Building Business Productivity with
Unified Communications
The Essentials Series

Integrating Mobility Into Business Unified Communications

Ken Camp

Introduction to Realtime Publishers

by Don Jones, Series Editor

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Integrating Mobility into Business Unified Communications

Is your staff increasingly reliant on mobile telephones? Does your business need to integrate remote and mobile workers more effectively when they're out of the office? Do you think this integration is unattainable? You might be surprised. Current unified communications solutions deliver comprehensive integration of mobile workers that enables increased availability and improved productivity by delivering easy access to the resources of your network regardless of the location of staff.

The Trick to Maximizing Mobile Workers

Mobility matters in business. From major enterprises to midsize companies to solo entrepreneurs, being mobile has become increasingly important for a number of reasons. The simple cell phone has evolved along with the wireless networks. Smartphones have become multimedia workstations.

Companies shifted from desktop computers to laptops and notebooks to maximize productivity and enable working anywhere. That transition has expanded to include a strong measure of convergence between mobile devices and computers. Many workers today use a Blackberry, Windows Mobile, or iPhone device as a primary business tool. For many working professionals, the ability to carry a digital camera, Web browser, email, and instant messaging tools as well as make calls with a single device is more than just a convenience; it's an efficient way to get more done.

The Old Way: Voicemail, Email, and Missed Opportunities

With the technologies of the past, business people were anchored. Their desk in the office was the pivotal point of the work day. A desktop computer connected to the corporate network and a wired telephone extension for the telephone and voicemail systems provided access to the company's resources.

For many businesses, maintaining this model created an impediment to adaptation. Voicemail messages left customers in "voicemail jail." Productive business had to be shaped to fit the tools rather than tools fitting the needs of the business. Remote workers were left with computers that could connect but often not reach the full resources of the network. Cell phones were distinctly separate and completely disconnected from the company. Unified communications has changed all that.

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The New Way: Always On, Always Available, Always Responsive

Today's business culture is very different from the past. Even the nine-to-five work day has become a thing of the past for many businesses. The information economy has changed the way we work.

Today, people work in remote offices, in other parts of the world, from home, from coffee shops, or anywhere the need arises. Globalization has rendered the 24-hour clock almost obsolete. Geography and the clock have both been made irrelevant for many workers. *Time-shifting* allows employees to work with anyone at any time.

Beyond working any time, today's workers often need to be connected to company resources wherever they are. Workers may need to be at a customer site, a training class, an airport, or anywhere during the work day. In order to perform their jobs, they require ubiquitous access to the full resources of the company, including telephone, the Web, and email. This change in how we work has created an *always on* approach to work. We don't just *time-shift* work to fit the hours needed. We *place-shift* it, working from wherever we happen to be at the moment.

Figure 1: Mobile devices are many and varied.

With the variety of smartphones, laptops, tablets, and other mobile devices available today, business support for mobility is becoming a major requirement for businesses of every size and type.

Ubiquity and Mobility Are Not the Same Thing

As the need for mobile services grows, mobility and service ubiquity are often muddled together as the same thing. Mobile, or cellular telephony, coupled with wireless broadband data services requires support for handing off calls from one tower to another and roaming from one serving area to the next. Although the cellular networks all contain occasional coverage dead spots where data or phone calls are dropped, as a whole, the network works very well. We can reasonably expect that a mobile phone call will successfully be transferred from one cell tower to another while we're on the go. Until recently, the technology to hand off VoIP calls from a mobile device (usually established over a WiFi network) to a carrier's cellular network wasn't common. Today, it's becoming more widely adopted and holds great promise for the convergence of mobile communications. This fixed mobile convergence (FMC) also holds great promise for the future of unified communications.

Ubiquity doesn't correlate directly to actually being in motion while working. Being mobile and in motion are two very different things. Although the expansion of WiFi to airplanes and trains has enabled many commuters to work in transit, the majority of mobile workers don't actually work in motion. Rather, we take our tools with us from place to place and work once we've arrived and are again stationary. Thus, mobility and ubiquity are different facets of network availability and reliability.

Extend Capacity by Extending Your Reach

Unified communications tools in many current products provide strong support for the mobile workforce. By extending the reach of the company to mobile users, the business presence or brand can be extended though technology tools.

With client support for mobile devices, the office phone number can be extended to an employee's cell phone. This gives customers a single phone number to contact, and allows complete transparency to remote workers. These remote workers appear to callers just as if the remote workers were working at their desks in the office. Many factors are converging to increase support for mobile work, making it a practical tool in every business, with some interesting benefits.

- Provide incentive for new staff joining the company; especially as baby boomers begin to leave the workforce, replaced by a younger workforce that expects mobility as a part of life
- Increase the likelihood of retaining experienced quality staff when it's treated as a way to work more flexibly
- Deliver better customer service—always on, always available

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- Increase both efficiency and productivity

- Solve staffing problems during peak periods and non-standard work hours by making mobile workers more accessible

- Ensure continued operations during an emergency or natural disaster

Integrating Mobile Workers into Routine Workflows

FMC has carried many implications. For some, it may mean extending the office number to an employee's cell phone. For many, it means the ability to roam between cellular and WiFi networks without losing call continuity. A mature view would consider both a natural requirement in the evolution of unified communications and mobility.

For many businesses, the most important potential is the ability to integrate corporate cell phones with the telecommunications infrastructure. As companies shift from traditional PBX technologies toward VoIP and unified communications solutions, this integration is not only possible but also can deliver cost savings while increasing efficiency and productivity.

Enabling Proactive Business for Increased Productivity

As the way we work changes to leverage technologies, our culture changes. The corporate culture of work changes as well. Professional and dedicated workers want to give their best work. They want to be proactive and take initiative. Many studies have demonstrated that lack of tools is one of the most common employee complaints in worker satisfaction surveys.

Recent advances in social networking are changing our culture. In the industrial age, our social network included the people we worked with. Today, it extends to customers and partners via online networks. Mobile solutions that allow access any time and any place foster a culture of regular communications and enable a phone call, instant message, or email note any time or place. Enabling the mobile workforce by providing well-integrated tools delivers the ability for good workers to do more, be proactive, and get results.

Leveraging Expertise Anywhere

Expertise from senior employees and SMEs is a precious resource in business. These employees generally draw a higher salary and are more in demand in a competitive job market. Maximizing their impact through mobile tools minimizes lost time and effort. It also engenders them with a sense of being valued, creating a spirit of productivity.

Unreachable Experts = Wasted Money

When workers need advice, mentoring, or assistance from someone with more expertise in a given area, they reach out to colleagues. Your staff is always busy, so reaching the right person can be a challenge during periods of high demand. Subject experts may be working at a business partner in the morning and a customer site in the afternoon and even supporting a conference or user group in the evening.

Using unified communications and mobility tools enables sharing information about company staff that goes far beyond leaving a voicemail message. Mobile support of IM systems includes presence indicators to show employees in meetings, at lunch, available, and so on even when they're out of the office. Using UCC tools to their maximum advantage, your staff can always know who's available to assist, where they are, and how to reach them.

Always Available = Improved Customer Service

This *always on, always available* capability parlays into improved customer service in many ways. Consider the sales representative who has to cover a large geographic area. Voice calls to the cell phone have been valuable for a long time. But when this sales rep has a fully converged mobile device, office calls, from inside the company or outside customers, route seamlessly to wherever the rep is located.

Phone calls, email, Web services, instant messaging, and more can be delivered instantly. Customers no longer get voicemail and leave messages wondering when they'll hear back. They can reach staff anywhere. Return calls don't have to wait until the employee returns to the office. Instantaneous response is easy—from anywhere, anytime.

Embracing Mobility for the Future

Today, mobility is a rapidly growing trend. It's a business tool that's being widely embraced. New tools like the Apple iPad aren't yet fully integrated into the majority of business systems, but there is tremendous support to leverage all the technological tools available into strong competitive differentiators for business.

> **Mobility Makes Computing Casual**
>
> As the Internet spreads throughout every facet of our business and personal lives, computing and communications are no longer regimented practices that must take place in the office. They've become an inherent part of our lifestyle. I call this "casual computing:"
>
> *As the tools of mobility penetrate our daily lives, simplicity becomes more and more vital. But simplicity carries a price tag of complexity. That dichotomy can be misunderstood. Achieving simplicity with integrated tools requires planning, foresight, and a methodical approach to achieving what really matters in our lives.*
>
> *Our work ethic as a society is changing and evolving. Always-on sounds highly productive, but there can be negative implications as well. Ask someone you know who works from home how they get away from work. When work and the home office is always present, always waiting, it's very easy for a driven worker to succumb to workaholic tendencies and allow family, friends, and even the social aspects of working relationships to lapse into disarray. If work can be an addiction, technology tools can easily be used to feed that addiction to the detriment of other aspects of our lives.*

Just as we take a holistic approach to network design, network management, and business process workflows, we must take a holistic approach to managing the blurred line between work and personal time, efforts and resources.

Mobile computing implies being always connected, but being actively engaged and connected doesn't have to mean that we are always available for work. The integration afforded by the convergence of data, voice, and video services on the network with enterprise business or Web services applications brings powerful tools to the hands of everyone. As work life and persona life blend, our social network overlaps or dovetails with our personal network in many ways. Just as our networks blend together, our communications styles blend into a more casual style of using the tools at hand regardless of our setting.

Casual computing for work doesn't mean being unprofessional or inattentive to our work. Rather, the structure of our work day becomes less regimented as we casually work during times that might have been "down" periods in our day in earlier times. The time clock, a centerpiece of the industrial age, when the manufacturing sector had to manage around-the-clock productivity, becomes an anachronism. In the information age of today, availability and access to resources is one of the foundations of how people communicate for both business and personal needs.

Increased Mobility Support for Employee Incentive

The global economy has suffered greatly for the past 2 years. Many jobs were lost, creating a perception of a surplus of workers. It's interesting to note that in June 2010, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that trends indicated more employees quit their jobs than lost their jobs during that month.

The emerging workforce from *GenX*, *GenY,* and *The Millenials* is not made up of job market entrants that expect to work in a factory or on assembly line. It's a highly mobile workforce that grew socialized to text messaging, instant messaging, email, video sharing, and social networking using mobile devices. Whether it's to attract a new pool of talent or to give incentive for current staff to stay on the job, mobility has proven a strong workforce incentive that many companies leverage to engage and motivate their staff.

Summary

Mobile tools are evolving at a rapid pace. They allow us to *time-shift* and *place-shift* our work to fit our daily life—at work, at home, and on the go. They engender a culture of being *always on*. We spend our time connected with more people physically farther away than we've ever have. Many workers blend work and play, business and pleasure, seamlessly, inexpensively, and with unified communications integration, almost effortlessly.

Mobile integration and support is no longer confined to the large enterprise with deep pockets. The ROI on the technology investment, increases in efficiency and productivity, and the corporate culture changes that accompany unified communications integration make this a worthwhile endeavor for a company of any size, in any industry. Mobility really does matter.