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True Engagement Requires Seamless Collaboration

Anytime, Anywhere, Any App, Any Device is Becoming Reality

By Robin Gareiss
President, Nemertes Research

Compass Direction Points:

- ✦ **Midsize companies** can gain a competitive advantage by making their employees more productive and engaging of each other and customers. By implementing a seamless mobile collaboration platform that enables anytime, anywhere communications, they will find numerous benefits.
- ✦ **Business benefits are real** with a mobile collaboration strategy. Employee productivity, revenue, resiliency, and customer loyalty are among the improvements.
- ✦ **Common platforms are becoming ... more common.** More than seventy-five percent of companies are using the same vendor for IP telephony and contact center, while 57% identify a "strategic UC provider."

Executive Summary

Among the biggest obstacles to unbridled productivity are technology deficiencies. When employees have different capabilities depending on where they are or what device they're using, they cannot fully engage with colleagues or customers, and their productivity suffers.

By adopting a mobile collaboration platform that allows employees to leverage the same applications and data regardless of their location, connectivity, or device, organizations will find significant improvements. Among them: improved productivity, increased revenue, happier customers, more efficient project management, better work/life balance, better employee retention, and bolstered ability to be resilient during disasters. The actual capabilities of a mobile collaboration platform can include a bevy of applications, but core to success is the ability to escalate, and to do so seamlessly. For example, a verbal conversation can easily shift to a video conference and then to screen sharing, whether it's an internal team call or an external call with a valued customer.

Though a true mobile collaboration platform benefits companies of all sizes, we believe such adoption will give midsize organizations (100 to 2,500 employees) a huge advantage over their slower-moving, large competitors, which simply take longer to win budget approval, implement the technology, train employees, and change the corporate culture.

The Issue

At each progression of technology—the laptop, distributed networking, broadband access, and personal mobile devices—the goal of anytime, anywhere communications was at the forefront. And though most companies enabled telecommuting and flexible work locations, while better equipping existing field workers, the experience has been less than perfect. The truth is, access to collaborative and enterprise apps varies widely based on each employee's location, device, and connection.

To enable a consistent anytime, anywhere, any device, any app work experience, organizations must adopt a common platform that integrates with a variety of communications and collaboration applications, extends to all devices and operating systems securely, and enables consistent performance regardless of location or device. With that platform in place, it's imperative to focus on change management. How will the culture change? How will leaders encourage the entire company to leverage the technologies to improve both team and customer engagement? And how will business leaders measure the changes the new technology platform enables?

Today's Workplace

Most companies have inhibited their employees, in one way or another, whether they're traditional knowledge workers, field workers, or remote workers.

Picture knowledge workers and a few items come to mind: a desk, a computer, a phone or headset. They are defined by *where* they work and the tools they use as much as they're defined by the actual work they do. But this setup drastically limits their effectiveness by keeping the tools and applications they need tied to the location where they work. By decoupling their location from their job, knowledge workers can become much more productive and loyal. If they or someone in their family are sick, they can work from him rather than taking the day off. If they are working with a team across the globe, they can take an evening or early morning video conference from home. If they have important expertise, and a high-value customer or prospect needs some answers, contact-center agents can reach out and find the knowledge worker after hours.

Likewise, field workers are not fully enabled from a technology perspective. Though companies have invested in providing field workers with mobile devices to improve their productivity, there remain weaknesses. The mobile apps do not always provide full access to data or enterprise apps. The performance over wireless links can be sub-par. And they may not have the collaborative apps (i.e., video, presence status, chat, etc.) to communicate effectively with colleagues, supervisors, and even customers. Sales people, for example, may lack access to customer records, credit limits, and inventory status. What's more, they can better serve customers in the field or close sales when they can access experts over text, chat, or even video conferencing.

Remote workers have different issues. Remote workers are those who work from home, branch offices, or even classrooms or clinics. They have a permanent work location (even though they may be mobile within that location, such as a physician at a clinic), but it's not the headquarters or large location. Connectivity, security, and devices often are not the same quality as headquarters employees. To be as productive, they need the same technology capabilities as their corporate office-based brethren.

A Better Environment

The ideal workplace is one where each employee is enabled with the right technology (device, applications, connectivity, security) that performs the same regardless of any factors, such as location, device type or operating system, or job responsibility at that time. In such a world, technology is the enabler. Employees communicate with one another more (regardless of the app used to communicate), they get work done faster (because they can access what they need wherever they are), and they serve their customers better.

The existence of multiple applications over any device can improve productivity, but integration is key to escalating conversations to new apps. For example, suppose a team is working on a tight deadline to complete a project. They start the day with a conference call to update each other with the status. The team leader senses two of the team members are not fully tuned in, so she asks all to shift to a video conference. From that shift, one immediately becomes engaged and the second hasn't joined because he is in his car getting coffee. She can address that issue immediately, telling him to pull over and join the video via mobile device—particularly urgent given the high profile of the project and the looming deadline. From there, one team member wants to show a document he's working on, so they screen share and provide immediate comments, perhaps with simultaneous editing. And throughout the day, they update one another from their mobile devices or laptops, using their persistent chat room: Effective, efficient, and productive.

Indeed, the capabilities of an effective collaboration environment are ever changing and a massive undertaking by IT staffs—particularly when they buy apps from a variety of vendors and must integrate. Figure 1 shows the progression of UC and collaboration apps alone—not even including full mobile enablement of these apps or the integration of enterprise apps. It's a huge undertaking.
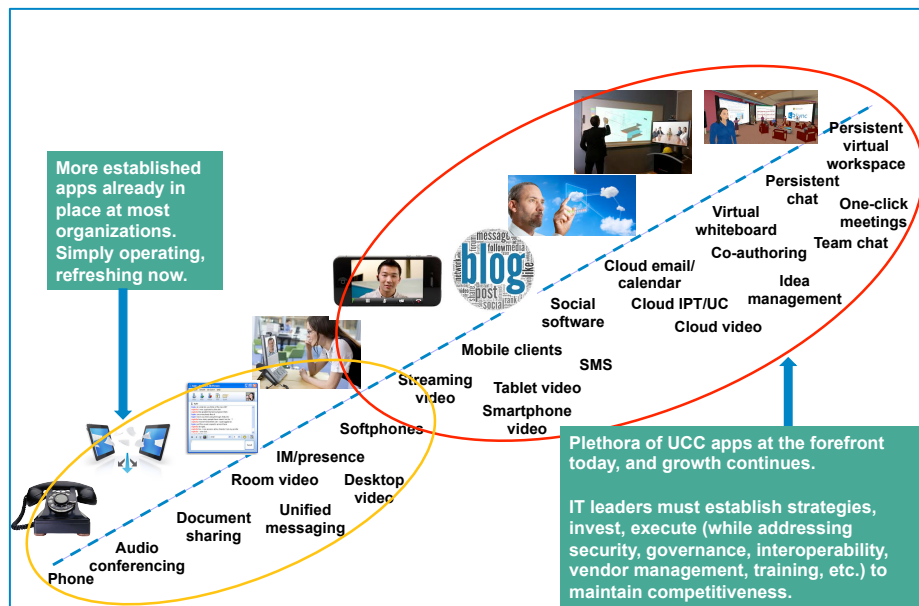

Figure 1: Progression of UCC Apps

In our research, we find that a growing number of companies are identifying a "strategic UC provider" to reduce the amount of integration needed. They want a single platform that makes it easy to add new capabilities and extend them to mobile devices. In just one year, from 2014 to 2015, those identifying a strategic UC provider increased from 32% to 57%. (Please see Figure 2.) In the most recent data, the percentages are slightly higher for larger organizations, which have more challenges

using multiple providers than SMBs. About 61% of large organizations (2,500+ employees) identify a strategic UC provider, compared with 54% of midsize organizations. In 2014, 42% of midsize and 41% of large organizations identified a strategic UC provider, so in both segments, growth is significant.
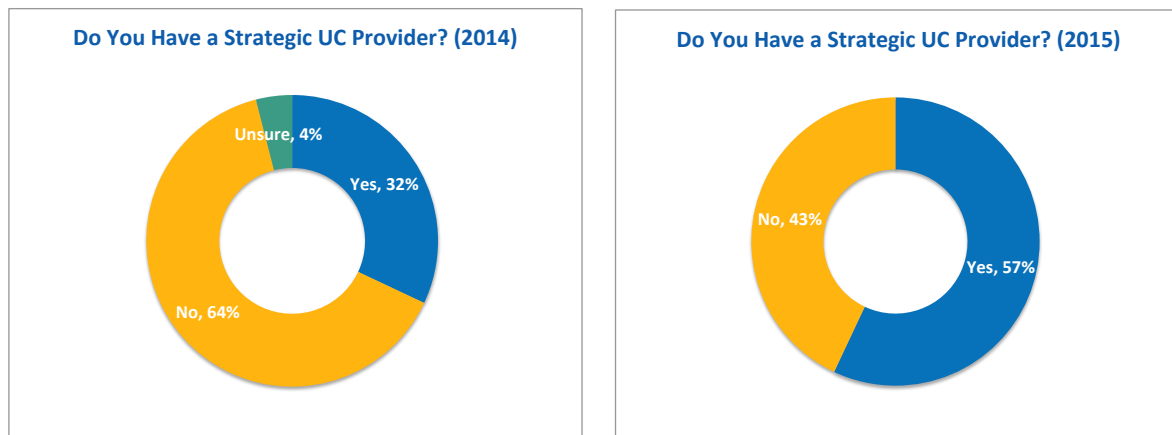
Do You Have a Strategic UC Provider? (2014)

Unsure, 4%
Yes, 32%
No, 64%

Do You Have a Strategic UC Provider? (2015)

No, 43%
Yes, 57%

Figure 2: Shift in Strategic UCC Provider, 2014-2015

Along the same lines, most organizations (75.4% of all companies; 69% of midsize) use the same provider for IP telephony and contact centers. We expect that trend to continue as organizations add new communications and collaboration channels to the contact center. In fact, the collaboration director at one global bank says the company views every employee as a potential contact-center agent. It wants to use a single platform for all collaboration (inside and outside the contact center), so agents can find experts in any location and tap them to provide expertise to customers.

In addition to the movement toward a single platform, companies also are spending more money on mobile technologies. For example, 56.5% of all sized companies have increased their mobile device spending in the past year (by an average of 24%). About a quarter of midsize companies have increased spending here, but the lower percentage is in large part because midsize companies were early adopters in allowing employee-owned devices into the organization. So their mobile device investments waned at least three years ago. Instead, midsize organizations are focusing on mobile app development: 43% are developing mobile apps, evaluating them or planning to do so. More than half (56.5%) of all sizes of companies are increasing mobile app development spending, by an average of 49%. And finally, about half of companies have, are planning to deploy, or are evaluating unified mobile desktops. Midsize organizations are furthest along with, with 33% already using them, vs. 17% of either small or large companies.

The Business Value

The business value of enabling employees with a consistently performing, secure mobile collaboration platform is extensive. A recent Integrated Benefits Institute report states the U.S. economy loses $227 billion each year from lost productivity, resulting from employee absenteeism from being sick or coming to work and not performing their best. Enabling employees to work from home while recovering from a minor procedure or simply feeling under the weather would reduce this loss and keep projects moving forward.

Success stories reach far and wide. One county government provided its building inspectors with mobile devices and associated apps to fill in the inspection form on site and send the results wirelessly, eliminating the need to drive all the way back to the office each day to manually key-in data from paper reports. Field inspectors also could chat with their supervisor to ask questions. Coupling chat with video capabilities to enable an inspector to show the supervisor specific problems on the job site eliminated the time and expense associated with the supervisor coming out to the job site. The result? The county was able to handle 30% more inspections with the same three inspectors and one clerk, save on fuel costs, and improve the quality of the inspections with the collaboration capabilities.

The bottom line is a long list of benefits, providing the technology is deployed with mobile enablement, security, and consistent performance. Once that's done, the key to achieving the benefits is proper training, evangelizing, and adjusting, based on feedback from employees and customers and new requirements and expectations. And one of the keys to success is engaging the business units, as well as the executives, so they're using the technologies to engage with their own teams and customers.
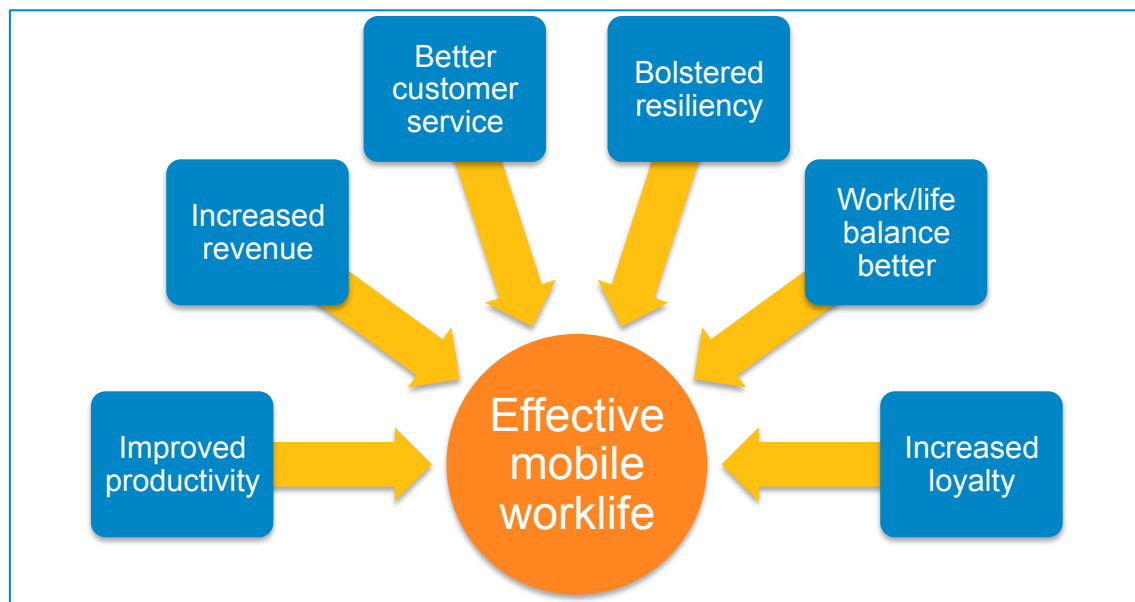

Figure 3: Results of an Effective Mobile Workforce

Figure 3 illustrates the key benefits organizations are finding as they move to a seamless mobile collaboration platform. The benefits affect the company, its customers, and employees—and all three are interdependent. A summary of these benefits follows:

- **Improved productivity** – Employees who can work from anywhere, from any device will work more and make better use of their time.

- **Increased revenue** – By enabling sales people with information they need, on the spot, and immediate access to experts, they will close more sales. One company, for example, enabled 700 sales people with a mobile office and access to all apps and data they needed. By closing the sales on site, they each handled 14 incidents with an average of $30,000 in inventory replacement to drive $2.94 in revenue. The technology cost was $1.74 million. Likewise, service reps who can resolve customer issues quickly—in part by accessing experts around the globe, wherever they are at that time—will keep customers satisfied. Satisfied customers buy more and refer the company to their friends and family, thus increasing revenue.

- **Better customer service** – Reputation is everything. By serving customers *how* they want to be served, they also become happier. For example, some may want to text the call centers, others may want to call via phone, and still others may want to do a desktop video conference to have eye contact with the agent. And in any of these cases, the agent should be able to shift between modes to improve the quality of the experience and better engage the customer.

- **Bolstered resiliency** – The company becomes more resilient to disasters or unexpected issues when people can work from anywhere and communicate effectively from anywhere. For example, one insurance company enabled employees to work remotely. Prior disasters took two weeks to set up temporary workspaces; they had people working within two hours. Less downtime means a healthier business.

- **Better work/life balance** – Employees can be more effective if they have flexibility in their work hours. If a U.S. employee is engaged in a team project with colleagues in Asia, he can adjust his schedule to come into the office in the afternoon and then work later in the evening from home.

- **Increased loyalty** – By providing employees with the tools and flexible culture to get the job done when and where it needs to happen, they will be loyal to the company and appreciate being treated with maturity and respect. Less employee turnover reduces recruitment costs. One company said it cost $1,300 to hire each new contact-center agent, and it had a 35% turnover rate. By providing an opportunity to work from home two days a week, turnover dropped to 10%.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Organizations that are not evaluating a seamless, flexible mobile collaboration strategy should rethink that decision. The benefits far outweigh the costs, time and risks. We recommend the following:

- Evaluate providers that can offer a single platform for collaboration applications that be extended to mobile devices. Nemertes recommends organizations evaluate their current infrastructure and apps and select a primary provider for UCC. We recognize that new and niche capabilities will come along, so assess how easily the platform integrates with third parties. Using multiple vendors for voice, video, collaboration, and the host of associated apps is becoming too cumbersome—and companies are spending an enormous amount of time on engineering and integration.
- Think about employees and customers. Determine how technology can eliminate the differences in the work lives of those in a headquarters, at a remote office, or out in the field.
- Determine metrics. Measure performance, cost, employee satisfaction prior to making the changes and then after to document success (or failure, in which case, the metrics will guide the root cause of the failure).
- Use management and monitoring tools. UC and collaboration will continue to grow, in the number of apps and the importance in the organization. Tools will help with setup and administration, directories, performance monitoring, troubleshooting, root cause analysis, and more.
- Build a business case. Show both the financial team and the business leaders how the technology can help them solve a problem or create an opportunity. It takes time, but it's time well spent.
- Don't ignore training and marketing. One of IT's biggest mistakes is rolling out new capabilities and then quickly moving on to the next thing. Spend the time needed to market the capabilities internally, train employees, and work with business unit leaders and executives. When the leadership of any company begins using collaborative apps, the rest of the company follows. Show them how it makes their lives easier and more productive.

About Nemertes Research: Nemertes Research is a research-advisory and strategic-consulting firm that specializes in analyzing and quantifying the business value of emerging technologies. You can learn more about Nemertes Research at our Website, www.nemertes.com, or contact us directly at research@nemertes.com.