

The Over-Sell: Hook, Line then Sinker

PRINT

November 12, 2007

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Microsoft and the media feeding frenzie surrounding OCS seems to enjoy proclaiming the death of not only the PBX but also the IP-PBX. The claims of cost benefits and abilities to unite all workers in a unified and true to Microsoft fashion seem to not sizzle out, but sizzle on.



Why I'm skeptical?

Besides the expected Microsoft style of reboots, updates, seemingly endless API vulnerabilities and my-way-or-the-highway thinking about telephony attached to what is "open" and un-proprietary; one would guess that would be enough.

One could also argue people resist change, I'm a bell head, or perhaps I'm engaged in a conspiracy to overthrow Microsoft. But truly, I'll admit that I am a dinosaur of sorts. However, while I resist and even mock globalisation, Microsoft, and misapplied VoIP; I'm not afraid of walking tall when it comes to being change master student of grandmaster of management Obi-Wan Kenobi.

Peter Drucker said some processes shouldn't be changed and the greatest changes aren't about the ohh and ahh that we normally hear about. Instead, the best changes are the ones that we comment on "why didn't we think of that!" Best bird-in-hand example is the PBX- why didn't we think of (Adding a web interface to it) that? Why? It was about complacency and protecting revenue for dealers- okay, so it's IMHO.

OCS rolled out as an immitator PBX along the pitch of making it easy to plug in Unified Communications- IMHO, is an over-sell. Not that I think that Gates and his gurus can't pull it off, nothing like that at all. Instead, it's about something else that separates true geeks from dinos such as me. My main concern about UC is you can't see people sweat, hear the agony or emphatic inclinations in their voices, or feel their handshake. That's right, I want to see them sweat, I want to hear the passion in their voices, and I want to feel that urgency or sense of need as they (the communicators) explain to me what it is that they are trying to convey. This isn't about any head-trip, instead it's about reading people, understanding their sense of urgency and need; and truly trying to be a better "listener" (receiver). As I ponder U-tube, IM, chat and social networking; I can't help but reflect that it appears one generation is attempting to reach out in a non-threatening or touching manner using technology where a previous generation did everything it could to do, to do just the opposite.

No, I don't want or need voice mail messages typed and emailed to me nor do I need some expensive server that provides me with advanced applications that my hybrid IP-PBX doesn't provide such as reading my email messages to me on my cell phone. It's tough enough running a business and then having to put on a show for the sake of putting on a show to say that we're converged or unified as a company? I don't think so. Microsoft has never been the sacred communications glue of business and in spite of their attempts at overtaking the sacred sauce. Telecommunications is too diverse, as are the needs of the many and then considering all the hoot-n-hollering about UC and OCS, it really only addresses the needs of the few. Peter Keen wrote in **The Process Edge**- "dramatic levels of process improvement don't translate into better business performance."

Lynda Gratton and Tamara J. Erickson wrote in Harvard Business Review, (November, 2007; pgs. 100-109) "...our research shows that as teams become more virtual, collaboration declines." They also found that "...the greater the proportion of experts a team had, the more likely it was to disintegrate into nonproductive conflict or stalemate."

Gratton and Erickson also go on to point out the dynamics and complexities involved in collaborative efforts. Technology with any twist isn't going to be the determining factor to solve communications problems and unify people. Although it may appear so for L-enterprise, it could be because their leadership or passion is to provide some sense of community to the overstretched and disjointed global workforce. Will leaders follow the herd for the sake of following the herd, or will they rightly justify UC and OCS? It's doubtful that any hook will hold and the benefits may prove elusive, thus accountability will sink for early adopters ignoring any of the human factors. Great leadership, not good leadership along with the ability to stay on task and to generate great relationships within and out of the corporate workgroups will pay more dividends than any OCS release today or tomorrow.

It wouldn't be sporting if I didn't add again, IMHO, that what "communications" lacks today isn't necessarily "unifying" or "unification" but more uniformity. With uniformity the glue (unification) will follow and stick. My **previous example** of my 1-800-number routes to my DID (Direct Inward Dial) number and after X-number of rings, the caller is bounced to my iPhone (AT&T Cellular). The glue is and has been there. The uniformity that lacks is the "one number" concept. There are three phone numbers involved and really, only one is needed and one provider, with one "fair" bill would be great. Ask me who could provide this and with a chuckle, my guess would be one of those dominant Telcos.

The next example is the nation's cellular network providers. Cell phone users traveling from one state to the next may not be able to dial 911, and instead, each state has different numbers. Then, the roaming charges may or may not apply and the ability to track the individual or to pinpoint them should be a standard feature with any cell phone. I spoke with Tuomo Rutanen of **Ekahau**, creators of Real Time Location Services (RTLS) on Polycom's **SpectraLink 8000 Wi-Fi phones**. Their software generates that ah-ha moment or comment "why didn't we think of that!" Being able to find and locate a company's greatest asset is more than cool. Ekahau, using RTLS to find doctors, teachers, engineers or virtually anyone for any number of reasons not only makes sense but it adds value to the one thing we all seem to take for granted- time and availability of others. Ekahau is providing the feature to fill the gap between GPS and WiFi. Where GPS leaves off, WiFi kicks in.

OCS may have it's right fit in telecommunications for some. I doubt that it will be "the only fit" or as big a hit that it is drummed up to be. So, add these thoughts about "uniformity" along with more examples of providing uniform communications (standard features and closed gaps) and you may conclude that "proprietary" wasn't such a bad thing and telecommunications may transcend from the old TDM dog that many love to emulate, berate and even vilify.

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