Five Myths About UCaaS

It takes considerable effort to kill a good myth. Many people still believe that swimming after eating is dangerous, groundhogs can predict the weather, or lightning never strikes twice. Just as in the rest of life, making business decisions is hard enough without the confusion of commonly held misperceptions.

Below, five popular myths about UCaaS are debunked.

#1: UCaaS Killed the PBX

Don't get too hung up on terminology. In the early 2000s, Unified Communications (UC) became the term for the next evolution of the PBX. This evolution began around the 1950s, when the private branch exchange (PBX) gained popularity in businesses. The PBX provided a cost-effective way to share telephone lines. Back then, not only was phone service expensive, but there just weren't enough copper pairs running into buildings to accommodate a phone on every desk.

Early PBXs required operators to literally connect calls with cords. Later, the PBX obviously evolved. The pull cords gave way to mechanical switches, which gave way to electronic switches and then software-controlled switching.

Telephone lines and trunks also evolved, from analog to digital to Internet Protocol (IP). Before IP, the PBX was completely isolated. The PBX was a dedicated device, connected to dedicated terminals and specialized providers, over dedicated wiring. It was IP, or Voice over IP (VoIP), that gave rise to the concept of UC.

VoIP enabled the PBX to operate on shared networks, enabling new features such as click-to-dial and unified messaging (UM). It was now possible to bring together other forms of communication, including instant messaging (IM), fax, and video. UC embodied the aspiration that all communications would be unified into a single application.

Of course, not all PBXs evolved to support VoIP at the same rate. Because the market had (and still has) legacy PBXs, the industry distinguished the newer products as UC platforms. It was actually these premises-based PBX makers that started the "PBX is Dead" campaign. More realistically, UC didn't kill the PBX. Rather, the PBX evolved, just as it had done from analog to digital before. The PBX has gone through some 70 years of innovative eras, and VoIP/UC is one of them (not the latest).

Along the way, two other noteworthy transitions occurred. First, the unified part of the UC dream largely ended. Many organizations now turn to team chat applications instead of IM. There's also been a net increase in communications channels (Skype, Hangouts, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) that have outpaced client unification efforts. Modern communications tend to be even less unified than they were before UC.

The second and most recent transition has been a move to cloud-delivered services. For the past 10 years, we've seen a steady migration from premises- based solutions to cloud-delivered services. What was initially considered a simple matter of deployment now represents much more.

Today, the PBX is alive and well, but it's more likely obtained as a service than a product. Because these services typically replace UC premises-based equipment, the industry is known as UC as a service or UCaaS. While UCaaS certainly supports multiple modalities of communications, it's generally optimized for the voice communications needs of the modern business.

#2: Voice Is Dead

There's a misperception that voice communications are decreasing in relevance. The "evidence" is the increasing amount of non-voice communication alternatives such as email, video, social tools, and messaging apps. While there's no denying the increase in alternatives, voice communications remain as critical as ever.

Non-voice communications only appear to take less effort. When it comes to understanding a message, pitch, tempo, and the emphasis of specific sounds, known as prosody, make voice uniquely effective. For example, "What a great party" can be a sincere compliment or sarcastic put-down, yet in text-only, the meaning is left up to the recipient to guess.

It's worth noting that when business conversations become too complex for text or email, we promote the discussion to voice, and never the other way around. It is unheard of to downgrade a conversation to text for clarification. Voice is how we enhance trust, build and protect interactions and reputations, and overcome objections.

Another indicator of the value of voice is the rise in popularity of speech assistants such as the Amazon Echo, Apple Siri, and Google Assistant. When the CTO of Amazon was introducing Alexa and speech technology to developers, he predicted that keyboards and screens would die out in favor of "more intuitive ways of interacting." Quite simply, text is not intuitive. Speech, or voice, is a natural, effective means of communication. Speech conveys emotion and expression.

Do not confuse the rise of additional communications modalities, then, with the fall of voice. Multiple modes of communications are increasing the frequency of communications, and today we are more connected than ever before. Voice has decreased as a percentage of our overall communications. But most research shows that real-time voice conversations have not declined at all, because voice interactions are more intuitive, natural, and personal than textual alternatives.

#3: Hosted/Cloud PBX (VoIP) Services Are Inherently Global

The world has never been smaller. Oceans and borders no longer delay communications as they did just 50 years ago. It is now possible to take a trip overseas without skipping a beat. Credit cards can eliminate the need to change currencies, and our smartphones can seamlessly keep us connected. Various apps can translate signs and menus. Map apps help us navigate streets and public transportation like a local. From an online perspective, there's not a lot of difference between a Starbucks in Rome, Italy, and one in Rome, Indiana.

This is mainly due to the Internet and the IP protocol's ability to travel great distances. But while it's possible, being feasible is a different matter. Popular content services cache their information — such as movies and other types of content — on servers around the globe to reduce delay. For real-time communications, on the other hand, this is not feasible. Additionally, real-time communications are susceptible to network loss, jitter, and latency.

Most UCaaS services will work globally, but distances degrade performance. The vast majority of UCaaS offers use a single-homed network design. This means all traffic runs to a single data center. That's not necessarily a problem if user and server happen to be on the same continent, but traveling or remote staff may experience degraded services.

There are two ways that providers can mitigate the impact of distance. The most popular approach is to utilize a distributed network of regional points of presence (POPs) that get the traffic onto a managed network sooner. This helps with network performance, but the traffic may still circle the globe.

An emerging approach is to design the solution for global connectivity with a distributed architecture. This is the case with Ooma Networks Enterprise UCaaS. Ooma built its network around eight active, load-balanced data centers. The design is survivable, scalable, and geographically distributed. User connections are algorithmically directed to the optimal data center, based on factors such as geography, latency, and availability. This design gives Ooma Enterprise customers increased reliability, with a consistent user experience around the world.

#4: UCaaS and CCaaS Are Separate Services

Traditionally, the contact center was simply a specialized application on top of the PBX. Thus, unified communications and contact center applications went together like a horse and carriage. This relationship was logical and also reduced the total cost by sharing resources.

The cloud enables individuals (as well as organizations) to obtain previously bundled services separately. For example, Craigslist unbundled the classifieds from the newspaper. This approach offers consumers many benefits. However, just because you can unbundle, doesn't mean you should. Shoes still come with shoelaces, Microsoft Word still comes with Excel, and Cracker Jacks still come with a prize because the value of the bundle is often greater than the sum of its parts.

UCaaS and CCaaS are separate applications. They can be bundled or obtained separately — and each model has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. The key benefits of a bundled offer include:

- **Ownership and design:** A single-provider solution is already integrated, which means one point of contact, one bill, and no finger-pointing.
- **Improved workflow:** A single solution for UCaaS and CCaaS means that any extension can become an agent — even remote extensions — without a change of equipment or provider. Agents can easily consult

with non-agent experts, hardware and clients are compatible, and systems and resources can be shared.

- **Increased versatility:** When we think of contact centers, we often think of banks of agents, supervisors, and call volumes. The cloud is changing this perception. Contact centers lurk everywhere in modern organizations, from internal help desks to a single receptionist — anywhere that, should an agent be unavailable, a queue is preferable to voicemail.
- **Operational benefits:** All cloud-delivered services come with some outsourcing. The customer is no longer required to perform all operational tasks. Cloud services include coverage and support planning, upgrades, disaster planning, and more. But overall availability, reliability, and quality design between providers become very complicated. A single-provider solution can ensure better business continuity.

If an organization opts to obtain UCaaS and CCaaS separately, that works too, but the burden of integration and support falls on the customer. Larger organizations, which have the wherewithal to bear this burden, often prefer this approach. Bear in mind, though, that a single-provider solution has one significant exposure: Most great UCaaS providers are not great CCaaS providers and vice versa.

An interesting alternative is an integrated solution sold (and supported) as one. Ooma Enterprise has created the best single-provider offer of UC and CC by partnering with Talkdesk. Ooma integrated its world-class, reliable UCaaS with Talkdesk, at the network level. These aren't just simple APIs, but a deeply integrated solution that represented as a single offer. It takes the guesswork, integration headaches, finger-pointing, and risk out of the UC + CC equation.

#5: As a Service Means Self-Service

When Amazon started selling books online, there was a lot of doubt that a website could match the buying experience of a local bookstore. It didn't. Instead, it created a new kind of book browsing and purchasing experience. Online shoppers generally traded a full-service experience for self-service. And while that may sound like a bad deal, it came with increased selection and lower prices.

In many cases, people prefer self-service, particularly with well-defined processes. For example, it's easy to purchase a specific book, flight, or item online. But when the options are not clear, there's a need for consultative services, and many cloud-providers simply don't offer that. That's not to say it can't be done. Zappos, an online shoe retailer, established itself early for its premier customer service.

The UCaaS industry is relatively young. It has flourished by offering a basic one-size-fits-all service to general customers. In other words, the low-hanging fruit. For example, most providers emphasize, as a benefit, self-service options as it lowers costs and gives customers more control. Consultative services require personalized interactions, they are also more expensive and difficult to deliver.

But cloud-delivered services and consultative services are not mutually exclusive. Nothing precludes an online provider from offering personalized services. Ooma Enterprise customers receive white-glove service delivered by an Ooma Success Hero.

Each Ooma Enterprise Success Hero is highly trained to handle a wide range of topics and will involve (not delegate to) other specialists as necessary. Heroes never bounce Enterprise customers across departments; they own matters until resolved. If there is a need to call back, Ooma Enterprise customers won't have to start over. Instead, the same person or Hero team member will work the issue until resolution.

Ooma approaches customer service with a long-term view. This is why the Success Hero program is not a limited, short-term service for new or large customers. Instead, Ooma provides industry-leading customer service for the duration of the business relationship. And self-service fans need not worry — high-touch customer service doesn't replace robust self-service capabilities. Both Success Heroes and administrative portals are available.

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