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# Making the UCaaS Transition Your Transition

As the enterprise communications business moves from telephony to unified communications and collaboration, UCaaS providers can capitalize on this transition by knowing their customers.

**By Michael Finneran**

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## About the Author



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## Making the UCaaS Transition Your Transition

**T**he enterprise communications market is undergoing a fundamental shift in terms of technology, system capabilities and delivery mechanisms. For almost 100 years, business communications (at least the part that wasn't done by mail) revolved around the idea of buying and maintaining a single-purpose voice communications system with its own separate wiring plant and user devices. All of that has now gone by the wayside.

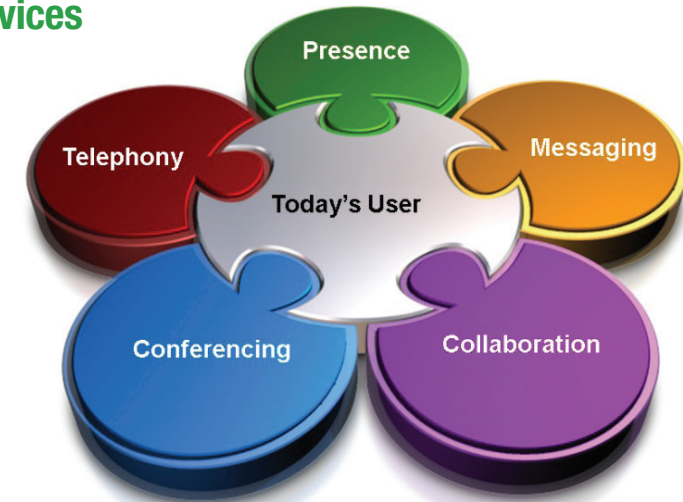
Businesses no longer want to invest in limited-function equipment that not only is expensive to maintain but addresses only a fraction of the communications capabilities users expect today. While the telephone remains a constant in business communications, business users need the ability to exchange texts and collaborate via audio and, increasingly, videoconferences, and that includes the ability to share and modify content through screen sharing and whiteboards. Most importantly, key personnel are increasingly mobile, so they need access to these capabilities continuously through whatever device(s) and networks they have available.

The need to support this expanding range of capabilities has fueled the transition of the enterprise communications business from telephony to unified communications and collaboration (UC&C). Traditional voice suppliers have rushed to incorporate UC&C and mobility into their offerings, but the result has been a market crowded with competitors, all of whom seem to be selling largely indistinguishable solutions.

### And Now the Cloud

While the advent of UC&C has turned the industry on its head, the business is getting an even bigger shock in how these services will be delivered going forward.

### UC&C: Users Want More Than Just Telephony Services



Source: ezTalks

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The market for business services has been reshaped by the overall recognition that companies have gotten too involved in delivering technology services that are not core to their success. If your business is selling buttons, broccoli or beer, why do you need to know how to run a telephone system? This fundamental idea has caused businesses to reconsider countless specialty services that they have traditionally provided internally, and often they choose to outsource those services to specialists.

One very important (and very expensive) service that businesses have

been providing is computing and communications. As companies such as Amazon, Microsoft and IBM have begun offering computing and data storage capabilities in the form of a cloud-based service, more and more companies have chosen to outsource those functions. Given the changing service mix and ongoing support requirements, UC&C was a natural candidate to outsource. The traditional premises equipment suppliers jumped on this bandwagon, and they were joined by any number of startups that could offer UC&C as a service (UCaaS).

For communications systems integrators (SIs), this environment produces a multifaceted business challenge. They must now offer a much richer set of communications and collaboration services and be prepared to deliver them in the form of a cloud-based service. Those challenges pale, however, to the bigger task of standing out in a crowded market and differentiating themselves from the dozens of other suppliers hawking what at first glance appear to be remarkably similar offerings.

This is the cruel reality SIs have to live with today. The key to success in this complex business environment will be to capitalize on this transition and to take ownership of your customer relationships.

## Riding the Wave of Change

Businesspeople desperately need tools that will help them be productive and ultimately

## Mobile work applications are redefining “office hours”

As a result of the continued proliferation and rapid adoption of mobile applications, employees are constantly on-th-go and getting work done outside of the office. Mobility no longer means access to just email and mobile phone service - it now includes everything from chat, to video conferencing, to file sharing, to project management.



Source: Intermedia's 2018 Workplace Communications Report

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be successful in the modern business environment. Unlike generations before them, the people entering the workforce today fully embrace technology and look to make use of that technology in their business lives the way they have embraced it in their personal lives. In cooperation with Branded Research Inc., Intermedia commissioned an extensive study of workplace technology and how companies can utilize that technology to attract talent and execute on business strategy.

What that study brought into clear focus was that technology counts heavily in business success. Fully two-thirds of users felt that mobile apps allowed them to be more efficient, and an even higher percentage (71%) indicated that mobile apps gave them peace of mind regarding where they stood on their various work projects. And 77% of organizational leaders shared their view on the productivity benefits of mobile apps.

Clearly, next-gen workers are redefining the lines between work and personal life, and mobile apps

help them manage that duopoly. This balance is seen in the 51% who use their daily commute time to check emails, make calls and get a running start on the day. However, 72% report they limit the number of work apps on their mobile phones to keep from being overwhelmed and to maintain that all-important work-life balance.

The study also found that businesspeople are expanding the range of communications tools they employ. Already, 20% of knowledge workers use video daily, and the increased use of video

is also key to maintaining that work-life balance. Some 75% of organizational leaders say their work travel has been reduced as a result of expanded videoconferencing capabilities.

Surprisingly, despite all of the newer consumer-driven communications capabilities coming online, email remains critically important. Fully 87% of respondents agreed that email remains the primary mode of communication within their organizations. For systems integrators, that means that whatever forms of real-time or near-real-time

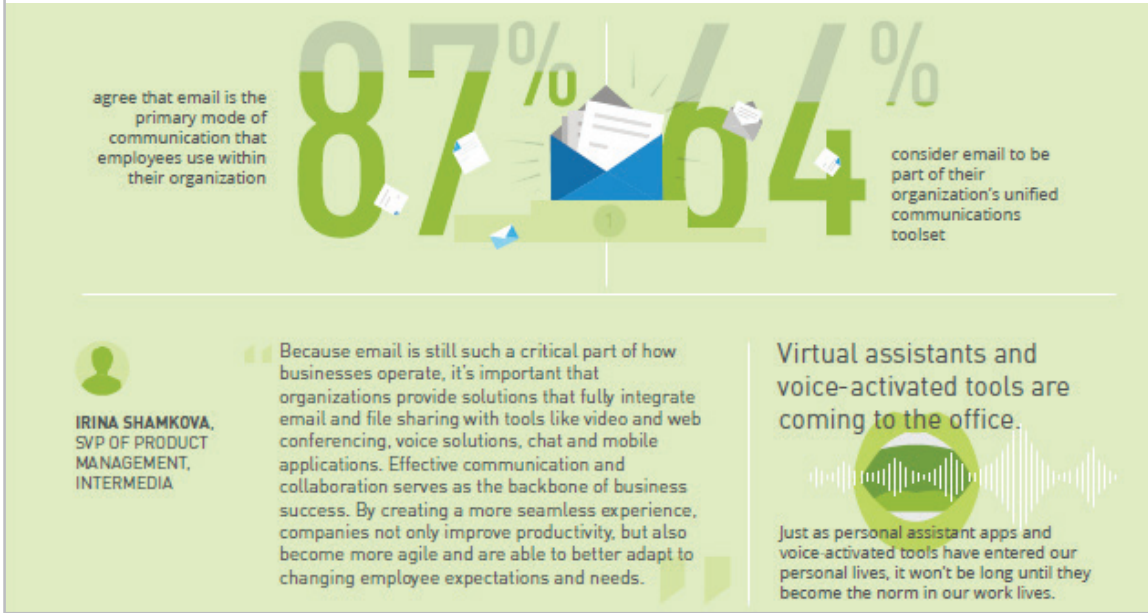
communications they offer, it will be critical that they integrate seamlessly with the core email capability.

The consumer mobile experience has undoubtedly had an impact on how this new generation of businesspeople tackle their work responsibilities. Clearly, those users view access to these types of tools in their business lives as key to their success. Email will still be among their list of tools, but all of these various elements must work together simply and seamlessly so that the business gets the full value of what they have to offer.

For systems integrators, the key to selling in this space will be to show how investing in their technology pays off in business results.

## Email still reigns as a high-value communication and collaboration tool

While tools like chat and video conferencing have become more prevalent, email isn't going away.



Source: Intermedia's 2018 Workplace Communications Report

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## Differentiation Means Owning the Customer Relationship

These research results reinforce the overall recognition that consumer mobile technologies have shaped how users adopt technology and now use it to be more productive at work while maintaining a critical work-life balance.

Business leaders have embraced the idea that computer and communication technologies will be key in fostering business success, but the big question for systems integrators is how to get those business leaders to choose their particular solution. The answer to that problem is to understand the customer's needs and to continue to meet those needs.

For some of the businesses, collaboration

doesn't fit into their workflows. However, they may emphasize the importance of continuously available voice service. In reality, reliable voice service is an important requirement in almost every business. When faced with a voice-focused prospect, one solution for the SI would be to pitch the most basic voice capability assuming that the key determining factor will be price.

However, if they dig a little deeper, the SI might find that the customer's definition of "voice" involves not only desk phones but the requirement to have voice access on their mobile devices. Of course, once you introduce mobile integration into the mix, this is no longer a "simple voice sale."

The key is to get customers talking about what they need to run their business. Once you get them talking about the need to keep their key people accessible regardless of where they happen to be, it's an easy matter to move the conversation to the other types of data or service access they may need while on the go. It could very well be that the customer hasn't looked beyond extending voice access to mobile users because it simply didn't think anything else was possible.

The important thing to recognize is that you're not just answering a specific need in the customer's business, you're building the relationship. The key to delivering "value" is showing how what you have makes their business more efficient and ultimately more successful.

## Moving Up the Value Chain

In the UCaaS market, building that customer relationship is more than just "closing the sale." There are literally dozens of vendors pushing UCaaS solutions, so systems integrators need a well-thought-out strategy to separate themselves from the crowd. One of the drawbacks of the "as a service" model is that meaningful product differentiation becomes harder and harder to establish.

While it may be an old saw, in the UCaaS environment the idea of "knowing your customer" becomes all the more important. If a customer simply wants to buy a "bag of capabilities," there are plenty of bags available. Separating your offering from all of those other bags will depend on understanding how your customer's business operates, knowing where communications and possibly collaboration fit in, and providing the capabilities they need to achieve their business objectives.

The only way to develop that essential understanding is by talking to customers, developing a real understanding of their business and building those relationships. You do require a solid, reliable product that "checks all of the boxes," but that is table stakes. The key in winning and, importantly, keeping customers in a UCaaS environment is making the service, and with it, the customer relationships, your own.

## Conclusion

Long-term business success depends on building and managing relationships. While it doesn't show up on the balance sheet, customer relationships may be one of the biggest assets you own. The systems integrators that survive and thrive in this new environment will be those who recognize the importance of those relationships and develop meaningful programs aimed at building and maintaining them.

### Office workers consider video conferencing a workplace necessity

Video conferencing is no longer just a "nice-to-have." In fact, more than one-in-four survey respondents say they would not take a position if that company didn't offer that and other tools:



Source: Intermedia's 2018 Workplace Communications Report

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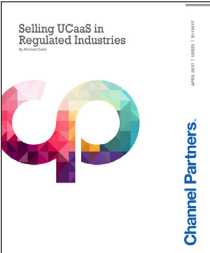
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