

BREAKING DOWN TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS FOR THE BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL:

“TRUE” UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS



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By Scott H.E. Welch

More and more business professionals find themselves being overloaded by the volume of information they are being sent on a daily basis. In fact, many are becoming a “prisoner of their own device”, or is that devices? Just how many devices do business professionals turn to in a day to retrieve all of their important voice and text messages? The average count is usually four – PC, phone, fax and hand-held devices.

Imagine being able to integrate the power of all of these devices into one communications platform that enables business professionals to

work on their own terms and break free of traditional communication barriers. True Unified Communications enable business professionals to do exactly that by providing them with one centralized mailbox to retrieve all of their voice and text messages via the device of their choice anytime, anywhere.

According to a report titled, *Unified Communications – the Catalyst for Enhanced Business Productivity*, by the Robert Francis Group, the implementation of a unified communications solution can lower operating costs within an enterprise, and can

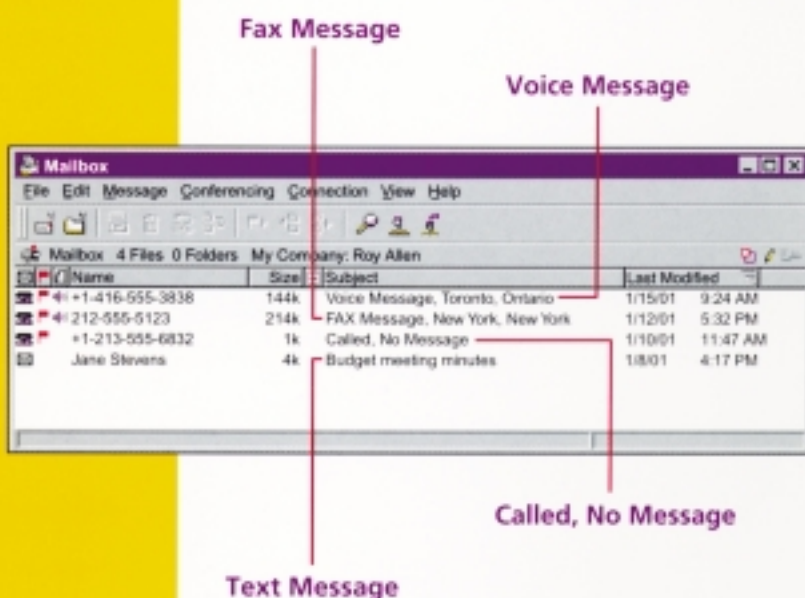
dramatically improve user productivity, customer responsiveness, and overall corporate competitiveness. The results are especially noteworthy within select employee groups in organizations, including traveling executives, remote workers, and individuals charged with customer care and support responsibilities.

Business professionals need to gain a better understanding of the benefits of unified communications to assess the value of such an implementation within their enterprises. For example, the study sites unified communications as a powerful tool that can increase a professional’s overall productivity by about 30-to-60 minutes a day. That timesaving can provide professionals with an advantage over their competitors in customer responsiveness and retention. Key in today’s highly competitive marketplace.

In addition, mobile professionals are no longer tied to one computer or hard drive, for access to all of their important data. With true unified communications they have the power to choose what device they want to retrieve the data with and how.

False versus True Unified Communications

But buyer beware – there are a number of “false” unified communications products on the market that



simulate the unification of voice mail and email on a client desktop only. Both voice mail and email messages continue to be housed on their respective servers but appear to be unified to the users as they access their messages at their desktop.

This method's single appeal is in providing a graphical user interface in managing voicemail, an improvement over the often-tedious task of managing voice mail using the limited capabilities of a telephone keypad.

False unified communications begins and ends at the desktop. Users cannot retrieve and respond to messages using any other device or from any other location. And, they are unable to reply to voicemail using email and vice versa.

In addition, there are the underlying problems of maintaining and servicing two separate servers.

Whereas, true unified communications provide a single-network-based access point from which professionals can manage all of their information and messages, using any number and a variety of access devices (PC, Web browser, phone, etc.) from anywhere – regardless of connection path (LAN, Internet, telephone) or operating system (Macintosh, Windows, UNIX). Simply put, "True" unified communications seamlessly integrates voice mail, e-mail and fax, through one mailbox on a single server.

From a central collaborative digital store, all of these message types are accessible via multiple devices and interfaces with a consistent set of features and capabilities. Unlike "False", True unified communications offers unprecedented flexibility through a centralized mailbox, since all features and capabilities are shared across all media types.

For example, users can track the status of any message – voice or email – from any device, solving the common problem of accountability as to whether a recipient received a message. All functions performed for one device can be applied to all devices over the same interface. In addition, messages that are read on the road using a cell phone will maintain their "read" status once the user is back at their office desktop.

True Unified Communications also enables the cross-over of control, status information and preferences.

For instance, utilizing the unified messaging graphical interface, users can record numerous greetings and set parameters that are tailored by caller or called numbers. This flexibility is not attainable with separate email and telephony servers since email servers are not designed to store voice greetings.

Users can easily unify multiple voice mailboxes with separate phone numbers while maintaining the distinct personalities of each, so they continue to appear separate to the caller.

Effective Unified Communications

Truly effective unified communication solutions integrate telephony-grade reliability with email's feature-rich functionality and capabilities on a single centralized server. They enable the convergence of digital communication and information exchange and leverage each technology's strength to overcome the weaknesses of the other. This not only makes a great deal of sense – it also opens a world of unlimited possibilities.

True unified communications is also facilitating the market's continuing migration from a desktop-centric environment



where all information is stored on a hard-drive. This paradigm is no longer serving the business professional – if anything it is limiting them.

board a plane for an important customer meeting with no data, no directions, no contact information – nothing.

Are Business Professionals Ready for Unified Communications?

According to the Boston-based research firm, Gartner, the North American market

is primed for mass adoption of unified communications. Gartner recently forecast that the unified communications market in North America will total \$5.225 (U.S.) billion per year in 2006. And, that the market's leading segment services offered by telecommunication carriers, service bureaus and wireless providers will produce the most accelerated growth among the market segments due to its massive pool of

potential users and the strong business case for wireless Internet subscribers.

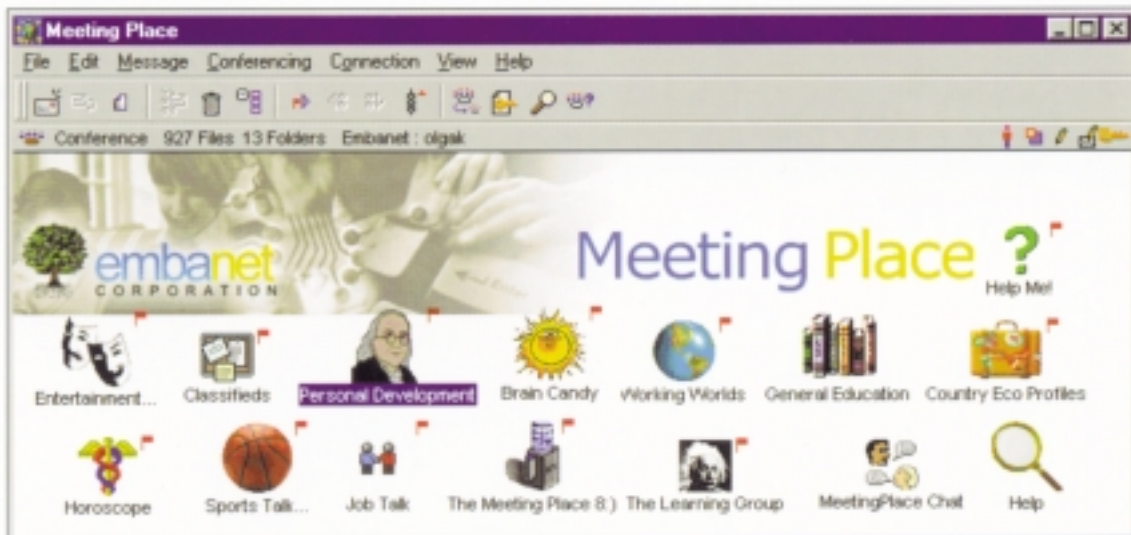
True unified communications empowers business professionals by enabling them to take control of their data and work on their own terms.

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About the author: Scott H.E. Welch is Centrinity, Inc.'s Chief Evangelist. As co-creator of Meridan Mail, Mr. Welch holds a wealth of industry knowledge and experience in the telecommunications industry and the implementation of enterprise communications systems. Centrinity develops and markets FirstClass Unified Communication and Collaborative Groupware technologies.



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The introduction of a notebook computer, in an attempt to solve the communication challenges of an increasingly mobile society, is today proving to be frustrating and limiting. Why? Firstly, notebooks are susceptible to being damaged or stolen. Lost or broken notebooks mean lost data and lost productivity. True unified communications safeguards the business professionals by freeing them from their notebook and enabling them to regard it as a “throw away” device that they can pull information, as required from a central server where valuable data is safely stored.

A common scenario would include a business professional at the airport who accidentally sets his computer down and walks to the end of aisle to use the phone. They turn their back for one moment and the notebook is gone. Not only do they have the stress of losing an expensive piece of equipment but now they are about to

If they are a subscriber to a True unified communications solution then they are able to find the nearest Internet kiosk at the airport and go on to the Internet to log-on and access their mission-critical information. The business trip is not a failure and they still have made the sale or retained their valued-customer.

By converging redundant messaging functions for data, voice and fax – as well as reducing system management and administration overhead – communication technology has reached new heights. Unified communications is proving to be the real key to lowering critical Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and helping organizations reach new levels of productivity gains. And, most importantly, it is providing business professionals with the reliability and dependability that have thus far eluded enterprise-wide communication networks.