



CommuniGate "Rightsizes" Unified Communications for the Normal "Everyday Business"

by Richard
"Zippy" Grigonis

CommuniGate Systems (www.communiGate.com) is a company famous for its powerful multi-tenant Unified Communications (UC) platform (CommuniGate Pro) enabling network operators, service providers and enterprises to provide services such as a Messaging Suite, Mobility Suite, Web 2.0 Suite, VoIP Suite, or customized applications. Another awesome innovation of theirs is the Rich Media UC dashboard called Pronto! which can be delivered through any Flash-enabled browser. Pronto! Allows you to deliver a wide range of applications such as integrated email, calendaring, contacts management, secure IM, presence, voicemail management, VoIP phone, RSS Feeds and management, plus (if that were not enough), media delivery with applications such as MyPhotos, MyVideos, MyMusic, etc.

CommuniGate Systems' Jon Doyle, Vice President of Business Development, says, "Small and Medium-Sized Businesses [SMBs] need to 'rightsized' their technology investments and reduce complexity and UC hosted services can do that. A ten-person company can't be expected to buy a massive UC suite or IP-PBX like a bank or 10,000 person companies can. That does not mean they are left out in the cold, or relegated to inferior technologies. So, how do they get their hands on unified communications without spending lots of money on an 'overkill' system? They should have access to high quality technology. How can they do this? They must look to hosted solutions where software is a service, the so-called SaaS [Software as a Service]". "It's just like paying \$60 a month for Salesforce.com,"

says Doyle. "Instead of spending half a million dollars to install Oracle servers, middleware and applications software on your premises, you can now buy good technology without making the enormous capital expenditure normally necessary to deal with the maintenance, ongoing modifications and upgrades of a big solution."

SMBs should keep several things in mind when searching for a UC solution:

- Much technology foisted on large enterprises is basically just regurgitated technology with an IP gateway, says Doyle. "It's not really innovative or even new. Often it's just repackaged software. Service

providers can provide you with the latest in cutting edge, productivity-boosting applications. Plus the network operator can deliver Internet connectivity, PSTN termination, making the solution turn-key"

- Small companies should be very careful in choosing technology and should ask very specific questions about the vendors, warns Doyle. "The vendor should have knowledge about their product's code. Here in Silicon Valley, many companies release 'dumbed-down' technology, as I like to call it. Some entrepreneurs secure venture capital and then they'll outsource the whole development project to another country - 'off-shore' they like to call it. The company that ends up with this product needs to support you, but they may not have any understanding of what it does internally, just brilliant! The vendor becomes something resembling a shell company. You see this not just in the world of software but with big companies that place their support centers 'off-shore' too. Many large hardware vendors and several airlines are bringing home their support centers because they don't have visibility into the quality and control of such outsourced centers, and customer outrage and frustrations have lowered perceived service. So companies must pay attention to what type of technology they're buying and how their vendor operates and supports that solution. Just because a company is small doesn't mean that they have to settle for less - demand quality and reliability!"



- Reliability and high availability are important, and that's one of the key values of CommuniGate Pro's technology, says Doyle. "When you select a unified communications platform, it's paramount that your system is going to be absolutely solid and provide so-called dial-tone reliability. Messaging makes up a great deal of UC, and many companies out there in the world are long accustomed to using messaging systems suffering from a ton of downtime. Amazingly, the Radicati Group recently reported that, 'Microsoft Exchange users (all versions) experience an average of 1.6 hours of unplanned downtime per month, and 2.4 hours of average *planned downtime* per month! Now, if your company depends on UC for all types of services, be it voice, video, IM and email, should such a system be subject to that much downtime? I think not. CommuniGate Pro provides 99.999 percent uptime, meaning just seconds per year of potential downtime; couple that with a reliable hosting partner and you can run your business and not get the run-around on bad technology."
- A small company can often become confused. "Do they go downstream to engage small startup companies that provide UC?" asks Doyle. "Well, some of these are merely outsourcing their software development and so their platforms aren't reliable. On the other hand, should an SMB simply adopt the technologies of big companies such as Microsoft? But as we've seen, the uptime 'credibility' of such things as Exchange isn't that great. Indeed, it's pretty atrocious, actually. Worse, what really is UC – four, five or more packages of software and several companies to deal with? How do you attain genuine reliability and good quality software? My conclusion is — you have to get the application delivered as a service. The provider has the infrastructure necessary to guarantee a higher level of uptime, and they have the financial wherewithal to buy the best technology to support small businesses."

"Additionally, operators and ISPs should understand that providing UC software as a service is a compelling, even exciting, market for them to enter," says Doyle. "It's all about economies of scale and business opportunity, and our technology is one of the best out there to help rightsize UC in a multi-tenant environment for businesses."

How an SMB Adopts Unified Communications

"SMBs should not be relegated to using open source or cheap, unreliable knock-offs of existing products," says Doyle. "The SMB should have the same demands and access to quality applications as a large enterprise. Until now this has rested on economic considerations. To get good technology you had to spend tons of money."

SMBs can today get the same quality of technology as is available to the large enterprise, and it can be done without a massive investment. You do it by paying for it as Software as a Service, which spreads the expen-

diture of the technology across many "tenants" of the system, often times providing better technology and reliability than on premises equipment. **UC**

SaaS — a View from the Other Side of the Business

by Simon Edwards, BT, Business and Technical Consultant

The adoption rates of SaaS (Software as a Service) solutions are rising rapidly with nearly 31 percent of SMBs (Small-to-Medium Businesses) currently using SaaS solutions, double the percentage in 2004. Access Markets International (AMI) Partners Inc. who did this study, also says that it is the SMBs that show the strongest interest in using SaaS for collaborative and business-intelligence solutions in the next 12 months. This should not be a surprise as the complexity and capital expenditures of Unified Communications can be daunting for any small business.

For service providers, Unified Communication sold as a SaaS solution presents a valuable and growing market niche with substantial growth rates over the next 10 years. Today the most demanded services are those that help streamline the SMB business communications, such as advanced web technologies, CRM solutions, and providing email, contacts management and advanced calendaring. There is no reason a small business cannot get access to powerful UC technology when the CAPEX and OPEX is spread over a multitude of companies in a multi-tenant architecture.

From a financial perspective a hosted UC solution will dramatically reduce CAPEX and free SMBs from large investments. The costs related to SaaS in comparison to not using modern communication tools like UC or to install and maintain an in-house solution, are less when man-hours and TCO are considered, and the

benefits are obvious. With better connected staff, access to information, and the workflow process, an SMB can save time, increase productivity, satisfy customers, and increase revenues. So, doing the math, services *versus* on-premises purchases coupled with the uptime guarantees are the compelling arguments when selling SaaS.

The most convincing argument to switch to a SaaS solution is the business aspect; namely, how unified forms of Internet Communications can result in cost savings and better customer relations. Instant Messaging and presence become powerful especially in the SMB where many remote or part-time workers and small teams are spread across several offices. The SMB can leverage these technologies as a competitive advantage normally reserved for larger IT budgets. VoIP often is thought of as a cost savings technology. However, the integrated service is of interest to the SMB, as it allows improved customer service when calls are directed to one number which can be routed to many devices like a mobile with powerful rules for time periods or caller IDs. Unified Communications also must be extended to the mobile with over-the-air synchronization to the mobile device enabling the SMB employees to have all communications in their pocket even when travelling.

SaaS is providing access to powerful technology in the SMB market place for business subscribers and will give service providers a growing market to enter beyond broadband and simple messaging services.