

Helping customer-facing organisations respond to changing business requirements

How Unified Communications enabled solutions can support businesses in building a more consistent customer contact approach

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1. The move towards Unified Communications – UC – adoption in the contact centre

If you spend any length of time investigating customer service in the UK, you could quickly convince yourself that customers are always unhappy – according to a quick scan of Google: 'UK customers are unhappy with Indian call centres', 'half of UK consumers are unhappy with their Internet provider', 'one in three are unhappy with their bank',

'four million broadband customers are unhappy with their service', and 'eight million Britons are unhappy with their mobile providers'.

But are customers really this unhappy, or is it that when they come into contact with customer service operations they're just not consistently getting the kind of joined-up service they have come to expect? What's increasingly clear is that – for many organisations – the IT and telephony within call centres just aren't communicating; and secondly that companies need to invest more in the joined-up technologies that can help support a more satisfactory level of customer service.

While standalone solutions can help to improve the customer experience, the majority of organisations still operating around a traditional telephony infrastructure are starting to feel the limitations, particularly when the requirement is to evolve the call centre into a more outward-facing customer interaction network.

That's where a more consistent customer contact approach based on Unified Communications can help in supporting organisations as they respond to changing business requirements. According to one recent US research study, organisations using IP-based unified communications applications saved an average of 32 minutes per day just by being able to connect with team members more efficiently, while for mobile professionals typical time savings of 40 minutes per day could be achieved when a UC infrastructure was in place.

This connectivity is particularly important given the nature of interactions in today's contact centres – one recent study showed that over ten percent of daily interactions that originate in contact centres now require assistance from experts outside the centre. Each of these then needed a further two interactions to fully resolve the customer's issue, and were estimated to last around two-and-a-half minutes longer than if the call could have been handled solely within the contact centre. In pure productivity terms, this highlights a significant area available for improvement in terms of talk time, individual agent productivity and first call resolution.

When deployed in the contact centre, the latest Unified Communications (UC) techniques can provide a powerful platform for enabling such an improved customer service environment. The idea of 'presence' is a key part of UC thinking, and has the potential to remodel the traditional customer contact structure. Instead of agents scanning internal contact lists to find anyone with the technical expertise to answer a specific customer query, UC techniques will allow those same agents to assess the availability of domain experts in real time and find the answers and contacts they need using just a few keystrokes and mouse clicks.

UC techniques can also be used within the contact centre, with agents able to connect with either individual experts or particular skill groups using techniques such as instant messaging or conference calls. A UC approach also encourages the integration of mobile or remote staff or experts who can operate a one-number strategy to make them accessible on any device they're using – irrespective of location.

Sustaining higher levels of customer satisfaction also depends on how informed agents are about previous customer interactions and transactions. Today's consumers may interact with an organisation by phone, by e-mail, via the web or using an SMS text, and they – quite reasonably – expect that organisation to have a single view of all their different interactions. Unifying incoming communications means that advanced routing strategies can be applied to all messages, which can then be consistently handled by an agent – perhaps even the same agent that dealt with that customer last time or who they know to be expert in their own concerns. With unified communications in a contact centre, it's easier for organisations to create a consolidated record of interactions, and with newer channels such as video, businesses can enhance the contact and offer even greater personalisation of the customer experience.

According to Aberdeen Group's recent survey looking at the potential of UC for contact centre operations within SMB organisations, the key benefits of UC technology adoption most regularly cited by respondents included simplified customer interactions at 40 percent, the increased availability of contact centre resources also at 40 percent, while 30 percent listed being able to respond more effectively to customer enquiries. Other benefits listed included improved team collaboration and reduced costs through improved processes, shorter calls and improvements in first call resolution.

2. The requirement for in-depth professional services in order to drive successful UC implementations

At Intact Integrated Services we've been working to support Cisco's partners in the implementation of solutions based on Cisco's Unified Contact Centre Enterprise technology. UCCE is a very powerful UC approach that allows organisations to seamlessly integrate their inbound and outbound voice communications with Internet applications such as

real-time chat, Web collaboration and e-mail. Because it's underpinned by Unified Communications, it has the potential to dramatically improve the customer experience – through agents being able to support interactions across multiple channels, sharing contacts to the most appropriate resources anywhere within the extended business, or by managing interactions based on almost any customer attribute.

UCCE has enormous potential, but it's also an Advanced Technology and for many Cisco partners there are considerable risks in taking on such potentially complex projects. Successful implementations of solutions such as UCCE are always about far more than just the technology, particularly with UCCE's service oriented architecture approach encouraging the integration of previously disparate contact centre processes. That's why it's so important for organisations to work with specialist UC partners with all the expertise and skills needed to support all aspects of a major Unified Communications solution.

3. Key issues impacting UC implementation projects

Having successfully engaged on a broad range of UC projects, Intact has highlighted some of the key issues that organisations need to consider before embarking on a major UC project:

- **Don't underestimate your company's existing communications culture** – it's important to understand how your staff communicate with customers and each other before determining your own target UC infrastructure
- **Get some UC project champions on board** – any next generation communications project will inevitably mean change, and it will be important to have some key users in place who can accelerate employee acceptance as well as support the project
- **Prepare your UC environment** – organisations will need to get some of the core building blocks in place, get a single authoritative directory as a source of contacts, make sure it will be able to support your Corporate IM, that your PCs all have the right spec for new UC software, and that you've got the right bandwidth and quality of service to support your network
- **Make the right architecture choices** – are you going to go for a distributed or a centralised architecture – many UC technology solutions rely on real time protocols and that can place serious demands on your network
- **Assess your security requirements** – SOA Service Oriented

Architecture is a great integration approach, but when applications are asked to integrate in ways that they never have before then it raises serious security issues that need to be addressed right from the start. You've got to use all of your existing security functionality, and also make sure you've got the same standards in place for remote users such as home-working agents or your extended mobile network

- **Find ways to maximise enterprise integration** – today the enterprise is the contact centre, it's important to explore every opportunity to connect your UC-enabled contact centre with all the other parts of the business that feature customer touch-points
- **Ensure that you've got enterprise grade project management driving you UC implementation** – UC programmes are wide-ranging and can impact many different parts of the organisation. It's essential to use a serious project management methodology such as Prince 2 to make sure that you can take advantage of all the processes, tools, templates and technologies that can help. You've also got to take any ISO standards or ITIL initiatives into consideration – done wrong, a Unified Communications programme can easily derail your hard-earned certifications
- **Don't overlook your support infrastructure** – the long term success of any Unified Communications project depends on its stability going forward. There are no short cuts here, so insist on contact centre SLAs, think about whether you need 24x7 support, make sure you've got third level support in place, and take advantage of some of the latest software-based remote management and reporting capabilities

4. **Delivering UC and UCCE expertise where it's needed – Intact's advanced IPCC practice**

UC solutions such as Cisco's UCCE Advanced Technology can be challenging to implement well, but it is an advanced technology and it's now becoming clear that the operational benefits that result from

UC programmes within the customer service environment more than justify the project costs.

The UC issues we've outlined are essential to get right, but they're also important in making sure that organisations have a high quality communications infrastructure in place that is both secure and reliable but also flexible enough to support future innovations for years to come. UC can prove challenging, but we're convinced that it's the right choice for an increasing number of companies and the technology partners who work with them.

To support these organisations, we've built up a specialist IPCC practice with all the expertise and skills needed to support all aspects of a UCCE solution, from initial ITIL-based project and services management, through initial design and SOA application integration to the provision of a major Unified Communications solution. Our IPCC Practice offers a range of high quality UCCE white label services – all backed by the company's ITIL-based project and services delivery model. We also bring together all the key UCCE components needed for a successful implementation, including a team with over 35 years' of specialist IPCC expertise, the UK's most comprehensive UCCE test lab facilities, and a proven track record in building business solutions based on Cisco's most advanced solutions

Intact is an acknowledged leader in the provision of Cisco Advanced Technology services, and its IPCC practice helps de-risk the challenge of UCCE implementation for Cisco partners, systems integrators, telcos and service providers. Because Intact never deals directly with end-user clients, its specialist IPCC practice is ideally placed to complement and extend its channel customers' existing Cisco AT solutions capabilities. Intact's expertise enables it to play a key role in helping the growing number of UK Cisco partners who want to expand their portfolio into higher value advanced technology solutions such as UCCE.

Focus on Intelligent Networking solutions

Over the last two years Intact has invested significantly to support the channel in delivering solutions based on Cisco's Advanced Technology. The company's integrated services capability spans beyond the LAN/WAN infrastructure, IP communications, wireless and security, through physical infrastructure deployment, to a wide range of server-based computing and application skills including datacentre design and deployment, as well as storage and application development.

Intact's research has shown that there's a growing number of Cisco partners currently working to differentiate themselves in what is

becoming an increasingly commoditised market – however, investing in entirely new Advanced Technology-enabled business models such as UC-driven contact centres can prove difficult. That’s why Intact has already invested significantly to create its comprehensive, multi-site Managed Service Centre that has the capacity to support partners in the roll out of their own Advanced Technology services.

Working with Intact gives them access to all the technical support they might need, without having to commit to the major expense of investing in their own trained UC experts. Intact’s practice approach also recognises that successful implementations of Cisco solutions such as UCCE are always about far more than just the technology, particularly with UCCE’s service-oriented architecture approach encouraging the integration of previously disparate contact centre processes. Intact’s IPCC practice has the expertise and skills to support all aspects of an UCCE solution, from initial design and SOA application integration right through to a major, Cisco-based intelligent networking solutions.

5. Intact Integrated Services – the UK’s leading Cisco Service Extension Partner

Intact Integrated Services Ltd is an independent provider of project, support and managed services solutions to the ICT industry. The company is an exclusively partner-focused organisation as well as being a leading Cisco Service Extension Partner, providing lifecycle offerings to Cisco partners, systems integrators, telcos and service providers.

Intact is unusual in that it is an exclusively partner-focused organisation as well as the UK’s leading Cisco Service Extension Partner (SEP) providing lifecycle service offerings to Cisco partners.

Intact never deals directly with end-user clients and doesn’t supply either hardware or software products. Instead, Intact focuses entirely on supporting channel partners in winning and delivering higher value, high quality business opportunities. As a result the company concentrates on proactively developing a number of ‘white label’ service offerings to broaden the service portfolio of Cisco partners.

Intact places a special emphasis on delivering services to support Cisco Advanced Technologies. These include:

- Unified Communications
- Contact Centre Express & Enterprise

- Rich Media
- Security
- Content
- Mobility
- Routing & Switching
- Network & Application Performance Management
- Datacentre services

Many partners find these Advanced Technologies a particularly attractive sales proposition given they are faced with increasing margin pressure on their more standard product and solution offerings.

Intact's service capability covers LAN/WAN infrastructures, IP communications, wireless and security, and physical infrastructure deployment to a wide range of server-based computing and application skills including datacentre design and deployment, storage and application development and support. Intact's services are backed by dual 24x7 Managed Service Centres in Slough and Croydon, delivering both support and managed services to a wide range of customers.

Developing a practice-based approach to Advanced Technology implementation

Intact has also recently launched a series of propositions aimed at de-risking the delivery of Cisco Advanced Technology solutions for partners. For some this can involve the simple provision of services to support specific sales programmes, while for others a more comprehensive Managed Service approach has proved more appropriate. In addition to its IPCC Practice focused on delivering high quality Cisco UCCE Advanced Technology solutions, Intact has also introduced a new resource to support Cisco Network Admission Control (NAC) implementations; a new Instant MSP programme to provide Cisco integrators and partners with a fast-track route to Managed Service provision, as well as innovative 'Proof of Concept' approach that supports Cisco partners in their delivery of WAN optimisation technology such as Cisco's Wide Area Application Services (WAAS).

Intact's multi-disciplinary teams are backed by dual 24x7 Managed Service Centres in Slough and London, delivering both support and Managed Services to a wide range of clients.

Intact's core service solutions are all supported by its quadruple quality certifications covering quality management, service delivery, information security and environmental management. The company has also added a fifth certification around business continuity. This significant investment in quality, process management and business continuity has allowed Intact to expand its services proposition to

include a range of additional consultative professional services including areas such as GAP Analysis, Programme Management for Certification, internal requirements such as Health & Safety and Onward Managed Services.

For more information, please visit www.intact-is.com, or contact us on 01344 756600.

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