

WHY UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS MAKES SENSE TODAY

By Andrew Gorski

WHERE DID THE TIME GO?

I recently had the opportunity to spend some one on one time with my father. Since I have a wife and three kids, a job and other social responsibilities, it seems that I have less and less alone time with him. It seems that most times that we're together are during the holidays (where other family members are present) or at one of my kid's activities (which do not allow for much intimate interaction).

This year in the spring and we took some time to get our family cottage open for the season. We put the boat in the water, cut the grass and then took time for dinner and a couple of beers at a local tavern. Over a beer (or two), my father commented to me that if he had one regret in life, it was that he didn't spend enough time with my brother, sister and me growing up. He was a heating/air conditioning guy and spent a lot of weekends doing side jobs for extra income.

As I thought about it, I told him that I don't know many working parents today who don't have the very same sentiment. My own job requires me to travel several days per week and although I make many of my kid's activities, I miss more than I would like. However, when I compare the time I am able to spend with my family during the work week, I think back to the way it was.

I spent over ten years working in a cubicle at my corporation both as a salesman and a sales manager. During that span of time, I was always up early to the train, worked the day downtown

and typically made it home at 6:30 PM. During those years, I rarely had the opportunity to have dinner with my family since my kid's day began at 6am and they were often starving when they got home from school.

Nowadays, when I don't travel, I wake up at 6 AM and take the sixty second "commute" to my home office, I make coffee, boot up the computer and I'm working. The tools my company provides me with allows me to communicate with and lead my team, who are scattered throughout sixteen cities, as if I was back in my cubicle in downtown Chicago.

What has allowed this miraculous transformation? Collaboration tools! The tool that integrate web and document sharing, video and audio conferencing has made it possible for the road warrior to work efficiently and effectively and reduce costs. Even though these tools are becoming more prevalent in the world today, there is much more opportunity to implement and use this technology than is being realized. Putting together a personal strategy for utilizing these tools can provide higher quality meetings, higher rates of job satisfaction, increased employee retention as well as providing more time to spend with the family or other desired activities.

HOW TO: CONDUCT HIGH QUALITY REMOTE MEETINGS

Many of us host audio and web meetings where attendees spend time "multitasking" and paying limited attention. In many cases, the larger the

11.4 if I'm busy, on the phone or available for a quick chat which save them time and tremendously increases the ability to contact me and get a quick answer when necessary. Instant messaging like this has tremendously increased one's ability to contact someone and be contacted and in many cases has replaced the old "email someone and wait back for a response" practice of days gone by.

I'm also lucky enough to have a tool which will take any phone call I get at my desk phone, to my extension or any other phone I designate and have it ring all phones including my smart phone at the same time. This tool ensures that I never miss the opportunity to pick up a caller which keeps me productive.

Outside of being in flight (and we all know that is changing too,) unified communications tools like the ones I have at my disposal lead me to always be "in the office" when I'd like to be." During times where I'm in the office and don't want to be disturbed, these tools also offer users the chance to update their "status" to busy or do not disturb and others allow users to hide. In the end, these tools allow the user to design when and how it's best to contact them as well as when they don't wish to be contacted.

HOW CAN WE AFFORD IT?

Unified communications (UC) means different things to different people, but much of what I have discussed above is exactly that. While some people choose to think of components of UC such as VoiP, IM or email as unified communications, I believe that the tools that allow one to communicate anywhere, anytime, with the device of their choosing and through the richest medium possible is truly unified communications.

When taking a look at your own company, think about how you communicate today and where you think you could do better. Many companies already have VoiP (Voice over IP) implemented and many of the tools I discussed above are add on products to what is already owned. When measuring the impact and ROI, I recommend looking hard at both soft and hard cost savings as well as productivity, job satisfaction boosters and time savings.

How much could be saved just by holding meetings in high quality video?

Some of the commonly measured **hard** cost savings would be relatively easy:

Business travel costs (Estimate or Calculate)

- Cost of Flights
- Transportation to and from airport + parking
- Cost of Rental cars + Insurance + fuel
- Cost of Lodging
- Cost of Meals

After examining how much each one of them cost, then multiplying that by the frequency you can get an estimate of the total hard costs of making the face-to-face business trips. This then becomes the amount of hard dollars that can be saved (if no additional expenses for technology are needed).

To illustrate, I'll share the story of one of my customers, a public utility company in the Midwest. They have over 5,000 employees employed throughout the Midwest with three main offices, all within about 300 miles of each other. Their challenge was to cut costs while maintaining a stable business climate. They had many employees traveling between offices which

led to expenses for mileage, lodging, food, etc. This company figured out the cost of each trip, the number of trips that could be avoided by using high definition video and figured out that **their \$1.2M investment would pay for itself in less than one year.** They ended up outfitting about four to five conference rooms with Cisco TelePresence in each location and cut down on an incredible amount of travel. Other benefits other than cutting costs were that employees didn't have to travel overnight to as many meetings, they didn't lose productivity while making the flight/drive to other locations and they were able to "meet" with coworkers in other cities and still make it home for dinner with their families.

Some of the commonly measured **soft** cost savings would be:

- Time lost to travel (reduced productivity)
- Fatigue of traveler
- Stress on traveler (work-family balance out of line)
- Unhappy spouse/children
- Cash flow issues is using personal credit cards for travel

Then calculate your ROI to show the benefits of using Unified Communications.

Besides Cost Savings here are a few Common Productivity Boosters that can be obtained:

- Reduction in attendee Multi Tasking – How much more productive would your meetings be if all attendees were actively engaged and always paying attention?
- Enhanced Communication – It has been noted that over 60% of communication is non verbal. Video allows people to utilize both verbal and nonverbal communications.

- Always Available Coworkers

How much more work can a company get done if they didn't have to wait for emails and voicemails to be returned?

What is the value of reaching the right person right away?

Job Satisfaction Boosters:

- Reduced Commute Time

Without a commute, employee spends more time working on the job while if working from home.

Without a commute, employee is able to take short breaks from the work day for family activities like dinner, school functions, etc. Also the employee is able to easily get back to work after taking a break.

The result of over three years of using unified communication tools; I've had more dinners with my family and missed fewer activities than I did in the ten previous years. Although I believe that I'll always feel regret that I don't spend enough time with my children, I'm grateful that technology is helping me be better than ever.

I'm also more available to my coworkers, my business partners and customers. That's something hard to put a price tag on.

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