

Building toward a unified communications strategy

Bridge the gap with Adobe® Acrobat® Connect™ Pro

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Unified communications (UC) promises to change the way people work, increase productivity, and foster greater collaboration. The convergence of voice, video, and data communication services on a shared IP-based infrastructure may offer organizations significant gains in business productivity by removing latency in communications—between customers and service providers, between team members, and with partners and consultants. However, there are challenges to finding and deploying a single communications solution that suits all constituents and fits how they work. It is unlikely that a single packaged application will be able to act as an adequate console for all communications channels—including critical channels such as voice, chat, and e-mail that allow for little down time—at least in the near term. For organizations ready to build a roadmap to unified communications, therefore, Adobe recommends an incremental approach, relying on today’s best-in-class applications and a multichannel collaboration solution.

To formulate and execute a UC strategy, CXOs and IT managers need to understand how team members are collaborating within their organizations today in terms of modes of communication, cultural preferences, and tools. In addition, they must consider the risk that deploying a single application will disrupt the existing flow of information and impede effective collaboration, which may far outweigh any advantages conferred by the new solution.

The goal of this white paper is to highlight the potential pitfalls of deploying a UC solution, outline critical points to consider when devising a long-term strategy, and suggest “quick wins” organizations can try on their way to a full-fledged UC solution. For instance, Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro software can fill gaps in your communications capabilities today, and it can run with existing technologies without requiring an overhaul of critical systems such as voice or instant messaging (IM) platforms. Since it does not require the displacement of existing technologies, Acrobat Connect Pro is uniquely positioned to help companies capture the benefits of UC today, without the potential downsides of a “rip-and-replace” solution.

The promise of unified communications

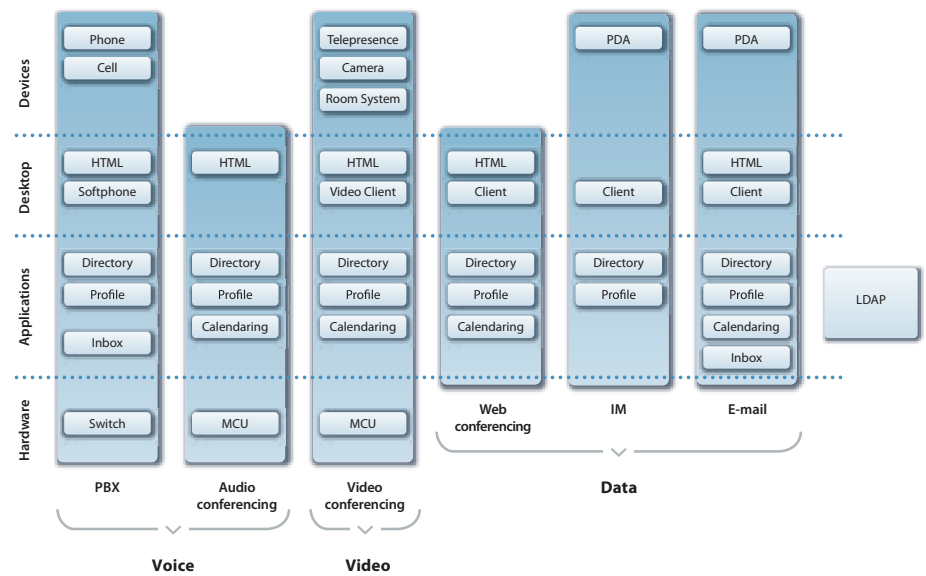
UC is the convergence of voice, video, and data communication services on a shared, IP-based infrastructure. Based on standards for signaling (SIP/SIMPLE, XMPP) and communications (G711, H264, and others), many UC solutions promise to integrate the following functionalities into one packaged application:

- Voice services such as telephony, IP-based Private Branch Exchange (IP-PBX), audio conferencing, and unified messaging (voice mail)
- Video services such as video conferencing, desktop conferencing, and telepresence
- Data services such as web conferencing, IM, and e-mail

Most organizations are already using these technologies today. They have deployed each channel over time, using different vendors and technologies that rely on different standards and deployment models (on-premise versus as a service). This piecemeal approach has resulted in multiple, loosely connected communications silos that can run from the back-end hardware to the end-user device. For example, some desktop IP phones work exclusively with one IP-PBX running on specific hardware.

Each silo also contains similar functionalities, such as a user directory, user profiles, calendaring, scheduling, and so on. The complexity of this picture can increase exponentially in large organizations, as each business unit or department may run its own communications systems.

Communications silos in the enterprise



Ideally, UC technology can break these silos and provide a fully integrated communications experience on one standard and IP-based infrastructure.

Finding the core value

Breaking down the hardware silos on the back end can benefit IT and the enterprise in the long run. But for end users, there is no immediate benefit to software packages that replace the communications applications to which they've grown accustomed with one integrated solution.

A unified client may enable users to manage their communication tools centrally. But does that experience provide any actual business value? For example, with a packaged UC solution, an end user may view the presence of a coworker, start an IM session, and escalate into a phone call, all with the click of a button. But the actual productivity gained by the integration of IM and telephony is insignificant. For example, if the two applications were not integrated, the user might instead simply ask for the coworker's number via IM and then dial it.

In fact, the core value of UC comes from the different applications it encompasses, not necessarily tight integration among them. Because UC is still a nascent technology, your business may reap greater rewards by employing collaboration and knowledge-sharing applications than by investing in an integrated solution.

Building a strategy focused on collaboration

To be successful, a UC strategy must focus on the applications enabled by UC technology: collaboration and knowledge sharing. To avoid the pitfall of deploying yet another communications silo in the enterprise, you must first understand the collaboration needs of each department or business unit. Then build a roadmap to meet those requirements. Finally, build a strong user adoption plan.

Understanding collaboration needs

Defining collaboration needs across the organization can be challenging. Collaboration habits may be deeply engrained in an organization's culture, but they are far from homogeneous. Every department, business unit, or workgroup has evolved different ways of collaborating. For example, some groups value face-to-face meetings, while others depend on public IM. Additionally, some groups work mostly internally; others engage mostly with people outside the organization, such as partners, suppliers, or customers. Thus, deploying a one-size-fits-all UC solution poses a risk of not meeting the needs of any department.

Take a collaboration inventory to define what collaboration means to each department in your organization. Who do they collaborate with? How do they collaborate today? What are their specific needs? The following are just a few of the styles and tools you may find.

Department	Who	How	Need
Sales	Customers	Mobile phones, PDAs	Ability to conduct presentations or product demonstrations to customers virtually to cut travel time and cost
Engineering	Suppliers	E-mail, IM	Ability to conduct product specification reviews with suppliers or external consultants
Legal	Internal	Phone, voice mail, shared storage	Ability to quickly locate other team members with the right expertise.

The “who” helps you see the different communities of collaboration within your organization and whether collaboration for each of them is mostly internal or external. If most of the collaboration or knowledge exchange occurs with external third parties, then making sure that your solution works across the firewall and on any operating system is critical.

The “how” helps you understand what works for them and should not be replaced. For example, if your sales force uses cell phones or PDAs for their mobility solution, bringing in a VoIP solution that enables them to access telephony services anywhere from a PC does not bring them any additional value.

The “need” helps you define which solution can provide the greatest productivity impact for each group.

Also consider any cultural barriers within your organization that may impede a change in the way that they collaborate. For example, some people are accustomed to face-to-face meetings; others do not share information freely; and others may view presence and IM as a way to spy on them. For people to embrace collaboration, you need to ensure that the technology is transparent, does not bring a steep learning curve, and offers the features that are most important to them. For example, people attached to face-to-face meetings might find the greatest value in video communications.

This analysis will help you define the overall priority of each solution within the UC application stack. It will also reveal synergies that might be accomplished today by leveraging existing solutions across departments. Finally, it will clearly show resistance to adoption that you might encounter when rolling out a new system.

Building an incremental solution

Many UC solutions on the market today require you to “rip and replace” by deploying the entire solution at once. But most real-time communications systems are business-critical. Replacing them all at the same time is incredibly risky. This risk is compounded by the fact that UC standards like SIP are still evolving; moreover, offerings from major UC vendors are rapidly changing. To minimize risk, your UC roadmap should have multiple time horizons.

- **Short term: Inventory collaboration tools and styles and identify needs**

Each department in your organization has probably already deployed some communications or collaboration solutions for their internal use. Create a cross-department task force to look at the various collaboration methods and tools in use throughout the enterprise. The team should gather best practices about existing tools and discover which new collaboration applications generate the most interest and support. Try to identify solutions in use that can be deployed effectively by other departments in the short term as well as current deployments that you may want to extend.

- **Midterm: Focus on technology gaps**

Identify the UC applications and technology that your end users are requesting. Often, solutions like IM or web conferencing are prime candidates. Focus your medium-term effort on acquiring these solutions, as they are likely to be the ones that provide the most benefit to your end users.

- **Long term: Analyze the lifecycle of existing assets**

Analyze the communication and collaboration assets you already have and evaluate when to upgrade or replace them. For instance, analog PBXs are becoming increasingly expensive to maintain as network equipment providers move to IP-based product lines. One driver for UC investment is the replacement of legacy systems with IP-based PBXs. Even though your organization might not need any of the new features provided by an IP-PBX, deploying it can lower maintenance costs.

Finally, when deciding which technology to bring on board, you should clearly evaluate vendor lock-in. How comfortable is your organization with being dependent on one vendor for its communication and collaboration systems?

Identifying challenges to adoption

UC will bring end users new ways to work and may pose adoption challenges. It fosters telecommuting and remote collaboration across geographies and time zones. But many managers may not be comfortable with managing remote workers, and employees may be reluctant to embrace virtual collaboration, even when environmental and cost concerns reduce employee travel. A poor user experience or a complex client installation may create user resistance.

Instead, build momentum around UC by delivering quick successes. Look for solutions that can be rolled out quickly and that have a minimal end-user learning curve.

Supporting long-term goals

Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro is a complete web communications and collaboration application suite that enables live, interactive web meetings; virtual classes; on-demand presentations and courses; and real-time and asynchronous group collaboration. It supports your UC strategy by providing a platform that can be tailored to the collaboration needs of each department, that can be deployed quickly, and that fits within a best practices approach.

Meeting Web 2.0 collaboration needs

Web 2.0 consumer applications have changed end users’ expectations regarding enterprise applications. Today, end users value personalization and mashups that allow them to adjust the application to meet their needs. Yet most technology deployed in the enterprise does not provide this flexibility. Acrobat Connect Pro has been built from the ground up on Web 2.0 technology; moreover, its flexibility does not compromise security or compliance.

An Acrobat Connect Pro meeting room offers components called “pods.” Each pod represents a UC functionality: VoIP, video, chat, whiteboard, content repository, and so on. End users can combine these pods any way they want, building real-time or asynchronous collaboration applications. The results can be tailored for specific use cases, such as project management, emergency response, command and control centers, virtual classrooms, large seminars, and more.

The Acrobat Connect Pro pod model is extensible. It is possible to build new pods that fetch data from external applications via standard web services. This flexibility enables a line of business to build collaboration applications that meet its particular needs. Each application can be saved as a template and shared with other groups.

Yet, despite this flexibility, central administrators can still control functionality at a granular level to meet regulatory and security compliance requirements. For example, some organizations require that chat be disabled, others that everything be recorded, and others that nothing be recorded. Acrobat Connect Pro provides compliance control to meet all these requirements.

Building momentum with rapid deployment

Finding UC applications that can be rapidly deployed is critical to building momentum around your UC agenda. Acrobat Connect Pro can provide that fast time to deployment.

Acrobat Connect Pro is available either as an Adobe-hosted offering or as licensed software for a more customizable, on-site deployment. Either version may be set up quickly. With the hosted Software as a Service (SaaS) offering, setup may be almost immediate, and a licensed deployment may be completed within a single quarter.

Promoting user adoption

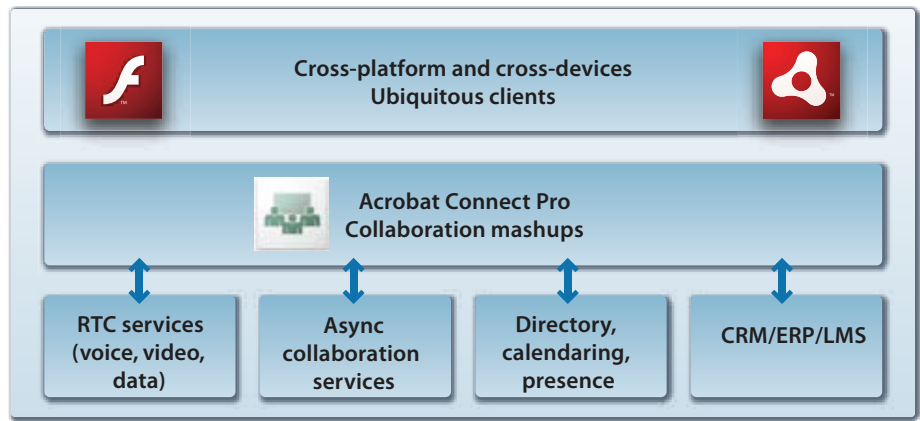
Acrobat Connect Pro removes adoption barriers. The user interface is based on Adobe Flash® technology, so there is no need for most Internet-connected users to download specialized software. They need only Adobe Flash Player software version 8 or later to participate in meeting or collaboration sessions. Since Flash Player is cross-platform, it provides end users with an easy way to collaborate across organizations with heterogeneous environments.

The Acrobat Connect Pro rich Web 2.0 user interface provides unmatched usability and ease of use, shortening the time required to train users.

Supporting best-in-class architecture

Acrobat Connect Pro provides many integration points with UC and collaboration systems, such as user directories, audio conferencing services, SIP/SIMPLE- or XMPP-based presence and IM solutions, and content repository and collaboration portals.

The Acrobat Connect Pro integration framework is built on a set of open and published XML-based APIs, which can federate multiple services. For example, if your organization relies on both an internal audio conferencing bridge for internal meetings and external audio conferencing service providers for marketing seminars or training sessions, both services can be integrated. Users can choose a service based on use case or cost.



Building momentum with Acrobat Connect Pro

UC technologies have the potential to revolutionize the way people work and collaborate by abolishing distance and time zones. However, deploying a UC solution is a complex task. It requires building an evolutionary roadmap that minimizes the risk of replacing existing business-critical systems and a business case that justifies large investments.

Thanks to its Web 2.0 features, ease of deployment, and integration framework, Acrobat Connect Pro can support your incremental path to unified communications: The software can leverage existing technology investments, minimize risk, and encourage rapid and broad user adoption. Acrobat Connect Pro can help you successfully deploy a key UC application and build momentum for your enterprise-wide UC agenda.

For more information

For more details about Acrobat Connect Pro, visit www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnectpro.

