

# CLOUD COLLABORATION

Understanding the Options to Find the Right Fit



September 2012

Prepared by:

Robert Chilton

Every CEO's wish list includes a desire for tools that enable innovation, growth and boost the productivity of today's increasingly distributed workforce. The question of how to bring the best resources together, facilitate the exchange of ideas, foster innovation and do it all without the lost time associated with traditional face to face meetings falls to the CIO to answer. As the market responds to this growing demand, the solution offerings available to the decision makers have made the task of selecting the right tools and platform complex, if not daunting. A Collaboration tool's Integration with other systems must be considered. Today's end users expect communication and collaboration tools to work together seamlessly and across a growing fleet of mobile devices. Tools can no longer be stand-alone applications that "bolt on" but don't fully integrate with existing solutions. Add in the pressure to contain budgets and securely manage the network, then the selection process can become stressful, time consuming and delay implementation while decision makers focus on making sure they get it right.

## ENTER THE CLOUD



The Cloud offers a seemingly concise answer to many questions facing IT and Business leaders, the many layers of aaS (as a Service) offerings available have promised to alleviate expensive capital investment in infrastructure and hardware as well as the high cost of specialized support personnel. The reality of cloud service offerings is slightly less universal than its marketing can often promise, as there are other ways to consume services, and not every platform is the right fit for a given enterprise. To make a fully informed choice on how to add a service hosted in the cloud to existing enterprise architecture, requires a method for evaluating the current leading options. At its core, the decision on which collaboration offering is the best fit should be based on the following factors:

1. Breadth of collaboration offering
2. Ease of deployment, integration
3. Simplicity of management and scalability
4. Delivery/consumption model options

## COLLABORATION OFFERING

To narrow the options down to the right fit for a particular enterprise, it is important to examine the breadth of the collaboration offerings from the major players in the market. Collaboration, in its evolving definition, includes many elements. Voice services, messaging, and presence grew together to form Unified Communications and mobility, video and social media style interaction tools have come together as Unified Collaboration. With the further development of Fixed Mobile Convergence, and the trend toward BYOD pushing the development of device and OS

agnostic integration, the menu of services available finally offers everything users have been asking for, including contact center and a broad range of collaboration applications. However, if the pieces don't all fit and perform seamlessly, the magic and the momentum are lost. The best offerings create an environment with integration coming off as organic and consistent user experience across the platform.



## DEPLOYMENT AND INTEGRATION

Another critical consideration in finding the right fit is the ease of deployment and integration across the enterprise. Depending on several variables, a company may be in position to migrate from a current platform of owned infrastructure and hardware to a hosted/managed solution, a fully hosted cloud solution or a hybrid blend of both. When considering a move to a cloud offering, the ease of deployment and integration will weigh heavily in the decision of how much to do at once. The modularity of the hosting platform coupled with the support and deployment model of the solution provider, either through the direct or partner delivery model, is critical to success. It will be essential to understand if the deployment model and resources committed to supporting the testing and roll out meet the expectations of the enterprise.

Intuitive user interfaces are also key to user adoption and should be another focus of the evaluation of deployment and integration. User efficiency should exhibit a steep curve post deployment. The post integration environment must have an organic similarity across the tools for users to feel comfortable and focus more on the benefits than on the changes in their workflow processes. The best fit will change the end user mindset from “how *can* I accomplish this task?” to “how do I *want* to accomplish this task?”

## MANAGEMENT AND SCALABILITY



The final aspect to evaluate is the operational flexibility of the collaboration solution. Specifically, the simplicity of the management interface and the ease of scaling the solution up or down as the dynamics of the business require. The cloud model does not require the subscriber to scale CapEx intensive hardware, infrastructure and support investment every time the business expands or contracts. This leaves the leadership free to scale the business based on market considerations without the need to factor in hardware upgrades, additions or stranding capital investment while also removing the difficult prospect of adding or reducing support staff behind the applications.

Of equal importance is the simplicity of the management tools provided by the solution provider, as every enterprise looks to have tools molded to fit their business process rather than modifying their operation to accommodate a ‘universal’ solution. There are limitations to the degree of customization an enterprise can expect when using a subscription service but the

amount of flexibility in the management tool set should play a big role in the decision process. The right fit will allow the business to react to changes in scale, scope and even process through innovation. Business practices are constantly evolving and the collaboration environment must keep pace or risk becoming a drag on the enterprise it was designed to support.

## **VENDOR HOSTED DELIVERY**

There are several key players in the Cloud Collaboration space and they offer 2 primary ways to consume their hosted services. The first of these is the direct or vendor hosted model, wherein the client purchases the services from the solution provider with the hardware supporting the application maintained in the provider's network of data centers. This model offers the direct support of the solution architect with the application hosting facilities typically being first rate and designed with a very high level of redundancy to offer consistent high availability to the subscriber.



A key advantage of this model lies in the level of support offered to the subscriber. In this model the full resources of the solution provider are leveraged to deliver a high quality user experience. In considering this model, it is important to look at stability and the provider's depth of experience managing global networks.

## **PARTNER HOSTED DELIVERY**

The alternative to the vendor delivery model is the partner model. In this delivery platform, the service is offered through a vendor partner using their owned or contracted data center facilities and hardware with design and architecture support from the solution provider. This consumption model offers high levels of support from the partner via their own staff of trained and solution provider certified specialists. Each partner is able to offer unique, value add services against their own specialization such as mobility or contact center solutions. The infrastructure and hardware are hosted in data center environments that meet strict design, component and redundancy thresholds. One advantage of this delivery model is a more diverse approach to the system and infrastructure design with a lesser chance of a single vulnerability being replicated to the point of defeating inherent redundancy. One possible disadvantage in this delivery model could be the depth of resource available for support via the partner, but many are contractually backed up for overflow and higher level support by the solution provider. When it works well, this is transparent to the subscriber and their end users.

## **EVALUATING THE MARKET LEADERS**

We will now look at the market leaders in cloud based collaboration solutions, evaluating their offerings using the criteria discussed above. Each is robust and



offers powerful tools, but represent divergent approaches to solving the challenges faced by their respective target demographic. It would be difficult to devise a solution that is the exact fit for every business from SMB through global enterprise, but each has taken their best shot at creating an environment that will work for any organization. This evaluation will seek to show which offerings have the best architecture to satisfy the broadest set of business needs with the highest level of integration, interoperability and scalability.



## **COLLABORATIVE CLOUD**

Avaya, as a VoIP telephony, network and cloud computing equipment manufacturer, has a strong position in the market of collaboration solution providers. They can offer their platform by directly assisting clients in building their own private cloud as well as offering the same service and support to independent cloud services providers who choose to offer Avaya products to their subscribers, or a hybrid with managed services. They use an open architecture that does not require the exclusive use of their proprietary hardware to deliver the solution but is flexible in offering blended solution design.

The breadth of their collaboration offering is impressive including voice, video, unified messaging, presence, IM and conferencing. Avaya Live Engage offers an innovative take on the traditional collaboration environment using a virtual portal populated with customizable avatars to represent interacting team members much like popular online game environments. While it is not a universally appealing format, it is a new twist aimed at making collaboration more familiar and interactive for younger workforce demographics. The Avaya cloud offering includes the Aura Communications platform for enterprise users as well as contact center, Avaya Live Engage collaboration solution, The Avaya Flare experience enabling voice, desktop video, conferencing, presence, IM and collaboration across desktop/laptop pc, Macs, smartphones and tablets (Android and iOS). Avaya has also committed to Fixed Mobile Convergence with a partnership with AT&T to provide expanded voice, video consumption at predictable monthly costs. The Avaya One-X Mobile application extends the utility of their Aura communications platform onto the 4G network and mobile devices.

Avaya's Collaborative Cloud is easy to scale up or down and does not include floor or ceiling limits to interfere with most SMBs up through Global Enterprise sized customers. Their platform has been engineered to integrate with Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes, Google Apps/Mail and many leading CRMs including Sales Force.com. Additionally, the management portal for administration and provisioning is fairly flexible and user friendly making workforce assignments and Move/Add/Change work less challenging than in traditional customer premise equipment platforms.



## **BROADCLOUD**

Broadsoft has garnered strong market positioning in the cloud collaboration space with their BroadCloud offering. BroadCloud is offered via the vendor partner delivery model with their platform being hosted by Telecommunication Services Providers, Landline, Mobile and Cable providers as well as via Piston Enterprises offering private cloud and managed services to end users. The Broadcloud product set includes hosted Voip telephony, unified messaging, video, web conferencing and collaboration tools with presence and IM under their Business Communicator product set. The products are engineered for interoperability with Outlook, Lotus Notes, and several leading CRMs to enable click-to-call and presence federation enabled by business partnerships with Microsoft, IBM and Acme Packet. Their mobility options are offered via apps for smartphones and tablets (Android, iOS) as well as for Mac and PC computing devices. They also provide fixed mobile convergence features for client's cellphones/smartphones mirroring the desktop extension and allowing calls to transition between wired/wireless extension as well as transitioning from WiFi to cellular network and back.

BroadSoft supports deployment with their own professional services organization who work with their vendor partners to plan and execute at the client site. Ongoing support is offered by the partners' trained and certified personnel who have access to Broadsoft resources and engineers. The Broadcloud products are designed to be easily scaled up or down as needed with architecture to host SMB through enterprise including support of international markets. Using Broadsoft's PacketSmart management and administration portal gives the end user control of primary tools but is less flexible in terms of customization than some other offerings. The tools are more powerful at the service provider level.



## **HOSTED COLLABORATION SOLUTION**

Cisco has long held a market leadership position in Unified Communications and Collaboration and was one of the first to bring their solutions into the cloud. As the leading manufacturer of enterprise network, VoIP and cloud computing hardware, Cisco is strongly positioned as a leader in both system architecture and solution development for cloud based collaboration. They offer customer premise equipment and design for private cloud, managed services, fully hosted and vendor partner delivery models. Cisco's Hosted Collaboration Solution represents a very broad portfolio of services including voice, unified messaging, unified presence and IM, video, web collaboration, conferencing, TelePresence, contact center and fixed mobile convergence. Their pay-as-you-use consumption model is attractive to those tasked with

managing the bottom line and the conversion from CapEx to OpEx operation is a welcome benefit.

The product set is designed for integration and interoperability across all popular computing and device platforms including Microsoft Lync and OCS, IBM Lotus Notes, Mac, PC, iOS, Android and Nokia Alliance devices. With collaboration tools like WebEx Meetings and social media format enhancements such as WebEx Social, Cisco's offering enables quick, efficient and productive work sessions from any device. Their Unified Presence application allows federation with other enterprises extending presence data and IM capabilities beyond the subscriber's company to selected outside partners, vendors and clients. Jabber carries those features and functionality to the end user's mobile device including Telepresence participation from smartphones and tablets. Cisco's Fixed Mobile Convergence supports the full suite of features enabling mirroring of desktop extension, seamless transition of calls between fixed and mobile as well as from WiFi to 4G network. Additionally, WebEx for Mobile extends the full collaboration experience to the smartphone including video. Highlight TP or video given we're emphasizing mobile and video now?

Deployment and integration are supported by Cisco's large staff of technical support experts as well as an extensive network of Cisco certified technicians and engineers employed by their vendor partners globally. Planning and execution are supported by their professional services organization and client site support is offered by Cisco or vendor partner personnel. The pay-as-you-use model coupled with highly scalable services enables very quick reaction to changes in business needs. The management and administration tools are comprehensive and highly customizable to meet the individual business needs. The HCS management interface offers multiple levels of user defined access to create hierarchical permissions and access profiles ensuring the proper access and control is available to each user role. Additionally, the HCS management solution includes an end user self-care interface empowering the user to customize their UC experience at a primary level, freeing administrators to focus on more complex requests.



### **OFFICE 365/LYNC Online**

Microsoft has joined the fight for cloud collaboration supremacy with their hosted product set built around the Office 365 and Lync solutions. As a world leader in software and solutions development, Microsoft can offer its cloud services directly or via their extensive partner network. They offer a fully hosted platform that includes their Office 2010 suite of applications along with Outlook for mail and calendars and Sharepoint for web collaboration and file sharing. The hosted version is somewhat limited in functionality as compared to the customer premise installed version with the ability to view but not edit some file types from mobile devices. The hosted offering of Lync 2010 provides for Unified Communications but limits the functionality of voice calling to point to point calls within the enterprise. Lync Online does support federation of Unified Communications features like presence and IM with other enterprises using Lync and

Microsoft has developed apps to extend Lync to Windows Mobile, iOS, Android and Nokia alliance portable devices. The current video service offerings in the Office 365/Lync Online solution are not as robust as other top tier competitors. Microsoft's acquisition of Skype promises more in the future release of the hosted solution but is not yet an enterprise grade or secure application. Lync Online supports Fixed Mobile Convergence allowing users to mirror desktop extensions, transfer an active call between fixed and mobile phones and integrates presence and click-to-call features using active directory.

Microsoft supports integration and deployment with its large vendor partner network via their own, large technology support and professional services organization. Although the per seat subscription model is straight forward, the overlapping license concerns about already deployed Microsoft products can cause some confusion with business leaders when projecting total cost of ownership after deployment of the hosted solution. Scalability is supported from SMB through Global Enterprise level with Microsoft offering multiple bundle options designed to address organizations looking for simple email hosting through the full product set.

The management interface offered with Office 365 and Lync Online is not as complete or customizable as the other market leading solutions. Microsoft has packaged 3 of their bundle options with 24x7 IT support included for each user moving support and administration almost entirely to the provider side of the equation. This may be attractive to those looking to limit the size of their IT support operation, but to others it may seem to complicate and slow down some operational needs.



## Summary

Having examined the market leaders in cloud collaboration and evaluated their offerings, our opinion and advice to our clients is no platform offers an ideal match for every enterprise. Avaya has a very strong solution set, but their Avaya Live Engage collaboration interface is not a comfortable fit for some corporate cultures. Broadsoft's BroadCloud is a robust offering with strong interoperability and effective tools, but their delivery mechanism is not aligned with some enterprises expectations of solution ownership from a cloud provider, namely not offering a direct consumption model but relying solely on partners to deliver the solution. Microsoft has the simplest integration with existing core applications as they own the most used business applications, but their hosted products are less capable than the customer premises installed versions and their voice product suffers from limitations not shared with their competitors. That brings us to Cisco Systems, the cloud solution provider with the deepest product offering and the most options for how to choose, deploy and consume. Their Unified Communications applications are robust and can extend to other organizations, their web collaboration solution is simple and effective and they have strong Fixed Mobile Convergence functionality that is device and OS agnostic. They have a much broader and deeper portfolio that spans the entire collaboration suite including UC, contact center, video and a range of collaboration applications. Additionally, the Cisco management interface offers the nearest parity to the customer premise

deployed model with very customizable access, roles and permissions that empower the administrators to assign as much or as little control as needed to different level of support personnel. These factors coupled with their design, deployment and support resources allow for speedy deployment and full integration once the decision to migrate has been made. For these reasons, Cisco Systems Hosted Collaboration Solutions offers the most flexibility and powerful tools to fit the broadest segment of enterprise and mid-market organizations seeking a cloud based solution.