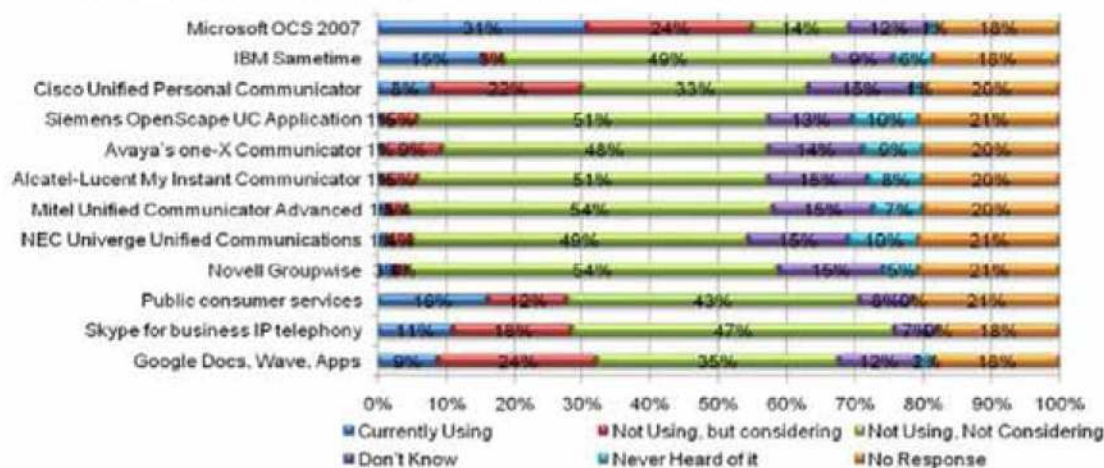# Overcoming 6 Hurdles to UC Adoption

By David Danto

FOR A TECHNOLOGY idea that has so much to offer, unified communications has sure taken a long time to catch on. The term unified communications (or UC) was first heard around the mid-1990s. The concept — including seamless integration of voice, IM (instant messaging), presence, video, etc. — has been solidly locked into the state of "being introduced" for the last 15 or so years. In fact, according to a July 2010 survey completed by Wainhouse Research, most organizations have still not gotten very far with implementing and adopting a UC solution.

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## Unified Communications Adoption

| | Currently Using | Not Using, but considering | Not Using, Not Considering | Don't Know | Never Heard of it | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Microsoft OCS 2007 | 31% | 24% | 14% | 12% | 1% | 18% |
| IBM Sametime | 15% | 5% | 49% | 9% | 6% | 18% |
| Cisco Unified Personal Communicator | 8% | 22% | 33% | 15% | 1% | 20% |
| Siemens OpenScape UC Application | 5% | 51% | 13% | 10% | | 21% |
| Avaya's one-X Communicator | 9% | 48% | 14% | 9% | | 20% |
| Alcatel-Lucent My Instant Communicator | 5% | 51% | 15% | 8% | | 20% |
| Mitel Unified Communicator Advanced | 3% | 54% | 15% | 7% | | 20% |
| NEC Univerge Unified Communications | 4% | 49% | 15% | 10% | | 21% |
| Novell Groupwise | 7% | 54% | 15% | 5% | | 21% |
| Public consumer services | 16% | 12% | 43% | 8% | 0% | 21% |
| Skype for business IP telephony | 11% | 18% | 47% | 7% | 0% | 18% |
| Google Docs, Wave, Apps | 9% | 24% | 35% | 12% | 2% | 18% |

Source: Wainhouse Research, July 2010

So the question becomes, if UC is as compelling, transformative and terrific a technology concept as everyone says it is, then why has the adoption been so poor? The answer is, due to the hurdles organizations need to jump over in order to deploy it. An examination of these hurdles will help resellers and integrators formulate a plan for a successful implementation.

## HURDLE 1: CONFUSION

A quick glance at industry magazines and manufacturers' marketing materials would send anyone into hiding. Apparently we can now do telepresence on an iPhone, seamlessly connect our speakerphones to our PCs, use the public Internet to handle critical business communications and — by the way — do it all for free. If you want to support industry standards you can work with the ITU, or the UCIF, or the IMTC, or the OVCC, or any one of a dozen other groups that either support interoperability or support a manufacturer's marketing plan claiming that they support interoperability.

When the public telephone system came into existence it was developed and grew as part of one of the biggest monopolies the world has ever seen. Under the guidance of a single firm it was relatively easy to set a technology direction and make sure all the hardware and software worked together without issue. The FCC's Carterphone decision and then Judge Green's divestiture order changed all that forever. The manufacturers in the communications industry

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are now more interested in growing their individual firms than growing the industry. As a result, they will do anything toward that end. It may be "good for the industry" for all hardware and software to work together, but it is probably not as important to your supplier as their vision of having you buy everything from them. All their actions are intended to have you make that decision.

**To Overcome This Hurdle:** We must provide clear guidance to end users to set substantive standards themselves. Take a snapshot of their current state of communications and obtain an understanding of where they want to go. Then, equipped with that target, one can set forth a game plan to reach the goal. Only include solutions that interoperate within the users' chosen environment, and don't let flashy manufacturer marketing get in the way.

## HURDLE 2: SILOS

At any given medium to large organization the odds are pretty good that a successful UC strategy will cut across some departments that have never worked well together and have no desire to work well together. These can include network services, PC/desktop support, voice communications, video conferencing, multimedia, real estate and facilities, event planning and a host of others that would be obvious to no one. Each one of these silos can be run by individuals that have absolutely no desire to change the status quo. After all, if a successful UC vision is implemented there probably will be significant savings achieved through a consolidation of redundant parts of the team. These individuals easily can see that UC-driven improvements might put their own jobs at risk and/or diminish the size of their responsibilities. Ironically, it is these very gatekeepers that are in position today to make it as difficult as possible to achieve meaningful change. I have personally witnessed departments at firms spending months spinning their wheels to make progress with UC only to see it shot down at the end because a gatekeeper in an affected department refuses to allow some change — with the result being nothing gets accomplished.

**To Overcome This Hurdle:** The vision of what a successful UC implementation can bring to an organization needs to be pitched above these silos and their gatekeepers to central IT management and/or organization management. Only with the buy-in and support of a champion with the authority to make the silos comply with efforts that cross over traditional boundaries will a UC implementation plan achieve success. It is urgent the champion understand that this support must go beyond the project initiation

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phase. At some point there will be one or more tough decisions cutting across the silos that he or she is the only person that can successfully push through. This champion must be prepared to ruffle some feathers to achieve results. In order to achieve the transformational change that UC brings, you have to be willing to make real changes to things that many of the silo gatekeepers will not want.

## HURDLE 3: THE WEAKEST LINK

It should seem ridiculous to everyone, but all too frequently organizations choose to invest lots of capital on new UC systems including voice and video components, only to make a penny wise, pound foolish decision on the outlying components. Why would anyone risk this substantial investment by relying on the "free public Internet" as the network, or by selecting voice headsets based on which one is cheapest?

**To Overcome This Hurdle:** A UC deployment is only as good as its weakest link. Ensuring that communications travel over a robust network is one critical factor that cannot be assumed or overlooked. Selecting high quality headsets is no less important than any other part of the UC infrastructure. The cheapest choice in these cases is usually the wrong choice as none of the prior quality decisions will matter if the communication doesn't make it all the way through to the user. An organization's investment in UC is only as good as the investment it makes in any one of its components.

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## HURDLE 4: MARKETING

Many a product has failed at an organization or in the marketplace because the owner thought it was "just so cool" that everyone would flock to using it. The reality is that it doesn't happen that way. People tend to keep doing what they've done all along. In physics this is referred to as inertia. I can't begin to tell you how many "this room is reserved for XXX" signs I've seen taped to conference room doors at organizations that now have an online room reservation system in place. Maybe that room's user even knew of the reservation system, but did his administrative assistant? Did the facilities team that sets the room up know of the new system?

**To Overcome This Hurdle:** In order to change habits and get people to adopt and use a UC solution — no matter how easy or cool it is — a detailed marketing plan needs to be developed and implemented. This plan should include prelaunch announcements, user input/feedback methods and collateral materials developed for each class of user. And just to be clear — a prelaunch announcement doesn't mean putting it on a firm's intranet site on the Friday before a Monday launch (not that that ever happens of course.) If the users do not feel that they have had input into the new process and system then they will be much less likely to adopt it. Conversely, if focus groups have been held asking the users what their opinions are, these users will be much more likely to feel a sense of ownership for it once it is in production.

## HURDLE 5: METRICS AND TARGETS

Once a broad new technology is launched at an organization, management begins to ask questions about adoption and ROI. Is 25 percent utilization good? Is 50 percent? Is there a specific meeting or travel habit that is targeted for change and/or productivity increases? What benchmarks have been established to measure against? The wrong time to start trying to figure out the definition of success is after an implementation has begun.

**To Overcome This Hurdle:** Specific adoption targets tied to marketing and release time checkpoints need to be developed and agreed to before the launch of any UC system. The calculations to measure ROI also need to be agreed upon in advance. Then, as the implementation moves along, the progress can be measured against these predetermined goals and benchmarks. If the project is on track it should proceed as planned. If it is not achieving the desired metrics then a predetermined set of actions designed

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to give it a boost should kick in. None of this should be handled as an ad hoc decision during the implementation. Also, it is a good idea to keep in mind the part of the scientific method that asks us to look at what we will do if an experiment turns out positive, and if it turns out negative, and says that if the answer to both is the same then we shouldn't do the experiment. If the desired adoption targets or ROI are unachievable or unrealistic, then it's probably not a good idea to recommend the UC project in the first place. Any positive momentum that comes to a reseller from a quick sale to the customer would be negated by the poor experience and would have long-lasting negative effects.

## HURDLE 6: ONGOING SUPPORT

All too often an organization launches a technology without any preparation for downtime and failures. Not everything works all the time. What is the operational plan during system failures? What are the recovery and support processes?

**To Overcome This Hurdle:** The success of a UC deployment depends on an organization having a support staff that has the depth of skill to focus on all of the disciplines required — networking, voice, presence, video, etc. This team needs to be able to operate and conduct administration and troubleshooting of the integrated environment, and monitor and maintain its stability on a daily basis. This can be fulfilled with a new in-house team or a skilled outsourced supplier. It would be incorrect to assume that an existing help desk operation can provide the needed maintenance

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and monitoring of the environment at the skill level required to reduce or eliminate downtime.

In order for an organization to achieve the promised benefits of unified communications, specific steps need to be taken to overcome the impending hurdles. The obstacles detailed above represent the most common challenges, but are by no means the only ones. As you prepare to sell or implement a UC solution consider putting an expert or experts in place that can help develop and manage an adoption plan geared for your specific situation. Don't assume that it is a multitasking hat that someone on your regular team can put on. Reach out for external experts in adoption methodologies to help make your UC plan a success. Maybe then we won't have to wait another 15 years to see the launch of unified communications finally move in to a phase beyond "introduction." **CP**

*David Danto has more than 30 years of experience providing problem-solving leadership and innovation in media and unified communications technologies for various firms in the corporate, broadcasting and academic worlds, including AT&T, Bloomberg LP, FNN, Morgan Stanley, NYU, Lehman Brothers and JP Morgan Chase. Danto recently joined Dimension Data as their principal consultant for the collaboration, multimedia, video and AV disciplines. He also is the IMCCA's director of emerging technology. The opinions contained in this article are solely his own. He can be reached at david.danto@dimensiondata.com.*

## MOREINFO

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