

How Cisco IT Integrates WebEx Conferencing with IP Telephony

Integrating WebEx with the unified communications infrastructure is a cost-effective option for linking employees, customers, and partners into a global network.

Business Opportunity

Cisco began investigating how to combine the capabilities of WebEx and Cisco® Unified MeetingPlace even before it acquired WebEx in March 2007. After the acquisition, Cisco employees could not wait to begin using the Web collaboration solution, especially sales employees, who saw an opportunity to meet with more decision makers, more frequently. In June 2007, Cisco IT made WebEx Meeting Center available to Cisco sales team in 11 countries. And in December 2007, WebEx Sales Center was offered to Cisco's Inside Sales Team as part of their integration with Salesforce.com.

WebEx is a hosted service delivered from a data center in Mountain View, California. Cisco IT soon realized that WebEx would become even more cost effective if the voice portion of WebEx sessions traveled to Mountain View over Cisco's WAN instead of the public switched telephone network. This approach would completely eliminate long-distance charges for each party that connected.

Cisco IT began investigating ways to provide WebEx services that would preserve the user experience while using the WAN for the voice portion of conferences. The faster the deployment, the sooner that Cisco would begin experiencing cost savings. Low risk was an important solution criterion because conferencing is a highly visible solution used by executives and customers.

Cisco IT Program

The Cisco IT and voice engineering teams collaborated in mid 2007 to develop a proof of concept. "Given the mission-critical nature of the assignment and its accelerated timeline, Cisco IT chose to use the proven Unified MeetingPlace infrastructure and support teams," says Dorinda Brews, project manager, Cisco IT. "If the test succeeded, we would minimize our buildout, hardware investment, and deployment time."

Proof of Concept

Cisco IT and the voice engineering staff built the proof of concept in a lab environment in Amsterdam using Cisco routers, session border controllers, and a Cisco Unified Border Element. To test the solution, team members dialed one of the company's local Cisco Unified MeetingPlace numbers and selected "3" for a WebEx conference, which placed the call on the Cisco corporate IP backbone and routed it to Amsterdam. There, a Cisco Unified Border Element converted the call to Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) and transferred it to the WebEx audio mixers in Mountain View. All WebEx features were preserved, including "look who's talking" and call back. "During tests, voice quality was excellent with no noticeable latency as traffic traveled from California to Amsterdam and back," says Brews.

As part of the proof of concept, Cisco IT invited members of certain teams to use the system in a pilot program, being sure to inform them that the deployment was beta and not to be used for mission-critical or external communications. "We received feedback from more than 130 people and used it to enhance the proof of concept," says Brews.

Concurrent Buildout of Proof of Concept and Production System

To save time, as Cisco IT built and tested each element of the Amsterdam deployment, the team replicated the same element in the Mountain View data center that would be used for the production WebEx hosted service. As a result,

Cisco IT was able to deploy WebEx Meeting Center in just six months – twice as fast as usual for a project of this scale, according to Brews. “Most Cisco IT projects begin with our design team, then go to the implementation team, and finally to the operations team,” she says. “But because rapid deployment was a primary goal for this WebEx project, we conducted all tracks at the same time.” An advantage of this approach was that the operations team manager participated in the proof of concept and therefore gained early awareness of what her team would need to do after implementation was complete.

Production

The Mountain View data center began processing all of Cisco’s WebEx voice calls on January 11, 2008. Cisco IT built a provisioning tool to manage WebEx account registration and termination and provided WebEx accounts to approximately 8500 employees, including:

- Cisco global sales teams
- Customer Advocacy staff
- Cisco Technical Assistance Center (TAC) staff
- Employees researching collaboration technologies
- Groups performing sales support, including human resources and finance
- Staff in newly acquired companies, including Scientific Atlanta, Linksys, IronPort, and Navini

In late March 2008, Cisco IT supplemented the initial four routers with five more, doubling the system’s capacity to 2000 simultaneous calls. Currently, all WebEx voice calls are routed through Mountain View. “We can’t continue to load up the San Jose routing network indefinitely, so our next step is to make this more of a global solution,” Brews says. “We are currently determining whether it will have to be rearchitected.”

Integration with Salesforce.com

Cisco is constantly discovering new ways to take advantage of WebEx to create a human network between employees, partners, and customers global wide. In December 2007, Cisco IT integrated WebEx Sales Center with salesforce.com for users in Singapore and Hong Kong to provide interactive Web 2.0 capabilities. “Now Cisco salespeople can schedule WebEx conferences using their salesforce.com interface,” says Adam Orzen, WebEx client services representative. “And when the salesperson conducts a WebEx meeting, the activity is automatically entered in salesforce.com. The tightly integrated solution saves the salesperson some record-keeping work and therefore increases productivity.”

Results to Date

Boon for Sales Teams

Cisco’s Illinois commercial team credits WebEx Meeting Center with helping a small group cover a very large geography, manage thousands of small and medium-sized business accounts, and coach and motivate hundreds of partner account managers. “With WebEx we are interacting with customers and partners three or four times as often, cutting travel-related expenses, and improving job satisfaction by letting us communicate with our families with video when we’re working late,” says Rick Sexton, product sales specialist, Illinois Commercial, Cisco.

The team’s unified communications specialist, who lives in Kentucky, uses WebEx Meeting Center to conduct several customer briefings each week, more than he could manage if he had to travel. He also takes advantage of WebEx to conduct multimedia pre-briefings with the account team, partners, and customers to develop a relevant Customer Briefing Center agenda. “Not only are our meetings more productive, but customers experience the ‘wow’ factor and start thinking about how they can use virtual meetings to scale their own businesses,” says Sexton.

Increased Responsiveness to Customers

The ability to include executives in any global location in WebEx collaboration sessions is helping Cisco be more responsive to customers. Case in point: Cisco IT was using WebEx to conduct an executive briefing about Cisco's data center strategy when the customer unexpectedly asked about Cisco's compliance with the U.S. Sarbanes-Oxley Act. "Nobody on the call was prepared for that question," says Lyle Rochon, IT program manager. The briefing team e-mailed the Cisco Sarbanes-Oxley program manager with an invitation to join the WebEx conference within an hour. Thirty minutes later he joined and gave a presentation. Rochon says, "The ability to connect to subject matter experts so spontaneously was very appealing to the customer and reinforced the impression that Cisco has a well-connected collaboration infrastructure."

Improved TAC Experience for Cisco Customers

The Cisco TAC uses WebEx Support Center to help employees work more productively and improve the customer service. "When TAC representatives are on a call with a client, they can initiate a WebEx session and access the caller's desktop to help with troubleshooting," says Brews. To start a remote support session, the support engineer simply pastes a customer's e-mail address into the start window and clicks "Start Meeting." The customer interface provides straightforward options for chat and yes/no prompts from the support engineer. "Customers like WebEx because it's easy to use, does not require special hardware or software, and gives them complete control over data access," says David Thompson, Business Development Manager at Cisco. The TAC team is implementing a phased deployment, country by country, to give them time to provide in-depth employee training.

Cost Savings

Cisco sales organizations expect to save US\$3.2 million quarterly by eliminating long-distance charges for the audio portion of WebEx sessions.

Enthusiastic Uptake

In July 2007, WebEx accounts were entirely funded by the sales organization, and approximately 10,000 Cisco employees were registered. In January 2008, Cisco began billing departments US\$4.50 per account for unlimited Web access and support. Not wanting to apply the charge to inactive users, the company migrated only the 8500 most active WebEx hosts to the new solution. Employee demand swelled as word spread, and by March 2008, the number of registered Cisco users had increased to more than 15,000. New users are registering at the rate of 1000 to 1200 weekly. In March alone, nearly 7000 individuals hosted WebEx meetings totaling more than 15 million minutes.

Next Steps

Following are the next steps as Cisco IT integrates WebEx with the Cisco IP telephony infrastructure:

- Stabilizing the solution
- Increasing capacity to accommodate more users. "Conferencing is becoming even more popular, because Cisco has asked employees to reduce travel by conducting meetings with WebEx or Cisco TelePresence whenever possible," says Brews.
- Developing a metrics and monitoring tool. The voice operations team is developing a tool that provides up-to-the-minute usage metrics so that Cisco IT can rapidly identify and correct failure points.
- Deploying a unified interface for WebEx and Cisco Unified MeetingPlace (Figure 1). "This IT project has helped us sort through the issues involved in offering customers a choice of a hosted solution like WebEx,

an on-premise solution like Cisco Unified MeetingPlace, or a combination of the two," says Bailey Szeto, manager, IT Strategy and Architecture at Cisco.

Figure 1 Future: The Conference Host Will Select the Web Engine

Welcome, Venkatesh Iyer
Home > New Meeting

Meeting Information

Subject: Iyer
Meeting ID: (optional) (15415 - Custom Text)
Date*: AUG 26, 2007 **Recurrence**
Time*: 1 PM (America/Los_Angeles)
Duration*: 30 (minutes)

Web conference provider: Cisco Unified MeetingPlace
Meeting template: Cisco Unified MeetingPlace
Password: Cisco WebEx

Reserve Audio + Web conferencing
of audio callers: 4

Invitees

Add invitee **Add**

#	Name	Email	Permissions
1	Venkatesh Iyer	voyer@cisco.com	Moderator/Speaker

Schedule **Cancel**

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