



## Collaboration without borders

### **Collaboration without borders**

**Empowering people to collaborate means removing obstacles, not adding to them, says Tim Stone, head of collaboration solutions at Cisco.**

*Truly productive collaboration means being able to interact quickly without boundaries – without being hampered by the need to change devices, launch new applications, or switch between screens.*

Ultimately, this means consolidating all forms of communication into a single ‘workspace’ environment, so that employees can manage every aspect of their working day via a common interface and from a single screen – whether that be on their PC, IP phone, laptop, handheld device or mobile phone, and regardless of the type of connection.

It’s long been recognised that business users don’t care about the technology – they merely want the assurance that they can go about their jobs efficiently and effectively. The vision for Web 2.0 business collaboration, then, is that the device, network, operating system and application – as well as the department, location and company affiliation of their team members - are immaterial to the user. Whether they need to track down someone and discover their availability for contact, strike up an ad-hoc conversation (by phone, instant message, SMS, email, voicemail, tele-meeting, web conference or video session), or share content securely, the process should be equally easy, and the user experience as uniform.



Sadly, few collaboration platforms make this possible today. If they are not limited in the scope of their collaborative capabilities within a company, they are restrictive when it comes to the handsets, operating systems, applications, or connectivity type that can be harnessed to connect users. This holds businesses back, working from the false assumption that it is an effective policy to limit users to certain devices, platforms or networks or to collaboration internally. If the ultimate goal is maximum agility, flexibility and productivity, any kind of limitation is a setback.

For optimal results, organisations need to free users from any restrictions, provided of course that the resulting collaboration environment is inherently and robustly secure – something that should be a given with the right technology partner.

### **Tougher market, sharper weapons**

The need for enhanced collaboration has never been higher up the corporate agenda than today. An urgency to beat turbulent economic times and the growth of globalisation (by getting more out of the working day, and by raising customer service without raising costs), has coincided with optimal conditions technologically to propel the roll of unified communications to the forefront of strategic decision-making.

Where once, unified communications was associated largely with the convergence of voice and data networks, today its scope and reach is limited only by the organisation's imagination.

IP telephony has earned a well deserved place in the mainstream, thanks not only to the substantial technological advances (in both call quality and security), and the potential

cost savings, but also the considerable additional functionality that becomes possible once voice content is freed up from particular handsets and can be integrated dynamically with other applications.

Meanwhile, innovative, high-performing collaboration applications strike straight at the heart of organisations' fundamental needs to work more dynamically and interactively with partners and customers. Being slick and agile means being able to form and disband teams on the fly, regardless of where people are, who they work for, or which technologies are at their disposal. Communities or virtual organisations are, for many, the answer to the need to focus, specialise and add value, while keeping costs under control. The right collaboration environment will proactively support this, by bringing teams together swiftly and effortlessly, bridging miles and time-zones through clever use of Presence visibility, and flexible contact, messaging, conferencing and content-sharing facilities.

### **Holistic and seamless**

Maximum gains come from taking a holistic approach to communications and collaboration, which means organisations should look for solutions that reward rather than penalise them for embracing an entire integrated suite of functionality, through preferential licensing.

Likewise, businesses should be able to opt in or out of the applications, devices and platforms they need to make collaboration work as productively and flexibly as possible for their particular organisation. If there are key business applications already in use in the company, this investment should be protected and exploited.



With the right environment, it won't matter, either, that users' workspaces may change across the typical working day – from, say, a PC with broadband in the office or at home, to an iPhone and mobile network for voicemail and email when in the back of a taxi, to a laptop and WiFi hotspot at an airport or train station. Maximum productivity can be ensured only when the user experience transfers seamlessly from one scenario to the next. This way, no user is excluded, and opportunities are harder to let slip through the net.

As long as users continue to have heightened expectations gained from their personal experiences of the Internet and social networking and content-sharing, their demands they place on their office collaboration environment can only grow.

Offering on-premise, software as a service and combined solutions, an open architecture and interoperability with third-party solutions, we aim to be as technologically agnostic as possible while ensuring a fast, robust and inherently secure business collaboration environment. By providing our customers with the tools and support to collaborate in a way that makes sense to them, we really can take customers to the next level in their search for more natural, responsive and rich remote collaboration – all managed via the intelligent network and collaboration platform.

**Autor:**

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