

From TDM to IP: Unified Communications Helps Agencies Connect Better, Faster and at a Lower Cost

Agencies and private sector CIOs are at a crossroads. Much of the installed communications systems and network equipment is nearing end-of-life. A portion of what is still in working condition is slowly losing vendor support. Meanwhile, there are a number of new technologies that employees and constituents are asking about and using, such as engaging in the bring-your-own-device trend, IT-supported IP video conferencing, mobility, follow-me services and virtual desktop infrastructure technologies.

The result is a perfect storm that means – for many agencies – waiting to upgrade communications isn't a choice anymore. It's a necessity, and one that's prompting organizations to take a look at their communications and network infrastructure and evaluate IP-based unified communications (UC) technologies as an alternative to traditional time-division multiplexing (TDM) telephone systems.

CIOs have a lot of questions about moving to a UC platform. The first question they ask, however, isn't typically about technology. Instead, they want to know what the business benefits will be and what the impact an upgrade might have on the agency's training, maintenance and budget.

The Waterfall Effect

There are many benefits that can be garnered by the increase in productivity UC offers, depending on which features are brought into play. Whether integrating voice, data and video on the same network or taking advantage of mobility, presence and follow me services with simultaneous access and availability notifications on a 24/7 basis, each has the potential to make a huge difference.

For example, mobility services allow agencies to provide their employees with the tools to work remotely and on-the-go. Employees can check each other's presence, instant message, retrieve voicemails via text and direct work telephone calls to their mobile devices. Escalation of

service becomes the norm, as users can go from reading a voicemail text to listening to it via a handset to making a call to seeing each other via video almost all within a single touch of a button.

Cost savings also make a big difference. Despite the fact that agencies don't typically generate revenue to offset their IT expenses, UC projects have a very strong return on investment. By moving to a UC platform, operations and maintenance costs drop significantly and there is no longer a need to maintain and support separate IT infrastructures for voice and data. Instead of having individual telephony components at every branch office, the agency enjoys a single system that serves a region or a sector, which means maintenance is only required on one system instead of many, and software and security patches as well as upgrades are simpler to implement. These benefits have the potential to turn a new UC implementation into a self-funding model. As cost savings are realized, those funds can be reinvested for the next location or group's roll out. An agency can reduce their long-term expenditures while also preparing for future communications demands. This reinvestment model can reach out as far as three to five years.

Looking Toward the Future

Before deciding to move to a UC platform, it is important to consider end users – what they need and how the new technology will be received. These answers will shape the rest of the UC journey since, like most IT projects, every UC engagement – whether public or private – must be cooperative and collaborative for it to achieve all of its goals. That support starts with the development of the project's scope and continues through implementation and post-installation.

Experts suggest getting buy-in from end users as early as a year in advance. IT departments should kick-start their efforts by creating an ongoing internal communications campaign that details the benefits UC offers for achieving the goals of the IT department, the agency and its end

Unified Communications Helps Agencies Connect

users. Executive buy-in and support is equally as important, so communications that highlight the financial and productivity gains of such a project should also be implemented specifically for executives.

Of course, technology is a big part of UC and making the right choices for today is important, as is knowing how those choices will fit into tomorrow's infrastructure. To that end, CIOs should start the technology journey with an assessment of their current baseline voice and data network infrastructures including software, hardware configurations, supportability and any details that might be available related to the planned OEM support – or discontinuation of support – as well as interoperability. Once an agency has this information they can look ahead at what their migration path is going to be and can prioritize the changes they will implement. In the end, it's not just

what's possible now, but what best-in-breed technology and processes can make possible for tomorrow.

Another key element in a successful UC implementation is having an IT integrator partner who understands the big picture and not just the little pieces. Agencies need to carefully evaluate potential partners based on their experience and capabilities to ensure their partners are well-versed in the security, governance and regulations that agency IT implementation requires.

When these elements come together, the IT department has the insight and the capability to influence the end result – an efficient UC solution that will carry their agency into the future

General Dynamics Information Technology

General Dynamics Information Technology integrates voice, video and data services to provide increased operational effectiveness to customers in the defense, federal civilian, state and local government and commercial sectors. Organizations rely on assured delivery of voice services, including voicemail, web conferencing, instant messaging, email and more to conduct daily business requirements. Unified Communications reduces costs and provides more seamless communication. Building on years of experience, General Dynamics Information Technology delivers complete solutions for integrating the full range of real-time and non-real-time communication services into a single IP-based system, connecting people to people, anywhere, anytime, on any device.

With approximately 24,000 professionals worldwide, the company manages large-scale, mission-critical IT programs delivering IT services and enterprise solutions for customers in the defense, intelligence, homeland security, health, federal civilian government, state and local government and commercial sectors.

For more information, please visit: www.gdit.com

GENERAL DYNAMICS
Information Technology