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publishers

Building Business Productivity with  
Unified Communications  
The Essentials Series

# Networking for Increased Productivity and Reduced Costs

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# Introduction to Realtime Publishers

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by **Don Jones, Series Editor**

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Don Jones

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# Networking for Increased Productivity and Reduced Costs

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Does your business exist in multiple locations? Do you connect with customers, business partners, suppliers, and others as part of the workflow? This article will explore how networking with IP-based communications solutions connects your company into a single, unified business operation. The reduction of operating costs through an extended reach and integration of processes with technology can deliver a solid return on investment (ROI). This article will help explain ways to leverage networking techniques that extend your reach, creating a business communications environment that integrates the business technology array into a single solution to strengthen your presence in the marketplace.

## Networking Offices for a Single Face to the Customer

Successful businesses look for new ways to do more with less and leverage technology investments to be innovative, competitive, and flexible. In order to do so, business communications systems must not only support many end devices—today, even small businesses require support for multiple locations.

Whether a company has remote offices or remote workers, some of the greatest power in unified communications lies in networking systems to provide a single seamless point of presence for customers. This requires a transparent communications environment that delivers telecommunications power of voicemail systems, automated attendants, and voice calling with efficient call processing, ease of use, and reliability.

## The Business as a Unified Organization

Every business has a charter, a mission statement, or a driving objective. This core competency is the driving force that the company was built on. It's the sweet spot of each individual business.

This sweet spot is the focal point of successful businesses. The entire company is focused on what they do. It's an integral part of every employee's work day. The business is unified around the purpose, building a culture of success and profitability.

## Solidifying the Business Brand with a United Front

Success in any highly-competitive market is augmented by carrying a single brand or reputation to customers, partners, and the public. Presenting a unified front as a single business entity when operations and resources are spread across multiple locations is a challenge with older technologies.

When call transfers require redialing or obscure transfers, customers grow unhappy. They might even drop the call and look elsewhere. Staff loses efficiency searching internally for answers to questions from subject matter experts (SMEs).

Integrating disparate solutions in different locations can lead to interoperability challenges and increase administration costs. Centralized administration of systems adds to the distinctive “look and feel” across multiple locations, driving consistency in operations.

There’s a famous *New Yorker* cartoon with two dogs at computers with the caption “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” With converged unified communications, nobody need know that you’re a small or midsize business, the company is in numerous offices spread around a wide geographical area, or the sales person or specialist they’re speaking with is working from home. The transparency of a suite of business communications tools can help a business present a unified face to the world.

## Are You Networked with Your Partners?

There are very few businesses that can operate solely in a vacuum. External business partners are many and varied:

- Suppliers and vendors
- Accountants and payroll services
- Distributors
- R&D or engineering partners
- Legal services

Beyond external partners, there are countless internal partners. Remote offices are often operated as partner businesses; run like a franchise on the other side of town or somewhere else. Remote employees teleworking are another form of partnership.

These partners, regardless of function, play a vital role in the success of the business. They require some access to resources. The integration of services through unified dialing plans, common voicemail systems, easy conferencing, and other business communications services relies on unified communications tools that can:

- Reduce telephone call expenses by routing calls over IP to the most cost-effective path
- Handle increasing call volume with fewer people by using the UCC system to route calls to the proper staff person quickly
- Expand the resource pool of the company by extending business communications services to business specialists and subject experts working remotely
- Eliminate expensive external conference calling services by providing them internally

## Integrating CRM

CRM is the software solution businesses use to locate and target customers. It's how businesses manage the life cycle of the relationships and communications interactions that keep a customer account vibrant. A solo entrepreneur may use a simple contact list, but as companies grow, the requirements for tracking this information quickly become a critical business system.

There are three aspects of a CRM system:

- Operational represents the business process automation component and is often tied to systems supporting billing, inventory, and sales force automation efforts
- Collaborative represents how a company communicates with its customers; it might tie in to email or telephone calling campaigns and calendaring systems to schedule follow-up contacts
- Analytical facet provides data about the business and how customer relationships are progressing; it can provide trends and information to help executives make important business decisions

These three areas are each strengthened by the integration unified communications delivers.

## How Tightly Are You Coupled with Business Partners?

In the past, businesses used telephone, fax, courier, email, and other services to share information. Although telephone or fax provides real-time information exchange, they can't integrate effectively with business applications until IP networking and unified communications services bring them together.

Integrating the voice services tightly with key partners provides seamless access. The collaboration tools in current systems can enable more than a phone call. Staff can share screenshots, database views, design plans, presentations, and more while conducting a telephone conversation.

Unified communications can pull together all the supporting partners in a business. Instead of each partner operating as an independent strand, these operations can be woven together to present a cohesive and responsive unit. This tight cohesion leads to quicker response for customers and delivers a toolset that enables collaboration to build a proactive workflow that makes the business stronger and more profitable. For many business relationships, this leads to new business offerings.

## Unifying Supplier/Vendor Relationships for Efficiency

Just as your company is looking for ways to do less with more, become more efficient, and streamline processes, so is every other company. Suppliers and vendors look for ways to use business communications tools to reduce delivery intervals, shorten order times, and gain efficiency to reduce operating expense. As partners work together, collaboration extends beyond the core services and products each delivers to their customers. Partners can create *win-win* situations by collaborating on how they use unified communications platforms, driving improvement in both organizations.

## How Can You Turn the Company into a Virtual Call Center?

The call center, or contact center, is a fundamental business tool for many organizations that falls typically into one of two categories.

- Outbound call centers—For example, any business that places calls on sales campaigns, debt collection efforts, or polling and surveys
- Inbound call centers—For example, any business that takes orders, reservations, or handles service calls for scheduling

Many businesses require both. For large enterprises, this often means simply establishing and setting up a physical call center, staffed with an appropriate number of employees. That may work fine in a company with 50,000 employees, but for a company with 500 employees, it simply isn't practical.

Many companies are made up of few employees, often spread around a number of different work locations. The beauty of unified communications solutions is the integration of technology with business to create a virtual call center that can incorporate anyone or everyone within the company. Companies can use unified communications services to integrate business communications across remote workers and remote offices.

*Just as the Internet eliminated geographic boundaries from the sharing and delivery of information of all kinds, unified communications technology can eliminate the age old problem of staff being available to handle business calls.*

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With networked UCC integration, employees in satellite offices and teleworkers can be integrated into the normal workflow of business. Any company can become a cohesive service delivery team applying resource attention wherever it is needed. Satellite business communications systems linked between office locations provide more than centralized administration; they provide a cohesive system integrating distinct offices into a single "organism" that responds to the needs of the business. UC client software on teleworkers' computers provides the same level of integration, putting remote workers virtually in the office whenever they're needed. Even mobile devices like the iPhone or Blackberry can be tightly integrated directly to company business communications solutions.



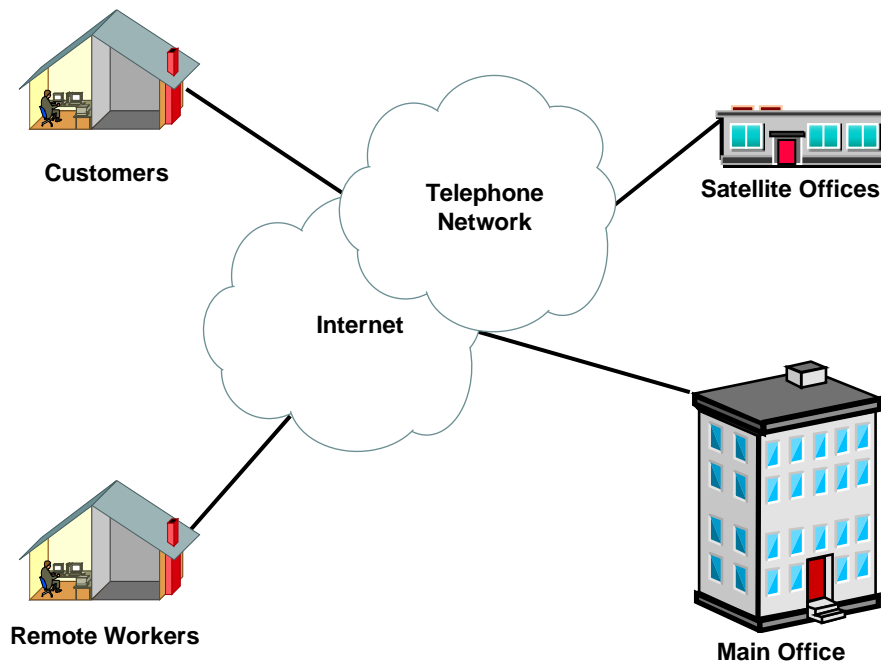
## Converge Voice and Data with Unified Communications

We've learned that IP has become the unifying protocol of business. Unified communications platforms leverage the convergence of voice and data today. Video, instant messaging, and other collaboration tools are quickly being incorporated as well. The reasons are obvious:

- Cost savings can have a dramatic impact on the success of any business. Reducing to a unified infrastructure reduces operating expense. Executives see this as a simple translation to a more streamlined cash flow.
- Integration improves a company's ability to meet business and customer needs.
- Adopting current standardized unified communications solutions builds a framework for a sustainable business that can leverage emerging technologies for future success.

## Integrate Existing Business Resources

Unified communications integrates all the resources of the business, both human and technological, giving managers a powerful tool to focus on business objectives.



**Figure 1: Satellite offices and remote workers form a tightly coupled business.**

Unified communications solutions integrate remote satellite offices and individual teleworkers into the business workflow for a cohesive face to customers and partners while reducing operating expenses and increasing efficiencies.

UCC solutions are far more than just a new technology. They bring value across a range of daily business operations by streamlining and simplifying communications with customers, partners, and employees. This operational improvement brings three key results:

- Increased decision making speed due to information being more accessible
- Improved collaboration between employees due to easier-to-use tools
- Improved customer satisfaction due to a tightly connected business organization

#### **Industry Perspective: Charles Larmand**

Charles Larmand is a leading consultant in the telecommunications industry. In a recent interview, he was asked why VoIP and UC sales are increasing so rapidly. His response:

*“What many businesses have right now is a clogged financial drain with pressure building up behind it. Companies are getting backed up with bills and are just starting to look for new ways to free up the cash flow to keep their operations going. At some point, they have to take action. A lot of companies are cutting back on inventory and salaries, which can hurt their ability to bring in new revenues. But many haven’t looked at their phone bills for years and years. And a lot has changed since then. It is possible for a company to save 40 or even 60% on their phone bills by switching from traditional telephone service to VoIP. While that may not be enough to unclog the drain, it can be enough to keep a business alive long enough to survive the current economic conditions. Smart Telecom agents are starting to go out and offer to overhaul the telephone systems and contracts for these companies. I haven’t been this busy in years.”*

#### **Create a Corporate Culture of Responsiveness**

For many businesses today, there’s been an increased focus on something we hear referred to as *Web 2.0*. In large businesses, we hear the term *Enterprise 2.0*. This whole mindset toward the next-evolution business is really not driven by implementing Ajax or Ruby on Rails in Web services. It isn’t about new fancy browser widgets. It’s about being responsive to customer needs. It’s about being nimble. Many companies have pursued *Web 2.0* initiatives, with varying results. Unified communications represents *Web 2.0* personified in business communications.

McKinsey & Company is a management consulting firm that advises many large companies and government organizations. In a 2009 McKinsey report, the one key point distilled from surveys of more than 1700 companies was that the most successful are actively using the broad suite of Web 2.0 and unified communications technologies to drive their success

(Source:

[http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Business\\_Technology/BT\\_Strategy/How\\_companies\\_are\\_benefiting\\_from\\_Web\\_20\\_McKinsey\\_Global\\_Survey\\_Results\\_2432#](http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Business_Technology/BT_Strategy/How_companies_are_benefiting_from_Web_20_McKinsey_Global_Survey_Results_2432#) [registration required]).

## Summary

Unified communications tools that network businesses into cohesive productive organisms aren't static. They change constantly, requiring constant evolution. For the networked business, this also increases adaptability. One could argue that the "survival of the fittest" is really based on adaptability.

Businesses that embrace remote workers and satellite offices already demonstrate flexibility in meeting business needs. Networking the business communications for a unified toolset focused on meeting business objectives builds a stronger competitive position today while laying a foundation for growth and success in the future.