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Avanade is a global IT consultancy dedicated to using the Microsoft platform to help enterprises achieve profitable growth. Through proven solutions that extend Microsoft technologies, Avanade helps enterprises increase revenue, reduce costs and reinvest in innovation to gain competitive advantage. Avanade consultants deliver value according to each customer's requirements, timeline and budget by combining insight, innovation and the talent of our global workforce. Founded in 2000 by Accenture and Microsoft, Avanade has more than 6,500 professionals serving customers in 22 countries worldwide. Additional information can be found at www.avanade.com.

Moving Forward with Unified Communications

By Larry LeSueur
Vice President, Infrastructure, Collaboration & Security

Today's mobile workforce thrives on email, cell phones, instant messaging, and web conferencing. In our fast-paced business environment, real-time connectivity can make the difference between closing the deal and spinning your wheels.

But the proliferation of communication channels hasn't solved our connectivity issues—in some ways, it's made them worse. We have too much communication in too many places. How many different log-ins and address books do you have? How many hours a day do you spend checking messages across applications, and trying different methods to reach colleagues and customers?

IT departments don't have it any easier—keeping up with user demand and managing the infrastructure to provide these tools becomes a greater challenge every day. In 2007, 97 billion emails will be sent every day worldwide according to IDC estimates. IDC analyst Mark Levitt further expects that "instant messaging, joined by free and low-cost VOIP calling, will result in slower email growth." *

As workers demand "consumer technologies at work, at the volume of email continues to grow, all these technologies will continue to reshape the world of work and the demands on IT departments.

But what if you had just one log-in, one address book, and one central repository for all your messages, regardless of device or location? That's the promise of unified communications (UC), the next-generation technologies that will eliminate the barriers between communication modes—email, voice, text messaging, internet telephony (VoIP), conferencing—and make it easy for people to communicate anytime, anywhere, using whatever method and device is most convenient and productive.

Microsoft® is a key player in making the UC vision a reality with the 2007 release of its next-generation technologies—Windows® Vista™, Office Communications Server, Microsoft® Office System 2007, SharePoint® Portal Server 2007, and Exchange Server 2007—which can deliver unified communications on a single, integrated platform and dramatically enhance how companies communicate and collaborate.

* Source: IDC, *Worldwide Email Usage 2007–2011 Forecast: Resurgence of Spam Takes Its Toll*, Doc #206038, Mar 2007

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Delivering on the promise of unified communications will trigger a paradigm shift, a fundamental cultural change that while beneficial, will be disruptive and present two key challenges for businesses:

- ⇒ On the technology side, IT will have to integrate email, voicemail, instant messaging, and conferencing services.
- ⇒ On the organizational front, two traditionally separate organizations, IT and telecommunications (telco), must work together to integrate technologies and bring the vision of unified communications to life.

Because unified communications is such a new concept, many case studies or best practices are currently being developed which will provide clear guidelines for how an organization should manage the change. Avanade is working closely with Microsoft, and we're already helping customers with IT strategies that deliver real business value today with UC. Our experience and resources can help you take the next step toward realizing the potential of truly integrated communications that work across networks, devices, and applications.

In this paper, we'll look at the benefits of unified communications, how you can create a UC roadmap for your company, and how a UC strategy can help your business gain a competitive advantage while moving toward a complete vision we call digital collaboration -- the use of technologies to enable efficient and valuable connections among people and information which has the greatest potential for improving business performance in the next five years.

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The business need

Think about the way you work today: You log into email separately from your IM. Conference calls require another log-in, often determined by the meeting you're attending. Your office and cell phones are also separate information conduits. Simply managing our communications has become a big part of our day-to-day work.

Since your company's bottom line can be directly affected by the speed at which decisions get made, unified communications as a supporting technology for your organization just fundamentally makes sense.

To illustrate the business need, let's consider the potential impact of UC on time-to-market in two industries: pharmaceuticals and financial services.

As soon as a pharmaceutical company begins developing a new drug, it applies for a patent on the formulation. On average, it takes 10 years and \$800 million to bring a new drug to market. Research, testing, regulatory approvals—all of these take time, money, and extensive collaboration internally and externally. But the patent expires 20 years from the filing date, after which other companies can use the formula to market competing generic versions.

So every day the drug is in development reduces the time the company has the drug exclusively in the market and can recoup its investments. But if the company could speed up its internal collaborative processes—get decisions made faster, ensure the right people are involved—it might shorten the drug's development cycle by, say, 10 percent. That's 10 percent more time to drive revenue and profit before the patent expires and the drug becomes generic.

For a financial institution, time-to-market is all about how many loans they can close on a monthly basis. One company decided to test the business impact of instant messaging by rolling it out in a single department. The results surprised everyone. The loan originators immediately began using IM to reach busy colleagues and get faster decisions. At the end of the month, the department had surpassed their loan targets. After that, the entire organization was saying, "I want this capability, too." Almost overnight, a cultural change happened.

They had the telephone. They had email. But the real-time connectedness of IM, and its ability to tell them who was available when, had a material impact on their business.

The time is right

Over the past few years, companies have tried various approaches to providing effective real-time communications for enterprise workers and customers. But the complexity of the technologies created barriers that limited their appeal.

Take video conferencing, for example. It's supposed to save time and money by providing real-time collaboration and eliminating the need to travel. One company forced its employees to use video conferencing, and they achieved a cultural change that transformed their organization within a year. But it was a painful change for users because of the complexity of the technology. And, while the company may have benefited from reduced travel, video conferencing drove up their IT and support costs.

But we learned our lessons from early video conferencing and VoIP efforts. Today's communications solutions are easier to implement, integrate, and use, which can reduce operational costs and increase user adoption through seamless desktop access.

In addition, today's workforce expects the same level of connectivity they have in their personal lives. They have cell phones and use text messaging; they want IM and web conferencing on their computers. Traditional land-line telephones are becoming obsolete for the workers rely on real-time communication channels along with IM, communities and as always, email.

We're seeing a cultural change around communications that says we expect to be able to send information and receive an immediate response, and to have collaborative interactions in real time, regardless of technology or geography.

So, with more mature technologies in place and more sophisticated user expectations, the time is finally right to deliver UC as a corporate platform.

Benefits of unified communications

We've already mentioned some of the key advantages of unified communications: a single, integrated platform for all your communication channels that makes it easy for people to communicate anytime, anywhere, using whatever method and device is most efficient. UC is not a single product but a view based on a set of standards of how infrastructure can be integrated and become a platform that line of business applications can leverage.

UC connects people with data and applications, no matter where they are. Integrating presence-based tools with email, voicemail, IM, telephony, and conferencing on a secure platform empowers teams to work together seamlessly, enabling employees around the world to share information efficiently and reducing nonproductive travel time.

Companies will replace siloed, conflicting systems with a single UC platform that leverages their existing data and telecommunications infrastructure. IT departments can deliver more flexible, more secure communications, with a simplified infrastructure that streamlines management and reduces the total cost of ownership (TCO).

Unified communications becomes *effective* communication, and drives down the costs and time associated with managing collaboration technology. That's why UC is a critical component of Avande's digital collaboration vision, which takes unified communications to the next level by integrating presence and collaboration tools within the applications employees use every day.

We believe digital collaboration is critical to staying innovative and competitive; to establishing high-value relationships with customers, partners, suppliers, and stakeholders; to attracting and retaining a highly skilled workforce; and to achieving high-performance operations.

The power of presence

A key benefit of unified communications is presence—the ability to see the preferred mode of communication and the availability of an individual. As teams become more and more geographically dispersed, presence will be the glue that enables them to work together.

Integrating presence into applications will therefore become a competitive differentiator for businesses.

Let's walk through a scenario that illustrates the UC vision and the importance of presence. Joan, a sales manager in Houston, leaves the office for a few days of vacation. She leaves an out-of-office message on her email and doesn't sign onto instant messenger, but she forgets to change her voicemail message. Joan checks her email while she's away, because she doesn't want any critical issues to escalate, but doesn't check her voicemail.

So when her client George calls her on the first day of vacation, he doesn't know Joan isn't there. He leaves her a message, and is miffed when she doesn't return his call.

A week later, Joan returns to the office to find several increasingly panicky messages from George. She tries to instant-message him, but he's away from his desk. She leaves him a voicemail, and just to make sure all the bases are covered, she emails him as well.

The multiplicity of messaging channels doesn't solve communications problems—it complicates them further, requiring people to spend more time and energy trying to connect with colleagues.

Here's where presence and a unified approach to communications can cut through the confusion, creating a single repository for all types of communication. Imagine: a single inbox for your email, instant messages, voicemail, web conferences, and faxes.

If Joan and George had been on a UC platform, their interaction could have gone much more smoothly. When George looks up Joan's phone number, he immediately sees that she's out of the office. He might decide to send her an email just in case, but he also sees that she has left a colleague's name and number. George calls that colleague and gets his problem solved immediately. This seamless connection for customers is a critical differentiator for businesses and key to developing long lasting customers..

This scenario also illustrates another key benefit of UC: the integrated ability to get presence information and communicate without leaving your workspace. George could determine Joan's availability, find out who to contact instead,

choose the appropriate means of communication, and send a message, all without leaving the familiar applications on his desktop.

Let's take another example: You need an answer to a business-critical question from a company with 50,000 people.

- ➔ First, you need to know, "who's the right person to answer this?" This is part of Avanade's digital collaboration vision for UC—a method of searching and associating data and knowledge with specific individuals.
- ➔ Now you've narrowed it down, and found 30 people in the company who could answer your question. But who is available *right now* to resolve your business issue? This is the presence-enabling aspect of UC.
- ➔ Once you've found a resource, what's the right way to contact them? Telephone, email, IM, conferencing? This is the broader story of UC, the ability to choose desired modes of communication and move seamlessly among them, depending on context, from within a single workspace.

Creating your company's vision for UC

Now let's go back to the business problem: In the past, UC technologies have been difficult to integrate and manage, and their complexity for the business user and the IT department have created barriers to adoption.

The technology has evolved - users expect real-time connectivity - the time is right. Yet the magnitude of the change required to adopt a UC strategy may cause your organization to hesitate.

Paradigm shifts are never easy. Consider the impact that telephony had on the workplace, or the introduction of PCs. Or what the internet did to business applications.

For IT departments, the challenge is to secure resources and convince your CIO or CEO that they should adopt a UC strategy to position the company for future business success. Their response may be, "yeah, it's cool technology, but how does it improve my bottom line?"

So how do you build the business case for moving your organization to a UC platform?

- ➔ Create a UC vision that's applicable to your company, that puts the technology into

context and makes it relevant to your executives. What will your next-generation workplace look like, how will it improve business processes, productivity, and profit? Going back to the example of the drug company who had a 10 percent savings in their development cycle—what would the equivalent savings mean for the bottom line at your company?

- ➔ Assess the current state of your infrastructure, and how it will be positively impacted by these new technologies. Focus on the improved manageability and security while providing additional services for mobile workers. Build a thorough transition plan that encompasses all aspects of your legacy systems and their phase-out or integration with UC applications.
- ➔ Understand the organizational impact, both to your IT staff and end users. The most stressful change may be to your telco and applications teams, who may have operated in separate silos but will now have to work together to deliver on the promise of integrated, unified communications. While transition can be challenging, as with similar changes a few years ago with Active Directory, the end result and savings are worth it. Finally, even though newer UC technologies are easier to learn and use, be sure you have a training and support plan for your end users.

Okay, when you're ready to move forward, how do you tactically evaluate technologies and vendors?

Choosing the right technology

Once you decide to adopt a UC strategy, the first crucial decision is to determine your company strategy; should you take a hardware network-centric or software application-centric approach?

Determining your approach may be more challenging beyond the surface, particularly if you have legacy communication systems with proprietary hardware, such as PBX phone networks. Some UC solutions available today retain this approach, building on proprietary hardware that's self-contained and offers great manageability within the context of that system, but is poorly integrated with other tools and

infrastructure. Because these systems are long-standing and familiar to IT telco teams, they may be resistant to change.

The other option is to move away from proprietary hardware systems and implement a software-based approach, which is more easily integrated across your enterprise and can be customized with third-party add-ons without proprietary concerns. While this approach has benefits of integration, it does introduce different challenges to consider such as how do you integrate the new applications with your legacy systems? How do you manage and extend it? How do you train and support people on it?

While you must evaluate the pros and cons of each approach as they relate to your company's needs, Avanade recommends that you should choose the software path if you want to realize the full business value and potential of unified communications. Otherwise, with a hardware approach, you may be able to connect Person A to Person B, but you're not truly integrated and able to drive digital collaboration.

Once you decide on a software-based approach, you next must choose the appropriate solutions. A variety of applications are available, but many deliver only a piece of the UC vision, such as instant messaging, web conferencing, or voicemail delivery into your email inbox. Some of these providers are well established, but ultimately your IT team becomes responsible for integrating the products into a productive communications environment for your organization.

The other option is to adopt Microsoft's UC view, which combines email, IM, telephony, conferencing, and video into a single, integrated platform that extends UC capabilities through desktop applications, such as the Microsoft Office suite, and can be extended to include mobile solutions. While Microsoft hasn't fully delivered all pieces of UC technology yet, it's moving at an accelerated pace to make its UC vision a reality today and fully complete tomorrow. This comprehensive platform includes:

- ➔ Office Communications Server 2007, the enterprise-level server that supports real-time communications, application sharing, even web conferencing and voice calls. The previous version, Live Communications Server,

was cited by telephony partners as an ideal hub for unified communications.

- ➔ Exchange Server 2007, the messaging system that provides anytime, anywhere access to email, voicemail, calendars, and contacts.
- ➔ Office Communicator 2007, the client software that brings all the communication feeds, plus presence awareness, to Office applications on the user desktop.
- ➔ Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, the web-based server that provides broad content-management capabilities and supports all intranet, extranet, and web applications.
- ➔ Office Live Meeting, which enables web conferencing, real-time audio and video streaming, and VoIP.
- ➔ Visual Studio[®], the development tool for creating custom applications and web services that are fully integrated with other Microsoft programs and technologies.

Microsoft's well-rounded, integrated approach, combined with Avanade's expertise and long-term digital collaboration vision, can provide a tremendous value-add to your organization. These fully integrated solutions will free your IT team from spending their time and budget trying to integrate and maintain disparate technologies, enabling them to focus on core competencies and strategic business initiatives for faster growth and greater revenues.

Building an implementation roadmap

From an IT perspective, UC is a paradigm shift that has the potential to transform IT departments from being primarily focused on TCO and reducing cost to enabling business operations in a very strategic way. UC has the capability to elevate IT to being a collaborative partner with the business side, as they work together to create and deliver their company's vision for unified communications.

Avanade knows that every company has unique needs and is at different stages of technology and management maturity. So the starting point for any UC roadmap is a comprehensive review of your existing infrastructure and business productivity to best determine what you can leverage and what you'll need to upgrade or

replace. Avanade's experts can help you conduct an in-depth baseline of the current state of your application and network layers and identify the significant pain points.

Once you've done this, and covered issues such as networking capacity and bandwidth, here are four key areas that we recommend you address in planning your UC implementation to ensure you deliver the full vision and value it has to offer.

- ➔ First, ensure you are leveraging what you already have and that your Active Directory and Exchange Server deployments are well managed. To begin implementing UC, you should also consider an upgrade to Exchange Server 2007, because it has built-in features for unified messaging that you can leverage and that will help with PBX integrations.
- ➔ Second, be sure your desktop environment is capable of handling UC, so that users can enjoy all the benefits of having robust communications at their fingertips, integrated into their desktop applications. Realistically, this means upgrading to Office System 2007, which provides full support for UC and real-time collaboration.
- ➔ Third, look at your internal portals and collaboration processes, and ensure that your employees can easily find and share information across time and geographies. If you aren't using SharePoint Server—now's the time to start. The robust content-management capabilities in Office SharePoint Server 2007 support all intranet, extranet, and Web applications across the enterprise, and can have a profound effect on your users' abilities to collaborate and deliver against your business goals. Note, however, that because SharePoint makes it easy for users to build their own portals on the fly, IT will need an architecture plan that enables them to establish business rules and maintain some control over the sites.
- ➔ Fourth, if you're using live conferencing today (audio, video, and/or web), consider it in relationship to Microsoft's upcoming Office Communications Server 2007. If you don't have live conferencing, you should be looking at it and with fall targeted as a release for Office Live Communications Server 2007 the time couldn't be better.

If your UC vision is constrained by budget, consider this: current research finds that an average maintenance cost per desktop, is about \$300 per year, or about one-third of the purchase price. If you can get more control over your existing environment, so you're spending less to maintain it, then a larger portion of your IT budget can be redirected toward business innovations such as unified communications.

Avanade can help

Avanade has a close working relationship with Microsoft, has invested in training and solutions, and is well positioned to help customers capitalize on the benefits of unified communications. We have several customer success stories for deployments of Exchange Server and SharePoint Server and we are also working with early releases of Office Communication Server. As we continue to invest in our broader vision of digital collaboration, we will continue to extend our expertise, invest in solutions, and work in partnership with Microsoft on unified communications strategies.

Consider Avanade's expertise with Exchange Server, Office Communication Server and Office SharePoint Server, two foundational technologies for UC:

Credentials:

- ➔ Participant in TAP and RDP programs for Exchange Server 2007, Office System 2007, SharePoint Portal Server 2007 and Office Communication Server
- ➔ Eight Microsoft Certified Architects in Messaging—the most advanced credential earned by top industry experts in IT architecture
- ➔ A worldwide network of more than 6,500 consultants who have collectively passed more than 8,000 Microsoft certification exams.

Deployments:

- ➔ More than 77 current projects for SharePoint Portal Server 2007
- ➔ More than 30 Exchange Server engagements to date and internal deployment of 6,000 seats
- ➔ Avanade has over 31 engagements with 21 Early Adopter customers for Office 2007

- ➔ We have completed more than 500 portal engagements worldwide
- ➔ Completed more than 25 Microsoft Live Communication Server and Office Communication Server (pre-release) deployments worldwide

When you're ready to get started, Avanade can work with you to help deliver project success. We offer proven expertise, unmatched credentials and unique tools. Avanade has invested in assets and reusable IP to deliver with quality and speed, which can result in cost savings for our customers. Using our proven assets, we have helped many customers upgrade or migrate to new technologies. Avanade can serve as a trusted advisor who can:

- ➔ Help you build a business case for upgrading or migrating to the Microsoft platform.
- ➔ Provide a comprehensive assessment of your infrastructure environment.
- ➔ Build a project plan with realistic timelines and perform the actual migration.
- ➔ Supply knowledge transfer and training for your existing staff.

Avanade is ready to work with you to assist you in your project success and a successful implementation of your UC strategy.

For more information, visit avanadeadvisor.com/campaign/collaboration

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