

Simplifying Technology:

Ways Your Business Can Communicate Better

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Discover how to:

- Reduce costs
- Increase productivity
- Improve customer service
- Gain a competitive advantage

For
Small
Business



To thrive today, a small business can't be latent.

It must access real-time information—such as customer orders, patient records, and inventory updates.

And it must bridge human gaps—ensuring that employees can communicate from anywhere in the business, on the road, or from their homes, using the device of their choice.

Workers' locations are expanding, while money and timelines are tightening. Communications—especially connecting to collaborate and do business faster—are more important than ever.

Smartphones offer some advantages over traditional mobile and desk phones. But they cannot deliver the voice clarity, efficient and secure data access, or collaboration power of today's business communications technology—unified communications (UC).

UC brings together voice, messaging, video, data applications, and the Internet Protocol (IP) to bridge communication gaps between employees, suppliers, and customers.

It also integrates diverse digital devices—including laptop, tablet, and desktop computers; wireless and wired IP phones; and smartphones.

UC is more than placing voice over IP (VoIP) calls. UC is all about making connections.

In less than 10 minutes you can read this guide and learn:

- **Who** needs unified communications
- **Why** invest in UC: The return on investment (ROI)
- **How** a business does it: The key technologies
- **Where** to find the help you need, for hosted or on-premises UC



Who Needs Unified Communications?

To quickly assess whether your business could benefit from UC, answer these six questions:

Y **N**
 Would your customer service excel if the phone system quickly answered every incoming call and routed it to the most qualified staff available for the call? Or if the phone system could automatically pull up customer or patient records?

Y **N**
 Is your company spending too much money on calls between worksites, on personnel to answer phones, or on phone charges for mobile employees, teleworkers, or conferencing services?

Y **N**
 Could you dramatically improve your organization's efficiency if your phone system could find mobile employees regardless of their location? If employees working

from home—or at a client site or Wi-Fi hot spot—could use your system just as if they were in the office?

Y **N**
 Would productivity rise with a phone system that reduces voicemail tag? Alerts employees to urgent messages?

Y **N**
 Would you save labor costs with a phone system that automatically reminds patients about their appointments? Tracks the calls of staff for client billing? Efficiently brings people together to collaborate?

Y **N**
 More than 30 percent of U.S. small businesses say that VoIP will be critical to their operations.¹ Are you dissatisfied with the quality or capabilities of “free” or low-cost VoIP services?

Wherever you answered yes to a question, your business could benefit from UC.

¹ AMI Partners report: 2010 VoIP Update – U.S. SMB Market, December 9, 2010.

Why Invest in Unified Communications: The ROI

When your employees use UC, they stay connected—whatever their digital device, media, or location. They can work without worrying about missing an important call, instant message, or email, or losing access to the applications and data on your network.

UC can increase the profitability of your company in multiple ways.

Typically, it delivers an ROI that includes at least two of these four metrics:

1. Increases productivity
2. Reduces costs
3. Improves customer service
4. Creates competitive advantages

Consider these real-life small-business examples:

An [importer-distributor](#) invested in UC to give its employees access to voice and real-time data, wherever they are. The ROI of the UC solution provided by a [Cisco® Certified Partner](#):

- Increased productivity by giving staff immediate access to voice and data, including secure mobile access with laptops and wireless phones
- Improved customer service by speeding responses; created a competitive advantage with superior customer care
- Reduced the costs of making phone system changes; enabled efficient growth in a fast-paced industry

A [supplier](#) replaced its old phone system to get more control and better connections. A Cisco Certified Partner provided a UC system that delivered the following ROI:

- Transformed phone calls into video calls that accelerated customers' decisions and product shipments
- Improved [customer service](#) by enabling employees to quickly get and give better information; increased connections with vendors
- Increased productivity by streamlining call routing and allowing employees to use wired and wireless IP phones

A [professional services firm](#) invested in a Cisco UC solution to reduce its operating costs and compete against larger companies. Its new technology delivered this ROI:

- Doubled revenues without adding staff, by increasing productivity; won accounts against much bigger competitors; enabled growth
- Improved customer service by using a single number to reach an employee, and giving employees access to the information needed to serve customers
- Saved \$57,000 in office costs by having employees work from home; saves \$3,500 each month by using an IP phone video receptionist

How Unified Communications Does It: The Key Technologies

We'll keep it simple to give you a quick understanding of the essential UC technologies: combining voice and data on a single network, and the applications that can improve the way you do business.

Combining Voice and Data on the Same Network

UC integrates voice, video, and data on one network so that everyone can communicate however they wish, wherever they are. Their communications are exchanged via IP, though a UC system such as an IP private branch exchange (PBX).

The system can be on your premises, or you can subscribe to a hosted service in the cloud or from a local service provider. Prices for a business-class UC system start at [under \\$1000](#). Hosted service subscription prices start at about \$25 per user, per month.

UC technology has come a long way in the last decade. Have you ever experienced jittery or dropped voice calls, or jerky videos? The culprit is usually network congestion. The good news is that even the smallest business can now avoid congestion if it has just four elements:

1. Adequate capacity (bandwidth). An IP phone call typically takes 80 Kb or less—a minuscule amount of the bandwidth on a local area network (LAN). Any home or business LAN that uses 100 Mb or Gigabit Ethernet to connect computers—

and uses an external broadband Internet service—typically has the bandwidth to add UC traffic.

However, voice and video are especially sensitive to traffic delays.

2. Traffic management. Two key network technologies decrease delays:

- **Virtual LANs (VLANs)** can put voice traffic in its own lane. A voice VLAN can't be used by other traffic on the network.
- **Quality of service (QoS)** can help ensure that voice traffic takes priority over other traffic on the network. When a voice call with QoS travels through the network, switches and routers give it precedence.

Automating VLANs and QoS reduces the risk of human error. Cisco is the only UC vendor that provides auto VLANs and QoS.

3. Business-class IP phones. Phones that are business quality and have a range of easy-to-use features are essential to gaining ROI. For example, some employees may require intuitive hold and transfer functions, video calling, or high-definition (HD) voice quality.

4. Business-class security and systems performance. [IP PBXs](#) and network [routers and switches](#) that are designed specifically for business communications offer

³ [Cisco 2010 Annual Security Report](#)

the speed, reliability, and security required for both voice and data.

Now that you understand a UC network, what can you do with it?

UC capabilities range from basic to advanced—from processing incoming and outgoing calls, to other business applications. You may want to begin with a UC system that will serve your business for several years, and add applications over time.

Key applications include:

Connecting Callers

Making and receiving calls: Use single-number reach to receive a call wherever you are, on any device. Or, when working in a Microsoft application, easily click to dial or answer a call (without picking up a phone or leaving the application).

Integrated messaging: Use your email software to receive, listen to, and manage voicemails and faxes. It can also alert you to urgent voicemail.

Centralized reception: An attendant console can ensure that every

incoming call is promptly answered and automatically routed to the appropriate person; you also can centralize or rotate attendant coverage for multiple sites. And you can free a receptionist to perform other job functions anywhere at your business, by using a wireless phone to answer and route calls.

Collaborating

Video calling: While on a call, you can use a USB video camera to stream real-time video on your PC or IP phone.

Presence features: Help an employee know whether colleagues are available and how they prefer to be reached, then simply click to reach them.

Online conferencing: Integrate voice, video, and data conferencing, and meet on an IP phone, computer, or smartphone.

Integrating Data Applications

Customer relationship management (CRM): When a customer call comes in, Salesforce.com or Microsoft CRM can display the customer records. This is especially useful for customer service and support staff, and gives salespeople opportunities to cross-sell and up-sell.

Operations: Increase productivity and reduce costs with applications such as time cards, call accounting, and systems monitoring. Industry-specific applications include insurance, auto repair, and healthcare.

UC streamlines business. It provides an impressive ROI—and reliable, secure, quality communications.



Where to Find the Help You Need

How can your company begin to communicate better?

We're ready to help. Cisco Small Business technology can help you (a) connect your business to the world, (b) secure it, and (c) communicate more effectively—using reliable, affordable options that meet your unique needs.

Count on Cisco for:

- **Products specifically designed and priced for small businesses.** Learn about [Cisco Small Business communications solutions](#) that can deliver the ROI your business requires. Cisco is the only vendor that offers all the hardware and software required for UC, end to end. Our integrated solution reduces complexity; it also eliminates finger pointing among equipment vendors.
- **The expertise of Cisco Select Certified Partners.** These partners specialize in tailoring product solutions to fit the needs of small and medium-sized businesses. [You can find a Cisco Select Certified Partner](#) near you; you can focus your search by adding the term “unified communications.”
- **A worry-free investment.** Cisco offers strong product warranties and an extensive product portfolio that can grow with your business. And we offer financing, including leasing.
- **The technical support your business needs.** We provide [a full range of support](#) specifically for small businesses.
- **Supplying hosted and managed IP services** with UC solutions. When service providers use Cisco equipment, you can gain peace of mind about QoS, VLAN, and security technologies, as well as reliability.



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