OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

An in-depth examination of the benefits and challenges of implementing Unified Communications applications across industries and company sizes.
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SUMMARY

In June 2012 Jabra and analysis institute Frost & Sullivan conducted a study to evaluate 302 companies’ strategic use of Unified Communications (UC), including decision making, benefits, implementation challenges and expected return on UC technology investment.

More companies than ever are embracing Unified Communications technologies as a means of simplifying and streamlining their internal and external communication functions. Companies cited many reasons for adopting UC, with most expressing a desire to increase employee productivity and improve business processes. Many organizations also cited that the global recession as a factor in deciding to roll out UC technologies.

The challenges companies faced and benefits they expected to receive from their UC deployments were, for the most part, consistent across industries and company sizes. This suggests that corporate IT departments clearly understand the need for, and are working to, increase productivity and enhance business processes to achieve increased profitability.

The decision to implement UC is, in large part, part of an overall business strategy. According to the survey a significant number of CEOs are involved in the decision making process, however a majority of the IT Managers asked, describe themselves as the main decision maker or in the circle of managers making the final decision to implement. The decision makers were highly confident about earning a rapid return on the UC deployment, with nearly 80% expecting to earn back their UC investment in less than two years.

More than half the employees of companies that have implemented UC technologies are already using the applications installed to perform their job duties - either onsite or remotely. UC adoption has been rapid enough that half of the companies that have deployed UC have already removed their traditional deskphones. Of the companies that haven’t done this, more than 70% are planning to do so in the near future.

As with all technology roll-outs, companies encountered some obstacles to a successful UC deployment, including implementation costs, limited value of the entire UC toolbox for the majority of the workforce and a lack of in-house staff expertise to manage and support the deployment. Larger companies tended to be most concerned about implementation costs while smaller companies were more concerned with the maturity of UC technologies. Companies’ actual UC implementation times varied little from their anticipated times, which indicates that most were realistic in their deployment expectations and implementations went largely as planned.

Companies also faced a number of challenges in getting employees to adopt UC technologies, including inadequate training, employee resistance to giving up established tools and ways of working as well as lack of integration with existing tools. The biggest key to ensuring user adoption, most found, was easy-to-use technology. More than 60% of decision makers said that headsets were one of the technologies that played an important role in UC
adoption. The benefits company employees received from using headsets included the ability to have their hands free while on calls, improved audio quality and better collaboration.

Companies also shared several lessons they learned during their UC implementations, including the importance of communicating and educating staff about the benefits of UC technology and getting staff and management buy-in to the process.

BACKGROUND

The use of Unified Communications (UC) is becoming increasingly prevalent across companies today. Organizations are turning to these technologies to streamline processes, reduce costs and enable both onsite and offsite workers to collaborate more efficiently and productively. Implementing UC technologies includes several different cultural parameters in the organization which are not to be taken lightly but to be supported. The change from deskphone to softphone must be seen as a process. Lessons learned from the surveyed companies show that users must be trained and ready to let go of their habitual tools in order for the process to become a success. Companies that are considering implementing UC technologies must therefore navigate significant obstacles and take measures to ensure that they have the resources to tackle employee resistance to new technologies, implementation costs, employee training programs and ensure that in-house implementation expertise and support is in place.

In June 2012 Jabra and analysis institute Frost & Sullivan conducted a study to evaluate companies’ strategic use of UC, including decision making, benefits, implementation challenges and expected return on UC technology investment. The study included interviews with 302 IT managers or similar key IT decision makers with responsibility for implementing Unified Communications in their company. Organizations surveyed included ones across Australia, France, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom and United States. Specific industries included Finance and Insurance, IT and Telecommunications, Manufacturing, Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare, Public Sector (excluding Healthcare) and Technology.
KEY FINDINGS

1. The use of Unified Communication technologies is becoming increasingly prevalent among all types and sizes of companies today. More than half of all employees in companies surveyed use Unified Communication applications to perform their job duties.

- Overall, 52.5% of employees in companies surveyed use Unified Communication applications.
- The highest adoption of Unified Communication technologies is among IT and Telecommunications providers, with 57% of employees using UC applications to perform their job duties.
- Lowest adoption is among Manufacturing organizations, with 49% of employees using UC applications.

2. Companies are using Unified Communication technologies for both onsite workers and remote employees.

- 61% of users work on site with access to corporate UC applications.
- 39% of users work off site or from home and remotely access UC applications.
- IT and Telecommunications companies have the greatest percentage of workers who remotely access UC applications, with 43%.
- Public Sector (excluding Healthcare) employers have the smallest percentage of workers who remotely access UC applications, with 33%.

3. The increasing prevalence and adoption of Unified Communication technologies is underscored by the fact that 52% of companies that have rolled out UC have also removed deskphones as part of their implementation.

Of the companies that have not yet removed their deskphones, 70% plan to do so in the near future.

Responses to the question, “Do you plan to remove the deskphones in the offices as a consequence of the Unified Communications roll-out?” included:

- 28%: Yes, within the next year.
- 42%: Yes, more than one year from now.
- 30%: No.

“We were surprised at how many companies have already replaced their deskphones, or are planning to replace them, as part of their UC implementation,” says Rob Arnold, Program Manager, Frost & Sullivan. “This action demonstrates that companies truly see the value in Unified Communications and are serious about using these new technologies to improve the way they do business.”

4. The decision to implement Unified Communication technologies is most often made at the IT level, but a significant number of company CEOs also act as key decision makers.

Responses to the question, “Who was the key decision maker to implement Unified Communications in your company?” included:

- 44%: IT manager or equivalent.
- 35%: CEO or equivalent.
- 12%: Sales manager.
- 5%: CFO.
- 4%: Human Resources.

5. The global recession was a factor in significantly more than half of all companies’ decisions to adopt Unified Communication technologies. Results were consistent across industries and company sizes.

Responses to the question, “Has the global recession influenced your decision to implement Unified Communications?” included:

- 57%: Yes.
- 43%: No.

6. The desire to increase productivity and improve business processes were the primary reasons companies decided to implement Unified Communications. Outcomes such as return on investment and improving customer service ranked lower as reasons for implementing UC.
Responses to the question, “Which of the following were the two main drivers in the decision to implement Unified Communications?” included:

- 53%: Increase productivity.
- 42%: Business process enhancement.
- 33%: Improve system operation and management.
- 26%: Return on investment.
- 25%: Improve customer service.
- 13%: Better support for mobile workers.
- 8%: Better support for distributed teams.

Respondents identified several challenges in achieving a successful UC implementation. Cost of the implementation and limited value of UC for the majority of the workforce were the biggest challenges.

Responses to the question, “What were the two main obstacles to implementing UC in your company?” included:

- 63%: Overall cost.
- 35%: Limited value for the majority of the workforce.
- 31%: Limited in-house staff expertise to deploy and manage the roll-out.
- 28%: Limited interoperability with existing assets.
- 25%: Waiting for Unified Communications technology to mature.
- 18%: Employee resistance to change existing ways of working.

“Costs and a lack of implementation expertise are some of the most common obstacles not just to UC implementations - but to all system implementations,” says Rob Arnold, Program Manager, Frost & Sullivan. “Experience shows that the key to a successful implementation is having a complete understanding of the project, a well-defined project plan and a knowledgeable implementation partner.”

Larger companies are significantly more concerned about cost as an obstacle to implementing Unified Communications than their smaller-company counterparts.

- 73% of companies with more than 5,000 employees cited cost as an obstacle to implementing UC...
- While just 58% of companies with 50-250 employees cited cost as an obstacle.

Smaller companies are more concerned about the maturity of Unified Communication technology as an obstacle to implementation than larger companies.
31% of companies with 50-250 employees cited maturity of Unified Communications technology as an obstacle to deploying UC...  
While just 14% of companies with more than 5,000 employees cited maturity of UC technology as an obstacle.

Respondents also encountered obstacles during the actual Unified Communications roll-out. The two most prevalent were that no single solution is suitable for all employees and insufficient employee training.

Responses to the question, “In your opinion, which were the two main obstacles you encountered during the Unified Communications roll-out?” included:

- 45%: No single solution is suitable for all employees.
- 43%: Insufficient training for employees.
- 41%: The roll-out was not focused on the users and their needs.
- 37%: Poor timing with respect to other company priorities.
- 26%: The roll-out lost focus on the vision of why we decided on it in the first place.
- 8%: We lost some employees due to a bad first experience with some Unified Communications tools.

Companies appear to be realistic in their expectations about the time required to deploy Unified Communications, and implementations appear to have gone largely as planned. Actual implementation times varied little from expected implementation times, and responses were largely consistent across industries and company sizes.

- 17% of companies surveyed expected implementation times of less than 6 months (18% of companies achieved that implementation timeframe.)
- 48% of companies expected implementation times of between 6 months and one year (43% achieved that implementation timeframe.)
- 26% expected implementation times of between 1 and 2 years (32% achieved that implementation timeframe.)
- 9% expected implementation times of more than 2 years (8% achieved that implementation timeframe.)

IT and Telecommunications companies were most likely to experience the shortest implementations, while Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare organizations experienced the longest.

26% of IT and Telecommunications companies achieved implementation times of less than 6 months...  
While just 8% of Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare companies achieved that implementation timeframe.

Organizations are highly optimistic about earning a rapid return on their Unified Communications investment. Nearly 80% of companies that have implemented UC expect to earn a positive return on it in less than two years. This optimism was largely consistent across industries and company sizes.

Responses to the question, “Considering all expected savings and productivity benefits, after how much time do you expect to see a positive return on your Unified Communications investment?” included:

- Less than 6 months.
- Between 6 months and 1 year.
- Between 1 and 2 years.
- Between 2 and 3 years.
- More than 3 years.
- Other.

Respondents identified several challenges that have held back employee adoption of Unified Communication applications. The two most prevalent were inadequate training and resistance to giving up established tools. These challenges were largely consistent across all industries and company sizes.

Responses to the question, “What have been the two key challenges holding back your users’ adoption of the new Unified Communications tools?” included:
58%: Inadequate training.
44%: Resistance to giving up established tools.
37%: Lack of integration with existing tools.
34%: Resistance to giving up existing ways of working.
23%: Incomplete roll-out of all features.

“These results illustrate the pitfalls of inadequate training, especially when it comes to new technologies,” says Rob Arnold, Program Manager, Frost & Sullivan. “Going forward, we expect the companies that earn the greatest returns from UC technologies will be the ones that do the best job of articulating the benefits of these technologies and provide the best training to their employees.”

16 Respondents believe that easy-to-use technology is even more important than training in ensuring user adoption of Unified Communication technologies.

Responses to the question, “What has been the key driver behind user adoption of the new tools offered when rolling out Unified Communications?” included:

- 46%: Technology was easy to use.
- 30%: Users were trained.
- 16%: New habits were formed quickly.
- 8%: A complete roll-out of all UC applications.

“We’re thrilled to see that companies see the value in easy-to-use technologies,” says Holger Reisinger, Jabra Vice President of Marketing, Products and Alliances. “This reinforces our belief that intuitive, easy-to-use applications not only help employees more quickly adopt new technologies, but make their jobs easier as well.”

17 Employee age appears to play a role in adoption of UC technologies. Respondents generally believe that employees age 40 or over are more reluctant to give up established tools and ways of working to adopt new Unified Communications tools.

Responses to the question, “Which of the following employee profiles do you consider more reluctant to give up established tools and ways of working to adopt new Unified Communications tools?” included:

- 66%: Over 40 years old.
- 34%: Below 40 years old.

18 More than six out of 10 of respondents agreed that headsets play an important role in employee adoption of Unified Communication technologies.
Responses to the question, “To what extent do you agree with the following sentence: ‘The headset (usage and availability) plays an important role on the adoption and acceptance of the Unified Communications’” included:

- 16%: Totally agree.
- 45%: Agree.
- 27%: Neither agree nor disagree.
- 8%: Disagree.
- 3%: Totally disagree.

19 Respondents identified several benefits of adopting headsets as part of their Unified Communications deployment. The most prevalent were the ability to be hands-free while on calls and improved audio quality.

Responses to the question, “In your opinion, what are the two most positive aspects of the headset usage in terms of adoption of Unified Communications?” included:

- 58%: Employees enjoy having their hands free when on calls.
- 42%: Improved audio quality leads to increased use of voice applications.
- 41%: There is less noise in the office when deskphones are used less.
- 26%: Improved engagement and collaboration with off-site workers.
- 24%: Employees are multi-tasking and are more productive.

20 Respondents reported several lessons they learned from their Unified Communications implementation. The biggest was the importance of communicating and educating staff about the benefits of UC technologies. Respondents also said that buy-in from employees is significantly more important than buy-in from management.

Responses to the question, “What lessons has the company learned from implementing Unified Communications?”:

“As we’ve seen, Unified Communications holds immense promise for today’s organizations,” says Rob Arnold, Program Manager, Frost & Sullivan. “However, companies that are looking to implement UC technologies should be aware of the challenges associated with implementing advanced communications solutions and have a clear, well-thought-out implementation plan. As we’ve seen, educating staff about the benefits of this technology and getting staff buy-in are critical components of a successful UC implementation.”
FIND OUT MORE

A critical factor in making UC work is by looking at it from the end-user’s perspective. Minimizing end-user effort means quick adoption, thereby maximizing usage and return on investment. Now that mobility in UC moves from being a luxury to mainstream, Jabra aims to support decision makers by supplying the best headset/audio solutions for their end-users to support a successful rollout of Unified Communications.

To find out more about which Jabra headset solutions are relevant for specific working environments, please contact Jabra at www.jabra.com/uc.

ABOUT JABRA

Jabra is the brand of GN Netcom, a subsidiary of GN Store Nord A/S (GN) - listed on NASDAQ OMX. Jabra employs approximately 850 people worldwide and in 2011 produced an annual revenue which amounted to DKK 2,106 million. Jabra is a world leader in the development, manufacturing, and marketing of a broad range of handsfree communications solutions. With a reputation for innovation, reliability, and ease of use that goes back more than two decades, Jabra’s consumer and business divisions produce corded and wireless headsets, plus mobile and in-office speakerphones that empower individuals and businesses through increased freedom of movement, comfort, and functionality.