

Network-Based Collaboration Tools for Government: Assessing the ROI

Information sharing within and between agencies is essential for effective government. But empowering employees in different locations to collaborate has been an elusive goal. "Until recently, government employees haven't had an effective way to securely reach out beyond agency walls to share information with coworkers and interact with citizens in a virtual setting," says David Rubal, regional manager for Unified Communications, Cisco.

Now, with the proper enterprise architecture, agencies can use their existing IP network as the platform to deliver secure voice, video, and web collaboration services to government employees and citizens anywhere in the world.

First, a Definition

Collaboration is not simply a newer term for IP telephony, video conferencing, or web sharing. Rather, it refers to a new way of working that:

- Combines voice, video, and web sharing in one experience.
- Can be used with any device and network that agency employees happen to have available; including desktops, laptops, IP phones, smartphones, and dual-mode phones (Wi-Fi and cellular). "Today, collaboration services can follow employees wherever they go if they have a wired, Wi-Fi, or cellular connection," says Rubal.
- Is available not just to executives, but to all employees who support the agency mission or interact with the public.
- Controls what information employees can share, based on their role within the agency.

Collaboration tools with these characteristics provide a measurable return on investment (ROI) by transforming agency business processes and reducing costs.

Measuring the ROI from Collaboration Tools

The main value of collaboration is helping to achieve mission objectives more quickly, according to Rubal. Agencies can measure success based on:

- **Saving time to reach coworkers:** Presence information for each employee, visible on an IP phone, PC, or mobile phone, shows whether coworkers are currently available and how they prefer to be reached, eliminating time spent dialing multiple phone numbers and leaving messages.
- **Reducing travel time, costs, and environmental impact:** Collaboration tools such as Cisco WebEx,™ IP video phones, Cisco® Unified MeetingPlace,® and Cisco TelePresence™ reduce travel requirements to support green initiatives in government.
- **Enhancing citizen interaction:** Agencies can take advantage of interactive Web 2.0 technologies like wikis and discussion boards, Cisco WebEx, and IP contact centers to make it easier for citizens to obtain information and services. Citizen self-service also reduces contact center staffing requirements and costs.
- **Providing a recruitment advantage:** A new generation of employees accustomed to instant messaging and social networking sites prefer to work for employers who offer advanced communication and collaboration technologies.

- **Simplifying the experience for IT and employees:** Network-based collaboration services follow employees on any device they use. For example, mobile employees can use their smartphones to view their coworkers' presence information and join meetings held with Cisco WebEx or Cisco Unified MeetingPlace.
- **Controlling access to information based on a person's role:** Proper network access controls determine what files an employee can share, based on agency policy.

"Network-based collaboration is fundamentally altering the way that government employees work," Rubal concludes. "Securely delivering a combination of voice, video, and data to any location, on any device, helps agencies accomplish their mission objectives more quickly."

For More Information

View a web chat on "Collaboration via Presence Awareness" originally aired December 10: ciscoknowledgenetwork.com/uc/archives.php

Join a web chat on "Better Collaboration With Video" on January 22 at 2 p.m. ET. ciscosales.webex.com/ciscosales/onstage/g.php?t=a&d=927015747

Watch a video to see how unified communications help meet the federal government's mission: www.cisco.com/cdc_content_elements/flash/ind_sol/cisco_uc_fedgov_web/flash.html




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