

IBM and Cisco: Raising the bar in Unified Communications

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Al:

Hello everyone and welcome to today's featured podcast. My name is Al Stretton and I am the Global Business Development Executive for Unified Communications for the IBM Cisco alliance. Joining me today is Fred Clark who is the Business Development Executive for Unified Communications and Collaboration for our Global Technology Services Team.

Today's podcast is to bring you up to speed on IBM and Cisco's approach to Unified Communications and how it's providing a richer experience for our customer, end users and for the organizations that we work with. Let's begin.

Fred thanks for joining today by the way. Can you take a little time and bring us up to speed on what IBM and Cisco are doing in the unified communications area today?

Fred:

Sure Al. We actually have a lot of great things that have been delivered over the last year or so between IBM Software Group and Cisco. There has been a lot of focus around plug-ins. So we've been providing this server based or client based plug-ins that allow Lotus Sametime clients to link right into a Cisco CallManager to leverage Cisco phones, softphones, link into the Unity Voice Messaging to bring it up into a Sametime client. We have new plug-ins that provides phone presence information from the Cisco presence server. We also have new integration that is leveraging the Cisco MeetingPlace capabilities.

We've got a lot of great deliveries around plug-ins. It's also been a little bit broader than just direct integration and Sametime. Cisco recently extended all the plug-in and unified communications integration that they have into the Notes 8 client. Also there is a new version last month that was delivered from their Unity on Domino. The leverage is Notes and Domino 8 and is able to run on the new Vista platform. Also we are pretty excited about a new capability that will be coming out a little bit later in the year that's going to have some pretty impressive integration that leverages Sametime eeb conferencing, the new Cisco Unified MeetingPlace 7.

Al:

So it sounds like we are doing a lot with this great technology and some integration pieces for the integration with our collaboration technologies. What about some of the other integrations and deeper technologies that we're looking at as well with this?

Fred:

One of the things is that we really had customers bringing this up and asking about it and fortunately were now able to support this later in the year. We've been doing a lot of work with customers around Cisco's Telepresence and we now have the capability from Notes Domino to do calendaring, scheduling of telepresence conference rooms, but now later in the year were going to be able to extend the option to customers or extend their business values of using telepresence and be able to provide it out into Notes or Sametime clients via plug-ins. That's a pretty exciting developments we've got going.

Al:

Yeah, that is outstanding. One of the questions that I've heard from several customers is that we may use Microsoft Exchange and are locked into some of this Microsoft technology. We are not sure that you can help us. I'm not sure that's a true statement. Can you give us some examples of perhaps when we've worked in those types of situations?

Fred:

Yeah Al. Thanks for bringing that up. Many times we are talking to Microsoft shops meaning that they've got Outlook, they've got Exchange running, and have no interest in doing that. We have a pretty exciting, compelling, unified communications - where we show and we can actually deliver with out-of-the box capabilities today - where we can take Sametime that can light-up and work inside the Outlook client and it can also light-up and work out of Office documents. The idea is that you and I can be working on a PowerPoint and I can see that you're online and I can go ahead and actually share that PowerPoint with you in real-time and collaborate and work together on a presentation. Also, we have the ability to start leveraging some of these social networking capabilities that Lotus has delivered with Connections and document management capabilities of Quiker can also be tightly integrated into Outlook and into Microsoft Office, as well.

Al:

So even though I am not a Domino user, I can still be a Sametime user and get the same benefits that of all of these plug-ins and integration with this Cisco UC technology?

Fred:

Yeah, absolutely. In fact, in our experience in everything that we are doing and showing today is available today. Customers that do have that Microsoft buy it, can in fact take advantage of this unified communications or real-time capabilities today. They don't have to wait for future product versions.

Al:

This is a great technology story. Technology is only one part of the answer. What business benefits have you been seeing for when we've deployed this to customers? I know you've had experience with a number of customer deployments out there. What types of value and maybe

you can throw in a couple of examples and here of what types of value that we've seen in specific customer situations?

Fred:

Let me give you a great one. I've been working with a healthcare provider where they are probably a little bit ahead of the curve compared to some and they've looked at some word processors that they want to augment or streamline to unified communications. They had an e-consulting team that they wanted to support. So the idea of the application with let's say a knee injury comes into the family doctor, the family doctor can do x-rays or MRIs there during that day. Then the family doctor may realize I need an expert, a sports medicine expert. They can quickly and easily find a specialized doctor that's available remotely and then using our tools they're able to bring in that expert and consult while the patient is still in the office.

There are a couple of drivers and benefits here for this particular customer. There is one, the patient is satisfied. In a matter of hours are able to get that first level of diagnosis moving instead of telling the patient they have to go back and call the specialist and wait two to three weeks to see them. The other thing that's going on here is when you have that specialist doctor that is able to be available for a few hours a week for remote consultation; you actually have a utilization impact. If you have a doctor that is seeing more than one or two patients a week even though it's through Unified Communications, that has profound impact on the productivity and of the business value of that infrastructure back in to improving the business productivity of the organization.

I can give you another example in Insurance. We're seeing insurance customers and now I'll give you kind of an example of what we have been supporting where you may have a new insurance agent that's relatively new to the organization and they have a customer on the phone. That agent can tap in to some of the subject matter expertise that exists back into the company. They're able to use our unified communications platform environment where they can put in questions or broadcast out questions into a community of expertise and those experts that are out online can push URLs or documents, or provide some chats.

What goes on is that newbie agents are looking pretty quickly like a subject matter expert to help all the questions that the customer have and are pretty seamless and transparent to the customer and it also provides some cross-selling opportunities for that agent while they got the customer on the phone. So with the customer, they only have to make one call now to their insurance agent to get all the information they needed and also this provides a lot of benefits for cross-selling opportunities as well as it's much cheaper to have one call forward as opposed to three or four to finally and eventually get that set of questions answered for the customer.

We found insurance companies particularly fascinating and find them great scenarios of use.

AI:

That's interesting. What it brings up as you're looking at some of these experts and finding the experts is that something that you mentioned earlier and that was the area of social networking. I knelt with Lotus Connections and some of our other solutions, we are coming at what these types of new technologies and they are becoming very well received from the industry analysts and from our customers. Can you give us a little bit more on some of the impact of social networking and what we are doing there with UC?

Fred:

Actually this has been fascinating. This hasn't been product or IBM driven. This is really customer implementation driven where we've seen customers are doing implementations, planning, and they'll say Fred, if we know the experts and are already on our buddy list and Sametime and we know how to work and collaborate with them for certain problems, but more often than not we have an instance where we don't know where the expert is. We've got to find that expertise and find the right way to validate that expertise and then bring them in to deal with the issue at hand. That's where we find things like Lotus Connections really has great value.

One can quickly do a tag search in the profiles capabilities so you can find this expert. Then you can quickly see what websites or kind of documents that they captured so you can get some sense of validating that expertise. Then you have seamless integration where you can use the UC platforms in there. So I see Fred Clark and he knows a lot about Cisco. I need to bring him into this customer situation right now. I can click on his name right there after doing a search and then I can start bringing him into an IM chat or phone conversation or into a web conference or we can do document sharing, whatever it is that we need to do to collaborate to get that issue resolved.

AI:

Thinking about that as you're looking at connecting with Fred Clark, the other integration solutions such as Quickr and other areas that we provide will help support managing those documents and making the content much more easily shareable out there.

Fred:

Absolutely, you hit a great theme about the document management. It's not all about just sending documents around by e-mail. It's sharing documents in a Sametime chat, or maybe pushing a link, or you have it stored in a persistent chat room where others can go and see the documentation and reuse it over and over, or ongoing or similar customer issues. Quickr and Connections have been powerful integration extension into our Unified Communications solutions story.

Al:

I do want to pick-up one theme that you mentioned earlier and that was in the hospital area talking about using perhaps call presence or some type of Web conferencing to help examine a patient or using telepresence earlier and integrating that with Sametime. What we see also is the ability of an organization to leverage these technologies to change the way they work and perhaps reduce their carbon footprint and save some money on traveling and at the same time implement green initiatives. What are your thoughts on that?

Fred:

It's actually been pretty fascinating. We've seen a lot of customers recently really aggressively embracing a lot of collaborative tools including video, high-quality video experiences that they get through Cisco Telepresence. A lot of the drivers were around - travel, travel expenses, or opportunity and costs incurred by being on planes and moving around to different sites and being streamlined by having great telepresence sites that you can link. We are also seeing the emergency of business cases and justifications from customers where they are looking at their carbon footprint. They are looking at green initiatives and those are getting into their recording back-up to the board and in some cases even customers are saying we've got to think about even moving to a four-day work week.

Those types of drivers and thinking is really ideal for us because our platform for unified communications between Cisco and IBM where we really have flexible tools that reduce travel, that can make people be productive whether working remotely through smartphones or from their home offices or in office directly. All of these tools really fit into those business cases and justifications very easily. It's actually pretty impressive particularly in Europe how fast this green and carbon footprint considerations have been common important.

Al:

Fred, that's an excellent point. As we talked about this we spent a lot of time on technology and the great business value. One of the things that we have to keep in mind also is that technology is great but it doesn't necessarily make magic happen and things are just going to get better automatically. It takes a little bit more of a planning process and getting the right experts involved to help deploy these technologies. Can you talk about our offerings around that Fred a little bit?

Fred:

Yeah, you bring up a good point. We are always reminding customers that just rolling out the technology doesn't make all these great things happen. There are a lot of considerations to do and having a little bit of a vision or strategy of how you want to leverage unified communications, identifying work process or business processes in the line of business that can be augmented or streamlined or impacted and prove that unified communications is important. There are even sometimes even cultural considerations to look at. Some companies may have a lot of new hire workers which really embraced using mobile phones and using social networking

and real-time tools, and there may be an older workforce that has great expertise and subject matter depth that customers have to work through on how we think these two different types of culture communities and get them working together and being productive and driving those overall business objectives.

Just putting together a strategy and a roadmap - we really do recommend that all customers sit down and plan and do pilots, do experiments and nobody is going to have all the answers initially. Go look for the right thing to do. We in GTS have a lot of experience in working with customers in exactly that whole solution plan and point of view that makes these deployments successful.

Al:

That's great. Basically what we are saying is then from the technology, to the business value, to the services piece of deployment and planning between IBM and Cisco we have the end-to-end solution that will help make your organization more productive leveraging your unified communications.

Fred:

Well said. Exactly right.

Al:

Thanks. Well Fred I want to thank you very much for your time today. I also want to thank everyone and that's listening to today's podcast for their time and spending their time with us learning about unified communications.

I would also like to mention that if you're interested in learning more on IBM and Cisco solutions for Unified Communications, you can contact your local IBM sales specialist or you can go to the web@www.ibm.com/lotus/UC2.

Again, thank you for taking time from your busy schedule today and listening to our IBM hosted podcast. We look forward to working with you and your organization in the future.

Have a great day.