shift to Line-of-Business Buyers

As the buying centers for communications and collaboration technology expands to business units, there needs to be an ever-tighter synergy among all lines of business (including IT). This overall shift to business buyers means a sharper focus on business outcomes. Collaboration has to be applied to specific business needs and outcomes. Therefore, it has to be measured against key performance indicators (KPIs).

Managing the content associated with business processes, including the work product generated by collaboration, is also very important and must be a part of the overall communications and collaboration strategy. It's important not only that collaboration be appropriately integrated into process workflows, but also that all the inputs for an interaction be up-to-date and available to the participants, and that the outcome be instantiated as work product and inserted into the workflow afterward.

The focus on measuring the value of collaboration based on its outcome increases the need for analytics. Insight about people, data, relationships and behaviors can lead to better decisions in the context of a business process. Using algorithms and big data to automate recommendations for better decisions and actions will see collaboration applications get smarter over time.

The Business Benefits of Open Cloud

An open cloud approach holds great promise for enabling secure communications and collaboration between internal and external constituents. It has to be based on open standards and open APIs so that it is extensible. It will enable deeper integration into business applications via APIs and serve as a connector between systems.

For example, as business strategies pivot to become more customer-centric, communications and collaboration processes related to the customer experience like CRM becomes critical. Integration with CRMs such as Salesforce, NetSuite and Zendesk will seamlessly link agents with customer data in real time to better serve customers. Information gathering will be streamlined as agents collaborate internally to ensure that customers interact with the right people. Tools like chatbots will help to automate this process and create better conversational experiences for employees and customers.

With the surge in team messaging and collaboration apps such as Slack, HipChat and Zinc, enterprises are now flooded with application proliferation and fragmentation that is hard to manage and govern securely. The interoperability problem that plagued UCC also is present here. None of these apps can speak to each other. There is valuable interaction data in all of these application silos, but much of it is inaccessible. It cannot be reliably curated, leveraged by other apps, or fed back into enterprise workflows for subsequent reuse.

Businesses need a more open approach that connects these applications elegantly and keeps collaborative interactions in context. Planners should ensure that cloud communications requirements include integration and connectivity across a broad range of applications.

Technically, open cloud communications solutions should support all business units and functions, such as Sales, Marketing, HR and Finance with interoperability capabilities that span the full UCC spectrum along with Contact Center, analytics, and open APIs for application integration.

For businesses, an open cloud approach can save significant time and cost in automating workflows and integrating communications into business processes. This can improve not only productivity, but also user satisfaction and the customer experience.

Conclusion: Connections and Conversations in the Digital Workplace

Enterprises are being disrupted by digital technologies. Business leaders are being tasked to develop digital workplace transformation strategies that focus on people and how they interact to get their work done. The shift towards conversational interfaces and experiences places more emphasis on open lines of communication with customers, employees and partners in the ecosystem. A major driver for the rise of chat-based messaging applications is a critical need to enable collaborative business processes and improve customer engagement by simplifying communications.

Ultimately we are moving towards a conversational enterprise where B2B, B2C and B2E delineations blur and give way to secure, information-enabled people-to-people communications across a collaboration continuum. Cloud communications will be instrumental in building intelligent interfaces to support conversational experiences across clouds and applications for employees, partners and customers.

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| The statistics cited in this report are based on November 2016 primary research conducted by InFlow Analysis with 200 global participants from the US, Europe, Asia-Pacific and Latin America.

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