

OPTIMIZING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS IN A RECESSION

HOW TO DRIVE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES WITH COMMUNICATIONS SOLUTIONS AND TECHNOLOGIES

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

When it comes to operations, all businesses have common objectives. Particularly in difficult times, they are all striving to reduce costs and manage existing ones, improve productivity and operate more efficiently. To stay competitive, they must increase sales and profits, and attract and retain the best people. While these are just a handful of objectives, it seems like an overwhelming list alongside tight budgets and a down economy. As companies struggle to be profitable, the right communications technologies and strategy can be a big factor in achieving these goals. This paper takes a look at how to best optimize communications during a recession by using IP telephony, wireless technology and conferencing solutions to drive greater business value and productivity on a minimal budget. You will also learn seven tactics for driving operational efficiencies using your telecommunications solutions.

"You should think about communications not as an expense but as an investment, and find strategic ways to leverage your communications solutions in your daily operations."

— Jon Arnold, Principal, J Arnold & Associates and Co-Founder, IP Communications Insights

COMMUNICATIONS: AN EXPENSE OR AN INVESTMENT?

Success in using communications services to achieve business objectives depends on your perspective. Are they an expense or an investment? If you view communications as an expense, you are likely to purchase IP-based solutions to replicate legacy technology, but at a lower cost. This approach is problematic, because it leads to a network-centric infrastructure that is divided into silos or point solutions and lacks the integration that leads to bigger cost savings and productivity gains. However, if you view communications as a strategic investment, you are likely to embrace new IP-based services that can add value to your business. And don't think that investment equals capital. Service providers have created solutions to fit customers' financial needs, from standard equipment purchases through all-inclusive monthly fee arrangements. Regardless of the contractual setup, in the long run an integrated solution will reduce costs while providing productivity gains that are invaluable. For example, a unified communications solution brings services together in an efficient manner, creating synergies between voice, data, video and applications that cannot be achieved in a silo-based approach.

To really leverage communications to drive operational efficiencies and create business value, some knowledge about what an integrated communications strategy can do for your business and what components you can incorporate that best address your unique business needs is necessary.

FOUR KEYS TO SUCCESS

How you communicate with team members, customers, partners and vendors is a critical aspect of successful business operations. Businesses who want to improve communications and experience productivity gains should focus on four key areas:

- Voice over IP (VoIP) telephony
- Mobility
- Conferencing
- New Applications

By focusing on these four areas, businesses can improve collaboration and decision-making, shorten product development cycles and reduce costs.

Voice Over IP (VoIP) Telephony

Sometimes called broadband telephony or Internet telephony, VoIP is the delivery of voice communications over an IP network. Typically VoIP systems interface with the traditional telephony network (PSTN) to allow for transparent communications over the phone. There are many benefits associated with VoIP. Removing network complexity reduces the time IT staff must spend managing and maintaining disparate systems. While the traditional phone companies charge for features like call waiting and caller ID, many VoIP service providers offer these as standard with their packages, as well as call forwarding, call blocking, voicemail and other advanced features. From a total cost of ownership perspective, there's likely a large cost savings.

VoIP also enables integration with other communications vehicles, such as email, improving worker productivity and empowering remote and mobile workers with the same features and capabilities they have in the office. Depending on how their VoIP network is set up, users can make calls from around the world wherever there is high-speed Internet access. Finally, administrators can more easily and flexibly provision new phones and services to employees, reducing the need for truck rolls.

Mobility

Mobility is another key enabler in today's global business environment. To be productive, telecommuters and mobile workers need access to the same applications and services as those at headquarters. Employees need to stay connected while traveling to diverse geographical locations. Cell phone access is not enough—remote and mobile workers use a wide variety of end devices to access corporate resources, applications and services.

Mobility services enable the digital lifestyle. Communications solutions that enable greater mobility help to attract and retain employees who are trying to strike more of a balance between work and other aspects of their lives with a more flexible work environment. Solutions that enable mobile broadband and fixed-mobile convergence help take mobility well beyond everyday telephony and extend the desktop beyond the office to address this demand—while also making it easier for IT to manage remote access.

Conferencing

Conferencing of all types—from simple voice conferencing solutions—to the fast-growing use of Web-based services like web conferencing—makes interactive meetings between people at two or more locations possible and cost-effective via simultaneous two-way video and audio transmissions over IP. Today's conferencing options are accessible and user-friendly, and can create a high-quality, rich environment for both internal and external communications. TelePresence is an immersive, high-end solution, but it can be costly. More affordable solutions offer good quality on a single screen, and a 360 degree view of the room. There are also desktop solutions, some of which are free, and many are hosted to provide better quality. Finally, video conferencing on smart phones offer portability, letting you hold interactive conferences while you're on the road. Given the global nature of today's business environment, conferencing enables efficiencies in collaboration and travel, and supports "green" initiatives, which may lead to additional cost savings.

Applications

The convergence of voice and data networks has also led to application convergence, making way for new capabilities never before possible and taking communications beyond traditional voice and data transmission. Now, integrations between voice and Web services can add tremendous value by reducing friction in everyday business processes. IP Telephony enables new applications such as Web-enabled call centers, collaborative white boarding, remote telecommuting, and personal productivity applications such as "follow-me" services and unified message handling.

"Mashups," which are highly customizable applications for vertical markets and customer segments, can be created to provide the exact functionality needed. A mashup can be used to insert voice capabilities into data-based processes. Click to dial is one example. Or, a mashup can be created to work with a calendar application to automatically call meeting participants and alert them to a time or location change for a meeting. Blogs and wikis also leverage convergence. These and other new applications will fundamentally change the way we communicate and work.

Web 2.0 applications are fast and inexpensive to deploy, and can be designed to incorporate new communications vehicles such as social networking sites like Twitter, which are promising big benefits when well-implemented. For example, IT departments can use social networking as a business tool to distribute information and application updates to employees, and respond to helpdesk inquiries to reduce helpdesk calls and hours spent troubleshooting. Such sites can help employees collaborate more efficiently and facilitate efficient knowledge sharing among teams. Web 2.0 applications speak the language of today's workforce and can deliver rapid IT TCO

TECHNOLOGIES THAT DRIVE BUSINESS VALUE

Now that we've explored four of the key trends in communications, let's take a look at the technologies behind those trends and what companies should implement to enable today's most efficient communications strategies.

As you continue to evolve your communications strategies and solution, SIP trunking, Unified Communications, hosted services and cloud computing models will help make your business more competitive and improve the TCO of your communications infrastructure.

End-to-End IP with SIP Trunking

Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) trunking is the use of VoIP to facilitate the connection of a private branch exchange (PBX) to the Internet, which replaces the conventional telephone trunk and allows you to communicate with fixed and mobile telephone subscribers anywhere. SIP trunking lets you converge local, long-distance and broadband Internet services onto a single circuit with dynamic bandwidth allocation, ensuring service levels for business-grade reliability and performance. Intra-company calling using new communications vehicles like chat and instant messaging offers a significant cost benefit when all locations are on a SIP trunk. Additionally, SIP trunking supports new presence applications, which provides awareness of the location and availability of employees via email and conferencing programs, further improving productivity among teams and employees. SIP trunking also increases scalability; adding new SIP trunks is easy and fast, and can be installed remotely to eliminate labor costs and maintenance.

Unified Communications

Today's workforce is bombarded with an overload of communications—instant messages, voicemails, emails, text messages. UC provides an integration solution across all modes of communication in a single environment, providing tremendous cost savings in terms of deployment, consolidation and management, as well as simplifying everyday communications between employees, teams and partners. It offers a flexible deployment model; you can deploy what you need now and gradually add locations and features as your business evolves. Once deployed, UC simplifies provisioning and administration. Moves, adds and changes to the communications infrastructure can be completed from a central location over the web. UC enables centralized troubleshooting, enabling administrators to rapidly find and fix problems with voice transmission. You gain access to a common view of the network for both voice and data traffic, which eliminates complexity while offering greater visibility.

Hosted Services and Cloud Computing

The next big wave in IT, Cloud computing simplifies network management and provides a quick solution for smaller companies to gain access to more advanced, feature-rich applications in an affordable way. Cloud computing supports the most powerful drivers for Web 2.0 such as virtualization, collaboration, knowledge management and content distribution.

In the cloud, hosted services provide a practical and viable way for businesses with limited IT resources to deploy new applications. Using hosted services lets you easily scale those services up or down, often without any capital expense or

idle servers to manage. The alternative is to manage services internally, which leads to irregular maintenance costs and periodic upgrades that take time away from business critical activities. A service provider can deliver the most current updates and features while removing the need for support and maintenance. Disaster recovery is another benefit; if your services are hosted remotely at a service provider's datacenter, you minimize the risk of losing data if something happens to your primary location.

TAKE THE WHEEL

So what does all this mean? Essentially, we all have to do more with less—that is, increase service and performance while keeping the budget in check. The changing economy has forced companies to reinvent their communications strategies to cut costs and be more efficient. If you haven't made a change in the last five years in the way you communicate with employees and clients, you're really behind. The good news is that the long list of options, technologies, solutions and deployment scenarios puts you in the driver's seat. Consider using these seven tactics to drive productivity and cost savings in a down—or any—economy.

Tactic 1: Audit monthly costs. It is critical to understand the services you're receiving and the associated costs. An audit of your current number of lines, trunks and connects and how much you spend on this infrastructure will help you discover inefficiencies. Most likely, you are spending 10-15% more than you need to on your communications. An audit will provide a prescription of the actual services you need to run your business, optimized rate plans with existing vendors and a recommendation to contract out services for additional discounts.

Tactic 2: Determine your options. Once you understand your actual service requirements, you should compare your service to the current industry standards. This will help you understand whether or not you're getting a good deal from your service provider. Your provider may be able to suggest alternative service options that provide similar or identical functions, but cost less.

Tactic 3: Check the competitive market. After you discover your options, evaluate competing vendors. Many vendors offer similar products at different price points. The market price for most communications services and products has dropped regularly quarter-over-quarter, especially Internet connectivity, and there are more options than ever. Make sure you're getting the best deal possible.

Tactic 4: Deploy cost-savings alternatives. An example of a cost-savings alternative is a meeting and conferencing solution. These allow you to spend less time on the road and more time with clients, reducing travel expenses and increasing productivity. Webinars are another service that help you reach a wide audience cost-effectively. Web tools and social networking sites can be used for training and knowledge sharing to further defer costs.

Tactic 5: Tele-working. Redefine your work environment going forward by enabling employees to work remotely. Mobility solutions will enable the "virtual office," helping to cut costs and further improve workforce productivity, while providing quality of life to employees that will help with recruitment and retention. With the appropriate tools in place, a company can reduce office space requirements by up to two-thirds, simply by letting employees work remotely.

Tactic 6: Develop your online presence. A focused Web development effort can help you find more potential clients and expand your business. Your website is a strategic external communications tool that helps expand your presence globally, sell into your target demographic and provide customers with an always-open business front without increased personnel expenses. Using keyword search optimization to hone your Web communications can enhance search engine prioritization so your message reaches your target audience. Web applications can be used internally to simplify and enhance collaboration and information sharing, unify globally diverse teams and speed project completion.

Tactic 7: Be local nationwide. In addition to a global Web presence, you can establish a local presence across the country by obtaining local phone numbers that ring into your office from anywhere and publishing those local numbers in the white pages.

Understanding the emerging technologies and how they can be used to improve operations, productivity and efficiency across your business is critical to implementing a sound strategy. Remember to consider communications an investment, rather than an expense, so you can begin to understand how to leverage communications strategically now and well into the future.

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with Qwest Business Solutions®



Qwest is focused on helping you work smarter, with services that leverage the latest technology and award-winning support. Here are a few solutions that can address the issues covered in this solutions brief:

Qwest iQ Unify™. Is a managed¹ voice and data solution that combines the Qwest iQ® Integrated Access Package with the Cisco Unified Communications IP PBX (UC520). It brings together local and long distance voice and data in a single, affordable platform with an extensive feature set including unified messaging², auto attendant, and conferencing.

Managed IP Communications. Is a managed CPE-based solution composed of IP Telephony, Voice Mail/ Unified Messaging, Wireless LAN, IP Contact Center, and paging.

Qwest iQ® Integrated Access Package. Simplify your voice and data networks onto a single circuit that dynamically allocates bandwidth between voice calls and data traffic over an Internet connection.

Qwest Conferencing. Fully integrates audio and Web conferencing into one intuitive interface, using patented technology to ensure that audio and Web are completely synchronized. Manage your conferences with simple point-and-click commands. All you need is a computer, Internet connectivity and a telephone

Qwest Managed Applications. Are you ready for business? Not just open doors—but open for communication via e-mail and through Web sites? With Qwest Managed Applications you can select from Qwest Web Mail, Hosted Exchange®, Microsoft SharePoint®, e-commerce capabilities and storage space at affordable prices.

WHY QWEST

Qwest delivers reliable, scalable data and voice networking solutions, across one of the largest U.S. fiber footprints. Qwest serves businesses of all sizes, ranging from small business to 95 percent of Fortune 500 companies, with industry-leading SLAs and world-class customer service.

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¹ Management includes installation, activation, maintenance, monitoring, and change management.

² Unified messaging is provided with the Cisco® Communication Manager Express features. The Microsoft® Office Outlook integration application is loaded via a CD-ROM that comes with the Cisco IP PBX UC520 device.