

# Bringing Unity to SMB Communications

A THREE-PART WHITE PAPER SERIES FROM 1TO1 MEDIA AND MITEL



PART TWO

## Unified Communications in the Workforce

SMBs find offices—and customers—everywhere



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## SMBs find offices—and customers—everywhere

Technology has redefined what it means to be a small to medium-sized business (SMB). The Internet and all its communication applications allow SMBs to look and act like their much bigger counterparts. At the heart of this technology is a concept called “Unified Communications.” It represents the intersection of IP Telephony and advanced Internet applications and it can launch SMBs into more valuable and efficient consumer communications, customer relationships and employee teamwork. This white paper series will reveal how Unified Communications can connect SMBs both internally and externally.

### The Omnipresent SMB

The rush and disruption of IP technology has exploded many traditional business concepts. The “office” is no longer a central location. The phone is no longer a simple handset and touchpad used for person-to-person calls. The concept of a small-to-medium-sized business (SMB) has changed as well. According to the Small Business Administration, the quaint mom-and-pop operation has given way to more sophisticated companies that use remote offices and Internet technology to drive more customers and revenue. Most small businesses (under 100 employees) have more than one location. And most medium-sized businesses (100-500

employees) have more than four locations.

Still on the agenda for SMBs is how to tie workers, offices, and customers together. One answer is Unified Communications. Traditionally, the phone system simply placed and received phone calls, now Unified Communications enable SMBs to have an office anywhere. It equips workers to be accessible regardless of their location and allows them to meet customer needs quickly and efficiently. It merges the phone system with Internet technology to make information and direct communication accessible.

“Unified Communications removes the external boundaries that made it difficult for small businesses to compete. With the latest communications applications they are no longer limited by geography so they can have an office anywhere and they look as big as they want to look,” says Asif Rehman, Senior Manager of Solutions Marketing at Mitel. While the first paper in this three-part series from 1to1 Media and Mitel Networks highlighted the menu of Unified Communications choices available to SMBs, this paper will delve further into the advantages gained from applications currently in use.

“Unified Communications is about end-user access,” says Sanjeev Aggarwal, an analyst with New York-based research firm Access Markets International (AMI) Partners Inc. “The goal of

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#### Key Takeaways

- Unified Communications’ goal is aligning all communication devices toward a single point of access—regardless of platform, network, device, application, or location. It is a necessary strategy for making small-to-mid-sized businesses (SMBs) more competitive.
- Unified Communications intersects perfectly with the current and future state of the SMB workforce. It enables SMBs to attract and engage employees who want and need to be mobile.
- For SMBs, unified communications has had the most dramatic impact on contact centers and other customer service areas.

unified communications is to enable more personal communications and customization. It supports concepts such as presence and location-based services that enable the detection and determination of end users, communications availability, preferences for communications device and status, and also privacy considerations.”

Solutions provider Mitel Networks is taking a

similar view of Unified Communications, while defining the term more around business processes than products. “We look at how a company currently completes the tasks and processes that are critical to its business. Then we look at how we can apply the Unified Communications technology to allow those tasks to be completed in a more efficient fashion,” says Rehman.

## Unified Customer-Facing Operations

The single point of access provided by Unified Communications opens doors for SMBs in customer-facing operations. A recent Gartner report shows that SMBs are planning to quickly utilize Unified Communications as a strategic customer-facing asset. It showed that the top three expectations for Unified Communications—efficiency, business process, and customer service—were all focused on operational improvement.

Because SMBs have not yet adopted some of the advanced applications picked up by larger companies with dedicated IT staffs, some large technology providers have fostered the misperception that SMBs are ignorant to the capabilities of Unified Communications. “There are small companies today that are gaining a competitive edge by serving their customers better through Unified Communications applications,” says Mark Ricca, a partner with market research firm IntelliCom Analytics. “There are certain vertical markets, such as health care, education and financial services, where some smaller firms are integrating more sophisticated applications than their large counterparts.”

Ricca says these mid-market firms often find the most dramatic results in customer-facing areas of their operation. For example, many businesses with contact centers have established and achieved their goal of “first call resolution” with Unified Communications. Designed to avoid long hold times or multiple hand-offs between representatives, first call resolution is a critical contact center strategy.

“What Unified Communications enables is the ability for customers and suppliers to reach people in an organization more easily,” says Doug Michaelides, Vice President of Global Marketing at Mitel. “Employees can be reached whether they are teleworking at home, in a remote location, or on their mobile devices. Staff members can coordinate activities more effectively and ultimately provide faster results and better service for their customers.”

This “office anywhere” capability has meant that many SMBs can now establish contact centers in different time zones and provide 24/7 coverage if needed. Working toward the customer satisfaction goal of first call resolution at contact centers, Unified Communications solutions provide the following advantages:

**Automatic Call Distribution (ACD):** Also called “intelligent call distribution” this system automatically distributes phone calls to a specific group of agents. For large businesses, ACD works on a first-come, first-served basis. For SMBs that might not have the advantage of huge contact center teams, ACD systems can route calls based upon caller identification, dialed number, time of day, and custom defined parameters established in an IVR program script.

**Agent Portals:** These help coordinate between voice and data screens as well as pop-up screens to access more information about the caller and their needs. For SMBs, agent portals are important because the person fielding the call can have all relevant information on screen without having

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to switch Web pages or networks.

**Presence Management:** By allowing users to determine which co-workers are available, either online or via phone, contact centers can locate those representatives with expertise in an area and get the question answered or problem resolved immediately. SMBs are particularly sensitive to this need because they often need to link with partner companies to resolve a question or complaint.

## New Workforce Priorities

Unified Communications intersect perfectly with the NextGen workforce. SMBs compete for customers, which are their most valuable asset. But they compete for employees as well. Today's employees want and need to be mobile. They want to work from home on occasion and have access to key information regardless of whether the office is open or even in the same time zone. The SMB that attracts and keeps these employees will be able to maintain a more consistent and competitive customer experience.

"Companies will need to redesign their workplaces to better fit the needs of knowledge workers," writes Tom Davenport, President's Chair in Information Technology and Management at Babson College. "The idea that we should spend our workdays in boring cubicles—either in big downtown buildings or suburban office parks—is increasingly out of kilter with the way people actually work and how they want to spend their lives. It doesn't take into account our needs and abilities involving mobility, social networking, stimulation, and fun. I'll bet that the best knowledge workers will be seeking out companies with workplaces that offer more to them."

Recent research supports Davenport's position. According to Gartner, more than 20 percent of employees for all sizes of companies surveyed work from home at least eight hours per month. Specific to the SMB market, AMI-Partners found 20 percent of small businesses currently allow their workers to telecommute at least a few times a month. That only measures full-time workers. It

Most current Unified Communications solutions come with some "out of the box" contact center functionality. Next generation applications can be easily integrated to provide many of the measurements that enterprise-level contact centers are using to benchmark their performance. These applications allow SMBs to track metrics such as the number of incoming calls, average wait times, call resolution, upsell, and cross-sell.

doesn't count the remote contact center workers, sales representatives, and field marketing people away from the company's headquarters that take advantage of new communication technology.

### **The first priority is integrating teleworkers.**

This flexibility to support the growth of virtual offices has been one of the biggest drivers for SMBs to upgrade to a unified strategy. With teleworker solutions, a remote employee can plug in an IP phone or softphone into any public Internet connection and have the same features and functionality as a phone in the main office. The remote phones are also connected transparently, so to a customer or partner calling into the line, it will appear as just another extension on the company system.

### **The ability to integrate with mobile devices**

is another key component of a Unified Communications strategy. A truly "mobilized company" promotes complete solutions, not just occasional connectivity. Research shows that more than 50 percent of SMB employees travel between four and five days a month so "reachability" for those mobile employees is critical. Unified Communications systems provide "mobile extensions", a feature that simplifies communication by providing a single phone number and a single voice mailbox for employees. An employee's office number and mobile number ring at the same time and the same features are provided on both phones. If the call is not answered it goes to the employee's corporate voice mail box. Employees are also able to transfer calls from mobile phone

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to desk phone saving airtime minutes.

“While today’s mobile devices can take pictures and download music, they could offer more features from a business communications standpoint,” says Mitel’s Rehman. “The mobile extension feature enables mobile devices with business applications like conference call and the ability to transfer a call. A mobile device effectively becomes an office phone.”

From a **reachability** standpoint, the mobile extension offers the advantage of being independent from mobile network operators. That’s important for small businesses that have employees in different parts of the country or the world, who could be limited by disjointed mobile networks. With the mobile extension application, the call will locate the employee regardless of their network, greatly reducing the odds of voice mail tag. It also greatly increases the connections to important customers in a global environment.

Because teleworkers and mobile workers are dealing with both voice and data, another critical application within Unified Communications is **“unified messaging.”** Creating a single inbox for email, voice and fax messages, is viewed as one of the most important productivity drivers for mobile workers. It puts email and voicemail in one

easily accessed and managed location.

Does all this access and mobility make employees more engaged? Babson’s Davenport cites a current initiative at a large U.S. financial services company that encouraged employees to “go mobile.” The program has “substantially increased” employee satisfaction, self-rated productivity, and has lowered costs.

Unified Communications’ increases employee engagement through value, such as the ability to be mobile and work at convenient hours. It also enables collaboration between various functions within the business and streamlines business processes. In order to connect internally more quickly and efficiently with co-workers, as well as external suppliers and partners, SMBs are increasingly turning to collaboration tools. These tools range from audio, Web, or video conferencing to presence enabled instant-message type applications where employees are aware of co-workers availability to chat and collaborate in real-time.

“SMBs today are spending more time collaborating with their buyers and suppliers, mostly in real time,” says Aggarwal of AMI-Partners. “This is now a necessity in order to be in tune with customer needs, and to have a handle on the supply chain in a nimble organization.”

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## Conclusion: Shaping the IP Future

Unified Communications is more than another catch phrase that technology companies have created to help sell their solutions. It is a fundamental change in the way SMBs will operate in the future. “Our outlook calls for rapid, ongoing adoption of various Unified Communications components over the next three-to five-year time frame,” says Aggarwal. As Rehman observes, “The future is now. Many of the applications that help support a Unified Communications strategy weren’t even available as recently as two or three years ago. They have rapidly been scaled down to fit the requirements of and SMBs.”

This adoption of Unified Communications and

collaboration will not only bring SMBs increases in employee productivity and operational efficiencies, it will also provide strategic competitive advantage. That, according to Rehman, is the urgent reason for SMBs to look at Unified Communications as a necessary upgrade or replacement to current communications systems. “An SMB that invests in Unified Communications now is making an investment in the relationship between its employees and its customers,” he says. “Will that relationship be obsolete in a few years? No. Neither will Unified Communications. Changes will come in the form of upgrades and updates to the software. Basic relationships with customers will never change.”

CASE STUDY

## Construction Firm Expands With Unified Communications



If there's a "poster company" for Unified Communications it might be Kuepers, Inc. Kuepers is one of the fastest growing design and construction firms in the Midwest, and credits part of that growth to the use of Unified Communications.

Before expanding to a larger headquarters in Brainerd, MN last year, the 30-year old firm upgraded its seven year-old landline communications system to a Unified Communications system. Because the company had already made a significant investment in Microsoft software—running Office, Project, Exchange, and Active Directory—they were looking for a solution that could support easy integration.

In some ways Kuepers is a typical small business. It had a one-man IT department, with limited experience installing phone systems. The Kuepers IT Manager, Devante Vargas, was looking for a system that was easy to deploy and operate. Kuepers ultimately chose a Mitel solution, largely due to its "plug and play" capability as well as the ability of its Unified Messaging system to integrate with Microsoft Outlook.

"I have been in IT for 14 years, but my skill set in telephony was admittedly limited. Fortunately, the Mitel solutions have been incredibly simple and easy to use," Vargas says. "The integration was pain-free and all of our employees have found the technology very easy to utilize." So easy that when the company did move its offices, the old system was shut down on a Friday and the new system was up and running on Monday.

Since Kuepers is on a fast growth track, the migration to a unified communications platform appealed to the company on a number of fronts. One of the main drivers was the fact that many of its workers were often hard to reach. "We consider ourselves very customer driven. Because our customers are making such a large investment we want to make sure their questions or concerns are answered quickly," Vargas says.

To address the "reachability" issue, Kuepers deployed both the Unified Messaging and the Mobile Extension applications from Mitel. "Our project managers and foreman now have a single contact number where they can be accessible at any point in the day regardless of their location," Vargas says. In addition, the Unified Communications system provides Kuepers' receptionist with presence and status information on all employees, providing the vision to know who is available to address a client's questions quickly. This has been especially critical as Kuepers business has expanded into neighboring states such as Wisconsin and Michigan.

Vargas says the Unified Messaging features have become extremely popular with the company's remote workers, as it provides the ability to check emails and voice mails from a mobile device. The Mobile Extension application has provided a significant cost savings, eliminating long distance and cell phone charges for workers who are working out of their calling area.

Although the company would not provide specific metrics, Vargas says their customer satisfaction indices have increased substantially since adopting the Unified Communications strategy. "Word of mouth is extremely important in our business and our clients have been spreading a very positive message about us," Vargas says. "We believe our customer service is a real competitive differentiator and our communications system has helped us a lot on that end."

That competitive advantage has helped Kuepers quadruple in size over the past four years, with its employee base growing from 70 to 280 employees. With plans to continue that growth track, the ability to easily scale was another key reason the company chose to move to a Unified Communications solution. "We foresee further growth in the future and we really feel this system will grow with us. In some ways, it really feels like we are only just beginning to take advantage of the capabilities the system provides." ■

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## About This Series

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More information is available at: [www.mitel.com](http://www.mitel.com) or 1-866-641-8082.

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