

The ABCs of UC

Unified Communications have been growing steeply in popularity in the past years. The pressing questions service providers ask themselves have shifted from “*What is UC?*” to “*How can I profit from UC?*” and the latter has yet to be answered for a lot of people. There are many ways to turn a profit by offering Unified Communications and this paper will tell you how.

- The UC market
- What is UC?
- Benefits
 - Mobility
 - Time efficiency
 - Social media integration
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The UC market

As the market-share of existing providers shrinks down, the competition for subscribers increases. Developing **new services** to retain existing customers and attract new ones is essential for maintaining a place in this dynamic market. By offering real-time communication and collaboration, you can enhance customer loyalty, reduce churn and potentially increase their ARPU (Average Revenue Per User).

Enterprise hosting requires that service providers **shape offerings** to meet more complex business needs. Increasing revenues often requires developing new service offerings and entering new markets, both of which bring additional challenges. A new extensible platform that enables integrated and differentiated services can help you expand your service offerings and grow into new services and markets, offering advanced messaging and collaboration services to consumers as well as entering the enterprise hosting market.

Unified Communications helps you create powerful connections between people, both inside and outside your organization, for **greater productivity**.

What is UC?

Unified Communications is a concept that **integrates real-time and non-real-time communication services**. The complexity of the term comes from its tendency to continuously **change**. As new communication flows emerge, UC has to integrate them, and thus, gains an extended definition. In fewer words, it literally puts all the communication and collaboration channels available at any given time under one umbrella.

In its broadest sense, Unified Communications covers all forms of communication exchanged through the internet. This includes IPTV and digital signage, for instance. One sure fact is that Unified Communications doesn't come as a product, but as a **set of products** put together in a consistent interface. This makes it attractive because of the easy access and the easy maintenance that this single interface provides.

Benefits

Adding new services to your portfolio is bound to draw more clients towards your business; especially since we are not talking about the same old features that everyone already knows. This UC component has been ignored by most service providers, not knowing that their users could crave it.

The benefits of UC are vast and depend on how you choose to leverage the tool. Each means of communication comes with its own set of advantages and UC brings them all together creating an all-in-one solution. It generally boosts productivity and efficiency, ultimately leading to more income.

Mobility

Out of all the benefits that UC brings, the one that stands out is **mobility**. When travelling or whenever you are out of the office, all you need for a VoIP call and an online presence is a computer with a broadband internet connection and a softphone installed on it. The softphone just needs to be configured with the public IP address of the server running the IP PBX software as well as your authentication data.

"As our [study](#) indicates that more SMB mobile professionals are connected via their smartphones and tablets, this enables them to work outside of the office more seamlessly, and encourages mobile professionals to nurture a connection with their local communities. In fact, 74 percent of SMB owners believe that it's crucial to be actively involved" said Godfrey Phillips, vice president for research at [The Business Journals](#).

Your mobile phone is essentially an extension of UC. Picture this: you're travelling overseas on business. You have your cell phone but the fee is somewhere around \$2.00 a minute. You don't need a laptop, or a smartphone. Any device that connects to the internet will suffice. You can install a softphone on your iPod touch for instance and make VoIP calls from any Wi-Fi hot spot.

Time efficiency

With UC, efficiency is increased with the **interconnectivity of communication channels**. This means you can send your information on one channel and receive the reply on another. This can spell a huge boost in productivity. Say you call a phone line, the recipient is not in the office, so you leave a voicemail. The recipient has set his/her voicemail to go in the email inbox. He/she can now immediately see your message on their personal smartphone and instantly reply.

A major contributor to time efficiency is **presence information**. In telecommunication networking, presence fills in the gaps between the sender and the recipient within the communication portfolio. With presence, you don't need to *initiate* a communication flow before knowing if the recipient is available or not. Thus, the amount of time and effort are automatically reduced.

Using all online communication means from a single interface is a huge advantage, but the brilliance of the system lies in knowing which connections can be established before attempting to initiate them. Presence information implies greater efficiency in such a simple way.

The secret of successful call center lies in UC

 A financial services institution with more than 1.8 million members has a staff of 2,500 employees located in 149 different branches. The 120-person contact center handles approximately 280,000 inbound telephone calls per year. Implementing UC **resulted in**:

- Extended number of specialists available to handle customer calls by 50%
- Reduced wait times
- Increased cross-sales and share-of-wallet, generating an additional \$5.59 million in monthly revenue
- Increased ability to consistently meet goals: 80% of calls are handled within 20 seconds and abandon rates have fallen to less than 45%.

Social media integration

With an estimated 15 minutes spent on YouTube and more than an hour on Facebook every day, your employees are not exactly maximizing the time they have on their hands. But by integrating social media into Unified Communications, not only can you even out the numbers, but you can profit from it too. Users can handle social sites from the same place they manipulate online communication channels. Consistency and rapid access to online information is crucial for any business.

Cost-effectiveness

Bluntly put, this is how UC saves you tons of cash:

- **Travelling costs** – no more foreign calling cards, no more long distance calling fees
- **Telephone bills** – your bill will be considerably lower with internet telephony
- **Hardware resources** – you already own most of the required hardware
- **Human resources** – your current staff can administrate the network; if your data is in the cloud, you don't need to worry about anything
- **Work efficiency** – your staff communicates better and therefore works better
- **One purchase** - you only need one client application for all means of communication

A hospital trust has nothing but advantages with automation

John Thornbury, director of ICT for Worcestershire Acute Hospitals trust, says the local NHS is saving **£300,000** annually through replacing an **outdated telephone service** with a **unified communications system** from the same supplier. It also allows the staff to use videoconferencing, reducing travel time and carbon emissions. The chief operating officer now uses this for meetings with his staff, as well as getting automated alerts if someone has waited for more than three hours in accident and emergency.

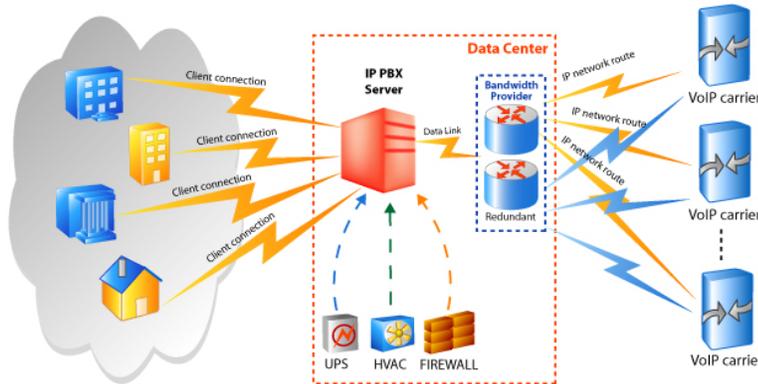
Setup

In order to gain new clients and increase ARPU, all you need to do is evaluate your current infrastructure and alternatives to see how to improve services and reduce costs. Most service or hosting providers **already have a reliable infrastructure** that can be used for offering Unified Communications with no extra hardware purchases.

Your company probably already has most of the necessary hardware infrastructure – **servers** and an **Internet connection**. You can also use a **physical gateway** that connects the PSTN to your network in order to make VoIP calls, but it's not mandatory.

Regarding software, in addition to an **IP PBX** - which acts very similarly to a physical PBX but has enhanced features - you will need **softphones** on each computer in the network in order to be able to make and receive calls. These are free of charge or paid, depending on the set of features they offer. For a more familiar experience, you can buy **IP phones** or VoIP adapters for regular phones.

Once you have all this, you'll be all set, ready to make calls within your network. To get in touch with the outside world, you'll require one or more SIP trunks. SIP stands for Session Instantiation Protocol and is the most common protocol for VoIP on the internet today. **SIP providers** can connect incoming calls too, not just outgoing. You can use an IP PBX without any connection to the local telephone company, SIP providers can allocate DIDs as well.



Management

Managing your Unified Communications network is easier than expected. A single instance of VoipNow runs on a server and serves multiple client organizations or tenants. A service provider can still deploy multiple VoipNow virtual environments on the same physical machine, even if the software is **multi-tenant**.

It's easy:

- Multi-tenant
- Scalable
- Graphical interface
- Billing engine

The **user-friendly interface** is highly intuitive and 4PSA offers tutorials and support for any problems encountered. **No extra staff is required** since the system can easily be administrated by your current network administrators.

Unified Communications software is **scalable**. This means that even if you increase or decrease your hardware resources, the software is able to expand and contract its resource pool to adapt. Moreover, scalability also means that as your company grows and the network grows, the system won't lose its functionality and efficiency.

Human efforts are also considerably lowered with VoipNow since billing is also automated. You don't have to export call records and then process them manually or with another software product. VoipNow's charging plans automate this operation for you and its call history reporting is always **accurate**.

Radian Group has a customer support team that can breathe easily

Radian Group is a global provider of investment infrastructure. After hopping on the UC bandwagon, their CIO said the following: "We didn't have one call to our Call Center. Now we have much less management complexity with the one converged network and this will allow us to get the next stage of capability to support our business growth." (Source)

Go for it

4PSA's flagship UC solution is VoipNow, a suite of software tools designed to accelerate Unified Communications adoption by businesses and end-users. The products are built around **cloud computing** and provide unrivaled performance with the most comprehensive features, massive scalability, and the ultimate in **automation**.

VoipNow includes an **IP PBX** and various management systems that make it a complete Unified Communications solution. These products generally lack a graphical user interface. Worse still, editing must be done manually on specific files and through command lines. VoipNow eliminates all that hassle because the installation and administration are performed remotely via a **browser interface**.