Key Considerations when Evaluating an Enterprise Collaboration Solution

Introduction

Collaboration is increasingly recognized as a critical investment for organizations looking for new sources of productivity and innovation. Cost cutting and efficiency measures can achieve only so much; the next breakthrough levels of business performance will come from the ability to tap into the collective knowledge and creativity of your workforce. The challenge lies in creating an environment where people can work effectively together anywhere, anytime, in an engaging manner while accommodating the needs of the new workplace.

Technologies such as smart mobile devices, social media, video, and cloud-based services are significantly affecting the way people interact at work, in much the same way that they have in our personal lives. At the same time, the workforce is also undergoing a major demographic shift, as the incoming generation expects a more flexible environment that provides choice in how, when, and where they work, as well as the device they use and the way they interact with others.

This reality makes the evaluation of a collaboration solution more important than ever. A narrow decision based on a single platform or capability—for example, instant messaging (IM)—may limit your flexibility later when it comes to supporting other important constituents such as mobile workers, executives, call center agents, and business partners.

Likewise, a solution that has not been designed with the wider needs of the enterprise in mind—such as the efficient handling of voice and video, consistency of service from the cloud or on-premises deployments, or the ability to support a variety of operating systems, devices, and applications—could become a major concern as the workspace continues to evolve.

We believe the answer is to base the solution on a flexible platform that is designed specifically to serve the new post-PC workplace, fits in easily with the existing IT landscape, and can accommodate the most stringent enterprise demands as they arise.

This document highlights six areas that we recommend for comparing vendors' collaboration offerings:

- Commitment to BYOD platforms
- Business-critical voice and video
- Business-critical support services
- Cloud support for voice and video
- Comprehensive support for video
- True cost to deploy

Commitment to BYOD Platforms

The use of personal mobile devices at work (the bring-your-own-device [BYOD] trend) is here to stay. Of the 350 million smartphones expected to be used in the workplace by 2016, 200 million of them will be user-owned[1], and the iPad, announced just 2 years ago, can already be found in 94 percent of the Fortune 500 companies[2].

Sales of smartphones and tablets are fast outpacing sales of PCs, and according to IDC, more end users will access the Internet through a mobile device than from a PC by 2015[3].

According to another study[4], 76 percent of IT leaders consider the BYOD trend "somewhat" or "extremely" positive for their companies. The top two perceived benefits are improved employee productivity (more opportunities to collaborate) and greater job satisfaction.

This trend means that any enterprise collaboration solution should support **all the major device platforms equally well**, with a native device experience and full vendor-backed support. And the obvious implication is that the solution vendor must have **strong mutually supportive relationships** with all the OS and device vendors.

Cisco Does Not Compete with the Mobile Device or OS Vendors

Cisco neither produces nor sells smartphones and tablets. As a result, there are fewer competing corporate objectives that interfere with our ability to work together with vendors that sell these products.

Our development teams have worked closely with Apple to develop a variety of products that integrate seamlessly with the Apple iOS operating system, including the WebEx®, Jabber®, and AnyConnect® applications. We share the feedback we obtain from our mutual customers with Apple in order to help improve both Apple's and our own products for our joint customers.

Additionally, the Cisco WebEx® meeting solution was one of the applications highlighted on stage at Apple's own iPad2 launch event—and CNN-Fortune cited it as a top 5 iPad application for business.

As a result of our strong relationships, we have seen more than 3 million Cisco Collaboration applications (including WebEx, Jabber, and Any Connect) downloaded from Apple, Google, and Blackberry application stores, and we remain committed to an "any device, anytime, anywhere" strategy that fully supports a multi-client BYOD environment, including the Microsoft Windows client platform.

Recommendation: Ensure your collaboration vendor is committed to supporting all leading BYOD platforms with no conflicting agendas.

Business-Critical Voice and Video

Unified communications has enabled millions of businesses to carry converged traffic for data, voice, and video over their corporate IP networks. However, there is an important distinction between simply delivering that traffic in a local, low-intensity environment (such as an office) and providing an enterprise-wide backbone capable of serving tens of thousands of users at carrier-grade levels of reliability and performance—in other words, capable of serving the company's most critical business needs.

Different Users, Different Needs

In many businesses different functions and user needs could benefit from improved communication and interaction in the workplace; in other words, there is no "one-size-fits-all" use case for collaboration. For example:

- Mobile workers need the same real-time access to collaboration tools and people as their office-based colleagues, but from their smart devices in constantly shifting locations and conditions.
- Executives need secure, high-quality voice and video interaction with customers, partners and staff across the globe, whether from the office or while traveling.
- Specialized workers such as physicians need a high-quality, confidential voice and video service to conduct remote consultations with patients, locate colleagues, and discuss test results.
- Contact center agents may need to interact with customers using voice, web, chat, video, or social media at the touch of a button, over a virtualized desktop link from home.

Cisco has deployed solutions for customers for all these use cases and many more in business-critical settings. By comparison, a solution optimized for only the desktop office worker may not adequately serve other users based on their specific needs, and thus may provide less value to the business.

Cisco Has a Proven Performance Record

Cisco began developing IP communications solutions in 1997, and has been in the business longer than any other vendor. Today, more than 95 percent of Fortune 500 companies use Cisco Collaboration, and we have shipped more than 55 million IP phones[5].

More than 200,000 customers worldwide rely on Cisco for their business communications every day. Hundreds of them have deployed more than 5,000 IP phones, and more than 50 have deployments of more than 25,000 endpoints. Additionally, our customers have deployed more than 3 million contact center agent seats and 1 million Cisco TelePresence® endpoints, while WebEx meeting solutions host 1.2 billion meeting minutes per month from more than 7 million registered hosts.

Cisco is the Gartner Magic Quadrant market leader in unified communications, as well as in several other important categories including IP telephony, conferencing, telepresence, and customer care.

Cisco Offers the Leading Media-Handling Technology

Cisco continues to make innovations that facilitate the deployment and management of business-critical voice and video, including:

- Single call control for both voice and video across the full range of endpoints from mobile clients to Cisco TelePresence endpoints—removing the need for separate infrastructure silos and considerably simplifying management of the combined system.
- Medianet and the Cisco Prime™ enterprise and service provider management portfolio help to optimize the quality of voice and video traffic across the network, allowing visibility, monitoring, and adjustment of priority or allocated bandwidth as needed by different endpoints.
- Cisco video solutions support the H.264 Advanced Video Coding (AVC) standard, making them interoperable with more than 2 million other video endpoints and infrastructure solutions in the industry.

> **Recommendation:** Ensure your collaboration vendor has a proven ability to support the entire business with quality voice and video.

Business-Critical Support

When considering an investment on which the business' operation depends, and which may be used by thousands of employees daily, a vendor's ability to provide world-class planning, execution, and support becomes as much of a consideration as the solution itself.

Multivendor Approach Complicates Support

The way in which a collaboration solution is designed can significantly affect its supportability. Some vendors rely on independent third parties to provide important missing pieces (for example telephones, video endpoints, media gateways, wireless, and LAN networking).

Although working with third parties is not in itself problematic, issues can arise when a multivendor environment complicates the support model. The customer can then face longer resolution times and sub-optimal system performance. For example, it may take time to diagnose and isolate a system fault among multiple components, figure out who is responsible for that piece, and ensure the vendor supplies a suitable fix that does not destabilize the system. The multivendor approach can also place a significant burden back on the customer to negotiate and manage multiple service contracts and terms.

Cisco Offers World-Class Solution Support

Cisco offers award-winning global support services that take responsibility for the success of the entire system,

using in-house expertise that has continued to evolve over 15 years supporting our unified communications business, and 25 years supporting mission-critical networks. Our support services provide:

- Single-point accountability: A distinction of the Cisco approach is that a single point of contact takes ownership for a customer's entire support needs. Cisco not only supports the full breadth of our own collaboration solution—from the software applications to the endpoints, switches, gateways, wireless networking, security, and compute hardware—it can also support third-party technology components in a multivendor scenario, or extend the same level of support through implementation partners that it offers for direct customers.

    This service model extends around the world, and in many areas support is available in local languages.

- Best-in-class support: Our support operation has won numerous awards for excellence, including the prestigious JD Powers award six times[6] for Excellence in Certified Technology Service and Support. Our support certification program is one of the most rigorous in the industry, and we have more than 4000 dedicated collaboration specialists in the Cisco Services organization who can assist customers through the entire lifecycle from planning to deployment to ongoing management.

- Single bill of materials: In addition to single-point accountability for support, we also provide a single bill of materials for all our support services, clearly documenting the terms and procedures and considerably simplifying administration compared with a multivendor approach.

Deployment Partner Expertise

Cisco also has a strong history of working with service providers and other partners around the world with deep knowledge of our collaboration solutions as well as the network and its ability to handle voice, video, and data traffic in large-scale deployments. Rigorous standards of certification help ensure that these partners are experts in their field and can assist with deployment, optimization, value-add solutions, or any other aspect of the system.

We also help strengthen the partner's role as a trusted advisor through the Cisco Services Partner Program, whereby partners can sell and deliver our range of smart services themselves (backed by Cisco as a Collaborative Service), or have Cisco deliver them directly. In addition, partners have access to a wide range of enablement tools and methodologies, further enhancing their ability to plan, build, and manage successful deployments.

Monitoring and Reporting

In addition to Cisco support services, administrators can also help maintain the system in running order themselves, with a comprehensive range of real-time monitoring, diagnostics, and reporting tools designed to provide a thorough check of the end-to-end system.

Recommendation: Ensure your collaboration vendor can take support responsibility for the entire system without relying on third parties for critical component support.

Cloud-Based Voice and Video

There is a growing interest in flexible hosting options for business applications, including collaboration, with 70 percent of enterprises already using some form of cloud technology[7]. However, the reality is that we live in a "world of many clouds", so IT teams may need a range of options from software-as-a service (SaaS) to a private cloud to a managed system as required.

It follows, then, that any credible collaboration solution should be able to offer its services under any of these hosting models, without loss of functions, service levels, or scalability. A critical element of such a service is the ability to deliver enterprise-class voice and video equally well from both cloud-based and on-premises installations.

Cisco Offers Choice Without Penalty

Cisco designed its collaboration architecture from the beginning for flexible deployment, supporting a variety of cloud-based models, on-premises deployments, and hybrids of the two. In this way we can offer our solutions consistently and securely regardless of the hosting model, and IT can choose the deployment option that works best for the business (that is, there is no "penalty" for choosing one over another).

For example, Cisco's industry-leading web conferencing solution is available under a SaaS model and a private cloud model, and is sold through partners and direct channels—the functionality is identical in each case. Likewise, Cisco TelePresence Systems are available in on-premises form or as a service.

Voice, Video, and Data from the Cloud

Rich media, such as voice and video, present a challenge to a cloud-based delivery model because they require synchronized delivery of large unpredictable packet streams over large distances to avoid "dropouts" or unclear images to the recipients. This is one reason why consumer-grade Internet-based services are not always considered robust enough for enterprise use: the Internet is notoriously unreliable and difficult to control, frequently subject to congestion and dropped packets.

Cisco has developed industry-leading expertise in how to optimize network traffic to ensure delivery of high-quality voice, video, and data to thousands of users simultaneously across the globe—something not easily replicated by other vendors. Our SaaS conferencing service supports nearly 2 billion meeting minutes per month among 33 million participants in 230 countries, making it the third largest business SaaS operation in the world[8].

Rapidly Growing Partner Ecosystem

Cisco also enjoys strong partnerships with more than 30 leading service providers, systems integrators, and wholesalers[9] (growing at 100 percent per year) who are free to create their own value-add cloud collaboration solutions based on the same industry-leading portfolio as that offered to our direct customers.

The Cisco Hosted Collaboration Solution (HCS) provides full functions of the Cisco portfolio, including voice, video, IM, voicemail, conferencing, and contact center from the cloud, while also facilitating powerful new options such as fixed mobile convergence between on-premises and fourth-generation (4G) and Long-Term Evolution (LTE) devices.

> Recommendation: Ensure your collaboration vendor has proven ability to deliver quality voice and video from the cloud at enterprise scale and reliability.

Complete Solution for Video

Video continues to be one of the fastest growing areas of Internet usage. By 2016, 3 trillion minutes (6 million years) of video content will cross the Internet globally each month, and video will exceed 92 percent of global Internet traffic[10].

The adoption of video by business is also accelerating as a result of increased globalization and the need to build and maintain face-to-face relationships with partners, suppliers, and vendors at a distance. The ability for video to enable a more compelling interaction than other forms of collaboration has also found appeal with executives: 54 percent of business leaders consider visual cues, such as expressions and body language, among the most important parts of communication[11].

The benefits of video extend far beyond the desktop. Immersive video rooms are taking the place of business travel, customer care is being transformed with virtual "in-person" experiences, in-store surveillance cameras can detect long-wait lines, and the factory shop floor can access video capture and streaming capabilities to monitor line status or security problems.

So it is important to assess whether your collaboration solution can provide video for the **whole** enterprise.

Cisco Provides Interoperable, High-Quality Video

Cisco offers a complete line of standards-based, integrated, and interoperable video solutions, including endpoints targeted at every user type—such as IP phones, desktop and mobile software, personal video devices, and telepresence. These endpoints all share the same Session Initiation Protocol (SIP)-based call control for voice and video, so placing calls between different users with different endpoints is as easy as pointing and clicking or dialling a phone.

Cisco also provides sophisticated management tools to let you manage video at scale. Medianet and Cisco Prime Collaboration Manager allow you to manage video-based implementations more easily by visualizing and

monitoring video collaboration usage in real time; it also allows you to identify, isolate, and correct problems. This proposition is much more difficult when critical components of the solution may not be able to participate in end-to-end optimization.

Cisco Protects Video Investments

Cisco makes great effort to ensure our collaboration solution is interoperable with the existing IT landscape to preserve investment. Cisco video solutions are standards-based (supporting the most widely adopted H.264 AVC standard), so they are interoperable with the more than 2 million videoconferencing endpoints and infrastructure solutions deployed in market today on that standard.

Our multiplatform collaboration client, Cisco Jabber™, provides better video quality than similar applications on the same devices, because its video capabilities are optimized for video on both Intel and Advanced RISC Machine (ARM)-based processor platforms. This optimization lets Jabber clients provide high-definition (HD) video on dual-core Windows PCs and at 480p on Apple iPads.

> **Recommendation:** Ensure your collaboration vendor can deliver standards-based, interoperable video to the full range of business users and endpoints at enterprise scale.

True Cost to Deploy

As with any strategic investment, it is important to assess the true cost of deploying a collaboration solution at the beginning, and to compare alternative solutions on an equitable "apples-vs.-apples" basis.

This true cost may not be immediately apparent with some solutions that embed collaboration functions into complex licensing and bundling arrangements, or where the dependency on extra components that are required to deploy a complete working system is not obvious. In this sense, apparently "free" client licenses are simply the part of the total cost that is visible.

Cisco Offers Clear, Simplified Software Licensing

Cisco requires that you purchase only three licenses to gain full functions including technical support and updates—an approach that considerably simplifies contract maintenance and visibility of what you are paying for. Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing (CUWL) provides the most popular bundles of Cisco Collaboration applications and services in a cost-effective, simple package, including soft clients, applications server software, and licensing on a per-user basis. Two additional services provide major software upgrades, maintenance updates, and award-winning 24-hour Cisco Technical Assistance Center (TAC) support.

By comparison, other vendor licensing can be more complex, with additional charges for upgrades, premier support, extra hardware, and third-party items.

Single-Vendor Savings

The introduction of third-party components into a collaboration solution can increase complexity and cost for both initial deployment and ongoing support, when compared to an equivalent solution that a single vendor can supply and support. Incompatibilities can easily arise from the many different permutations of interface, configuration, management, and software revisions between critical elements of the solution, adding integration and support burdens.

By comparison, Cisco offers "one-stop shopping" for much more of the solution footprint, including an infrastructure purposefully designed for real-time collaboration (not general-purpose office tools), and a wide choice of compatible endpoints for voice and video, gateways, security, and networking that can reduce the cost of integration, troubleshooting, and maintenance.

> **Recommendation:** Assess the true cost to deploy and support your collaboration solution; bundled client licenses do not necessarily mean the solution is "free".

Summary

We view collaboration as a strategic business asset, not simply as a desktop tool for messaging and document sharing. The ability to harness the collective knowledge and expertise that lies within your workforce is a powerful competitive advantage and source of innovation for your business.

You can amplify this advantage by embracing recent shifts in technology (such as smart mobile devices, video, social, and cloud-based applications) and broadening access from office-based workers to all employees (including customer care agents, executives, and mobile and desk-less workers).

It is from this perspective that we highlight the six areas in this document that in our opinion can significantly affect deployment of an enterprise collaboration solution, although they may not be immediately apparent.

We believe that a solution that has been developed primarily from a desktop PC software perspective is inherently less equipped to meet the new workplace demands (such as BYOD environments, video, and flexible hosting) than one that has been designed from the beginning as an integrated system optimized for real-time communications.

We believe that successful delivery of the next-generation collaboration experience is not just a matter of desktop software or the latest social network or smartphone. It requires a "full-stack" approach with the flexibility to adapt to multiple different environments and use cases, with the built-in infrastructure that can provide a compelling user experience and deliver the superior reliability, scalability, and value expected of a true business solution.

Cisco has the most established track record of any vendor in the unified communications business, and we encourage you to compare our collaboration solution offerings in detail with any of the available alternatives – especially against the criteria outlined in this document.

We hope you find this information of value in your evaluation efforts.

For More Information

For more information please contact your local representative or visit http://www.cisco.com

1 Forrester, February 14th 2012
2 Apple Event, September 12th 2012
3 IDC cross-sector research, October 2012
4 Cisco IBSG Horizons Study, May 2012
5 Cisco News Release, April 2012
6 Cisco Recognized for Excellence in Certified Technology Service and Support Program
7 CIO Magazine 2011
8 IT Business Edge, October 2012
9 Cisco HCS news release October 2012
10 Cisco Visual Networking Index (VNI) 2012

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