



Building tomorrow's collaborative workplace with today's technology.

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Imagine a workforce with instantaneous access to critical information — in whatever format it's needed, wherever it's needed. Also imagine a workplace where all communications tools converge to provide employee connections that increase individual and team productivity. And, what if you could bring it all together connecting people to people and people to information seamlessly? This "workplace utopia" doesn't require years of planning and millions of dollars in IT investments. In fact, it's an initiative most organizations can achieve in the near-term with technology already in place.

Social Networks: A Model for Business

The explosion of social networking technologies has made communications easier and more instantaneous than ever before. On a consumer level, users connect when and how they want through technologies and applications such as Facebook, LinkedIn, text messaging, instant messaging and e-mail.

Businesses, in essence, are also social networks and use similar, collaborative technologies to connect people to people. The value for a corporation, however, lies in the integration of these and other internal tools to move beyond just connecting people to people, but also connecting people to vital information. Additionally, the proper convergence of these technologies will enable organizations to get more from their existing collaboration systems — and gain a sought after multiplier effect.

Office automation tools, e-mail and phone systems are technologies that, by themselves, have reached a point of diminishing return on reinvestment and don't merit significant investment in rapid, next-generation deployments. However, when these technologies are integrated with one another, the potential for increased productivity, operational efficiency and improved customer experience — which ultimately drives profits — makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

"Integrating often disparate collaboration tools give organizations the potential for increased productivity, operational efficiency and improved customer experience. In essence, a business that stops spending on new technologies and start integrating their existing tools is able to gain a big competitive advantage."

Enterprise Collaboration – An IT Priority in 2008

The idea of seamless enterprise collaboration is not new. Many of the CIOs we meet with tell us that the development and implementation of an integrated collaboration strategy is either complete or on the near-horizon, and they're not alone. As noted in a recent Forrester report, "Enterprise Collaboration: Hot as Ever in 2008" featured in TechWorld, of more than

1,000 IT decision makers surveyed throughout North America and Europe, 49 percent called implementing a collaboration strategy a priority. The challenge, therefore, is determining where and how to get started on building out the collaborative platform.

This article will discuss three areas of integrated collaboration that we see as having the most potential for delivering the highest return on investment.

Priority #1: Voice & Data Integration – Not Just VoIP

Nortel CTO, Phil Edholm, was quoted as saying that of the time it takes to make a decision, about 90 percent of it is wasted time, a result of people waiting for responses from voicemails and e-mails that are sitting in queues. Additionally, a June 2006 article in Harris suggests that information workers waste 30 minutes per week playing "phone tag." So how can we help reduce some of these inefficiencies and get closer to achieving our workplace utopia? Some IT decision makers are turning to Unified Communications (UC) as an answer.

Integration Focus

Three areas of integrated collaboration which promise to deliver the highest return on investment:

- Unified Communications
- Business Intelligence
- Integrated Collaboration Platform

Microsoft defines UC as bridging the gap between telephony and computing to deliver real-time messaging, voice and conferencing to the desktop. Gartner's Magic Quadrant for UC helps address why it's significant, "The largest single value of Unified Communications is its ability to reduce human

latency in business processes." While new technologies such as VoIP can reduce telecommunications costs, and video conferencing can save on travel costs, and instant messaging can increase worker productivity, simply putting more technology in isolated silos isn't going to give an organization a real competitive advantage.

UC takes multiple streams of communication like e-mail, voicemail, video, Web conferencing, instant messaging, and presence awareness and strategically implements them together to maximize effectiveness. Again, Gartner lays this out explicitly in The Magic Quadrant, "Although communication methods (such as voice or IM) can be used individually "and separately, organizations should examine how bringing these methods together can increase synergies and efficiencies."

By integrating communications into business applications, such as Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, and leveraging a single platform, UC strategies will increase productivity at a lower total cost of ownership. This is the real value proposition of UC, and addressing it is a top priority for today's IT leaders.

Priority #2: Business Intelligence - Not Just Data

According to Gartner, only 36 percent of CIOs believe that management is using the right information to run the business. While Business Intelligence (BI) has been a top priority for CIO's for several years, only now does it appear to be getting the attention it deserves. Gartner reports that within three years, 75 percent of CIOs expect to have an enterprise information management strategy in place with data analytics as an area of particular focus.

It's clear that while most CIO's view BI as critical for success, IT's execution has lagged behind the intention. This is likely due to the nature of most of the BI tools on the market. Executives seem to be faced with two choices in implementing BI solutions: either a comprehensive strategy with a long, expensive development cycle or smaller more specifically scoped implementations that by their nature are not enterprise level and frequently result in multiple versions of business metrics (for example finance's view of the product hierarchy versus marketing's view of the product hierarchy). The most successful IT strategies fall somewhere between these two approaches and:

- Provide quickly realized deployments, yet build these deployments as part of a comprehensive enterprise strategy.
- Exert control over the information to assure quality data that is consolidated, consistent, and historically accurate, yet allow business users free and flexible access to the information.
- Provide multiple analytic views for specifically targeted audiences, yet maintain a single version of the truth.
- Use tools that work the way business analysts already work (Excel) and collaborate (SharePoint), so that the dialog around BI can be about what the information means rather than the tools used to produce it.

Integrated collaboration platforms have matured to a point where they support these objectives. It is now possible to use the same familiar tools to support individual, departmental and enterprise analytics. The competitive organizations are the ones who enthusiastically embrace having integrated and coordinated places to share quality information. For information to be an effective agent of change for an organization, it needs to be targeted to the correct audience, and presented in such a way as to support their objectives. BI tools today cannot do this effectively in and of themselves; rather they produce this result when integrated with desktop and Web-based applications for presentation and analytics. This naturally means more involvement from the business, working the way people already work, and using tools such as Web sites, Excel and integrated search to support effective collaboration.

Priority #3: The Integrated Collaboration Platform

We've all seen the frequently referenced, research-study quotes:

- "80 percent of corporate data resides on individual PCs"
- "information workers spend up to 25 percent of their time looking for documents"

Since the turn of the new millennium, many companies have put in place systems intended to address the need to access and share information more effectively. The challenge however, centers on the lack of an integrated collaboration and content platform that allows for rapid, innovative approaches to changing business needs and easy integration of new technologies. The solution that organizations should focus on is the integration of existing technology investments such as portals, document management systems, e-mail, and search. "The reality is that most existing infrastructures make it difficult to be agile in response to business needs," noted Chris Howard, VP and director, Executive Advisory Program at the Burton Group in the October 2007 CIO Executive Briefing, "IT staff spends more time maintaining the environment and writing isolated solutions than building more modern, integrated infrastructure. The more pieces of disparate infrastructure your IT team maintains and patches up, the greater the drag on innovation."

Infrastructure has come to mean more than just the operating system, as traditional applications are melded into it. As Peter O'Kelly, also of the Burton Group, points out, emerging industry trends focused on superplatforms allow organizations to accelerate communication, collaboration and content (information) developments: "The superplatform concept refers to the market trend—exemplified by IBM, Microsoft, and Oracle—to provide comprehensive and integrated application platforms, addressing DBMS [database management systems], application servers, message-oriented middleware, and other product/service categories," noted O'Kelly. "Communication, collaboration and content concerns are now important parts of the superplatform model." Additionally, Forrester analyst Erica Driver states: "... the market for point collaboration products (e.g., team collaboration, enterprise instant messaging) is shrinking as collaboration features get absorbed into the software infrastructure ... organizations will continue to swap out collaboration point products for enterprise collaboration platforms, and the market will continue to consolidate."

These experts are talking about much more than portals and content management. Collaboration platforms evolve into true integrated collaboration platforms when they are combined with unified communications and as the presentation layer that is vital for wide adoption of BI. This is the true multiplier effect.

The Future: Profiting from the Cumulative Effect of Integrated Collaboration

The technologies required to realize the full potential of an integrated collaboration framework have been, or are currently, being deployed in most organizations. The time is right to drive the integration of these disparate technologies so that organizations can reap a competitive advantage without significant additional investment in new technologies. Since many of these technologies are already in-house, the effect of integrated collaboration initiatives can be summed up as "better together." Integrating often disparate collaboration technology investments will drive the organization's ability to build the workplace utopia that seamlessly connects people and information, unleashing its hidden potential.