

Openness: The Basis for a Sound Unified Communications Strategy

Speakers:

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>> Good day and welcome to the IBM podcast on openness -- the basis of a sound, unified communications strategy. My name is Marisa Viveros, Vice President, Converged Communications Services. Today, I will be speaking with Bruce Morse, Vice President, Unified Communications and Collaboration.

Bruce, openness can mean a lot of things. You have talked about openness as a key element of the IBM communication and collaboration, or UC² strategy. What is the IBM strategy, and how you are you defining openness?

>> Thanks, Marisa. First of all, we define openness as really a combination of factors. It starts with promoting and supporting open industry standards, and building our offerings on standards (where they exist), so that it allows customers as well as other partners to easily integrate and add value to that. As an example, Sametime, our unified communications and collaboration platform, is using things like Eclipse, which is a Java based standard technology, and ratified SIP for signaling, etc. But frankly, sometimes standards don't exist or they're not complete.

When standards come out, many times they're not defined well enough in many cases to allow all use scenarios to be dealt with appropriately. What IBM then tries to do is step in with other industry providers and fill in the gaps through the open industry standards bodies to be able to maintain an open way in which the industry moves of forward. An example of that is: today the presence standard is not well defined, so we have been working with vendors such as Cisco, through the IETF standards body to be able to more fully define that standard.

Openness also to IBM means that you publish your interfaces -- all your interfaces -- that allow others to integrate and provide the tools that allow those vendors to integrate their capabilities or for customers to integrate their applications or build additional value into your products.

This needs to be done in a predictable and consistent fashion, not just exposing those APIs when it is convenient and in "my" best interest, but also making sure that they are always open even if it means that other vendors in the market may in fact create and integrate products that frankly are competitive to my products. Openness means consistency and making sure that all the standards are open, and remain open, and not controlled from version to version like some of the other vendors in the marketplace do.

Frankly, this is the reason that we have over 400 Sametime partners today. We've made it easy and we have been consistent, and been predictable in the way in which we've put the API out there and we have used open industry standards.

So we think that this is a key part of our strategy and this is how we define openness today.

>> How do organizations and clients benefit from adopting an open approach to a unified communications?

>> I think first of all, the number one benefit of an open approach is that it provides customers with choice. In most cases we find, particularly in unified communications and collaboration, that customers have already made investments in a wide variety of different communication and IT infrastructures. They have different telephony systems, they have different videoconferencing systems, they have different applications and the benefit is, with an open approach, it allows these customers to be able to integrate what they've already invested in, and spend their money, therefore, on building additional business value (things that benefit the business) versus spending money to rip out and replace perfectly good infrastructure, just for the purposes of being able to integrate it together into a unified communications environment.

Really, it comes down to providing customers with a choice, and avoiding vendor lock-in and ultimately, again, allowing them to spend their money on building incremental value for their business, rather than ripping and replacing perfectly good infrastructure.

>> There is a different set of stakeholders in this value chain. I'm wondering, what does it mean for IT or Telecom managers?

>>> For IT and Telecom managers, for them, it means in many cases, they've already made decisions on which vendors they prefer to do business with. They already have investments, and already know how to manage that environment. And for them, what that means, therefore, is that they can take what they already know is a predictable and a secure and preferred environment and again integrate that and benefit from unified communications without ripping and replacing. So it really provides them with a lot more choice, a more predictable environment, reduced risk; I think it makes their lives a lot easier versus trying to force them down a path of potentially ripping out what has been a perfectly good and secure infrastructure in the past.

>> I would imagine that leveraging the existing investment that has already been made ensuring ease of migration is fundamental to them as well. What are the implications then of openness for the end users?

>>> I think that from an end user perspective, what it means is that the end user can ultimately -- an aspect of openness, frankly, is the ability to support lots of different end user environments. That means, not all users use of the same tools, not all users work the same way. We have examples where we go into companies where some end users prefer to use Mac, as an example, as a client environment...or Linux or Windows, or for their mobile devices, they are using Symbian devices, or they are using RIM blackberry devices, or using again Windows mobile, and so from an end user, it means that openness is the ability to support end user choice. So, at the end user level, it really does provide a lot of flexibility. But at the same time, openness on the back end or server side, it means that if you can do this in a fashion that insulates the end user from those changes, as you in fact change out telephony systems in the back and or change videoconferencing systems, etc., if you can also isolate those changes from the end user, and deliver a consistent and predictable end user environment through these multiple clients, you can avoid disrupting the end user, or trying to retrain the end user on the different tools, etc. So, openness is really important on both sides, at the end user experience and client level, as well as the back and server level. And again, being able to do this in a fashion that isolates or insulates the end user from a lot of those changes.

>> Absolutely. Bruce, could you give us some examples of customers who are benefiting from their commitment to openness?

>> Sure. There are actually a lot of different customers who benefit. Before I give you specific examples, I would say that we find that the vast majority of customers that we engage with have, as I mentioned before, multiple vendor environments to start with. We rarely see a customer who is standardized on a single vendor's IT infrastructure, telephony infrastructure, etc. The vast majority of our customer environments are mixed environments.

I will give you a good example. Prudential U.K., as an example, happens to be a customer that has a fairly mixed and heterogeneous environment, in terms of what they have installed. They have as an example, on the client side, they use multiple different clients. They use Windows, they use Citrix, they use Mac, in fact they are even starting to pilot Linux on the desktop. They've got dual e-mail environments, where they are using both Notes and Exchange Outlook. They've got voice, their telephony system is provided by Avaya and Cisco, they've got Polycom and RADVISION providing video conferencing, so they are also in fact using Blackberry on the mobile as well, so it is a great example of the typical environment that we encounter a lot, where there is a lot of different communication and collaboration infrastructure that they're trying to figure out how to put all that together. They frankly chose Sametime in large part because of not only the capabilities that we can deliver, but also its openness and ability to integrate these different environments that I just described.

Another example would be Bank of New York Mellon. Here is a classic example of the merger of two different banks, Bank of New York and Mellon Bank. One has standardized, frankly, Bank of New York, on a Notes environment. But Mellon comes in with a sort of a collection of different e-mail systems, including Outlook. They have multiple telephony systems, again, Avaya, Nortel, Cisco... they're using Cisco Meeting Place for some of their web conferencing. So again, it was another example of where they had a pretty heterogeneous environment, and they were looking for a unified communication and collaboration platform, that allowed them to be able to leverage what they had already invested in, versus ripping and replacing all of that. So that was a big reason why they chose Sametime as well. There are lots of examples where customers do this, and they are not always big customers. It applies equally to small and medium businesses as well.

>> Bruce, thank you very much for talking with me today. This is a really exciting topic -- unified communications and collaboration, especially IBM becoming a front runner in this area.

>> Thanks, Marisa. I enjoyed talking with you as well.

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