Best of Breed Solutions Can Click for Collaboration
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1. Best of Breed Solutions Can Click for Collaboration

Unified communication services provide companies with simple, yet reliable collaboration solutions. Generally speaking, intelligent and integrated communications offer opportunities for businesses to improve daily operations. UC allows employees to communicate via voice, instant message, email and video conferencing through a consistent interface. Including additional features such as presence in a UC solution makes it easier than ever for coworkers to share information. Presence technology is one type of application that enables users to locate and identify specific computing devices whenever a user connects to the network and regardless of the device’s physical location.

The core of UC is an IP phone system, and each additional feature can be added through best of breed applications or other infrastructure components. There are different ways of deploying UC that can impact the technology’s value to the organization. As a result of customer demand, vendors today are joining forces with other application providers to offer best of breed solutions. These solutions offer industry-leading reliability, scalability and simplicity while also lowering the total cost of ownership of the system.

With best of breed, customers can be confident their communication solutions offer the top technology currently available on the market. The industry has for years been dominated by integrated, single-vendor solutions, but a recent ITWord report said best of breed, open solutions are becoming more common as companies realize their benefits. Customers can leverage specialized components that are capable of meeting their specific organizational needs rather than having certain features go to waste.

2. Best of Breed Solutions

The partnership between ShoreTel, Polycom and HP in May 2012 is a prime example of vendors working together to provide leading communication services to their customers. These three major companies in the communications sector teamed up to provide a complete UC solution, and offered a promotional incentive for these bundled services.

The promotional bundle was designed to provide customers with the flexibility to right-size solution architectures for their specific needs. The bundle provides a broad portfolio of services at comparatively low TCO, and the technology is capable of supporting a variety of verticals. It includes ShoreTel’s on-premise, cloud and mobility solutions, HP’s Networking solutions and Polycom RealPresence video and voice solutions. Customers can acquire bundled offerings through ShoreTel resellers so that they can enjoy the ease of having a single point of contact for all UC-related matters.
Utilizing a best of breed approach allowed customers to realize a number of benefits:

• Drive down the complexity of managing communications through simple design while supporting the ability to adjust to emerging trends.

• Improve resiliency and reliability through the use of a flexible network and distributed unified communications architecture which provides uninterrupted availability

• Consistently deliver an optimal user experience through infrastructure for supporting voice, video, instant messaging and presence that is compatible with a wide variety of platforms and devices

The combined offerings enable organizations to communicate and collaborate with their employees, customers and business partners in an effective and efficient manner. Speaking about the integrated communications solution, ShoreTel CEO Peter Blackmore said:

“\textit{We are seeing significant customer demand for a best-of-breed built solutions with a low total cost of ownership. Through our distributed architecture and joint promotion, we are able to further lower the cost of entry while maintaining ShoreTel's commitment to a brilliantly simple solution.}”

Craig Hinkley, vice president for the Americas and Networking at HP also shared his thoughts on the partnership:

“\textit{Clients’ networks need to be scalable and agile to accommodate multimedia communications like voice and video conferences across a variety of devices. Through our integrated solutions architecture with ShoreTel and Polycom, we are delivering an end-to-end unified communications infrastructure that is flexible and reliable for clients’ backed by support offered through a single point of contact.}”

3. Best of Breed Benefits

Unified communications technology enables users to communicate more efficiently and consistently across any platform, but approaches to implementing UC systems can vary. Companies often use a single vendor approach to expedite time-to-deployment and for simplicity. However, businesses may miss out on the long-term advantages that would otherwise come from using best of breed. These benefits include: lower total cost of ownership, increased mobility, enhanced simplicity, greater reliability and consistency.
Lowering Total Cost of Ownership

A 2012 report from Osterman Research detailed the opportunities businesses are afforded by using best of breed communication solutions, as opposed to single vendor systems. The report stated that while a single service can cost between $27 and $53 per user per month, an open, best-of-breed solution can cost $65 per year, or $5.40 per user a month.

Best of breed additionally lowers the costs associated with licensing fees, labor and hardware, the Osterman Research report indicated. As these allow existing PBXs and other systems to be reused, users can avoid PBX replacement costs by waiting until the end of the system’s life rather than replacing the technology prematurely. This allows organizations to adopt a diverse array of less expensive on-premise and cloud-based applications.

Best of breed additionally leads to lower power costs, which can save larger businesses several thousands of dollars every year. Because individual employees are able to access all communication modes via a single interface, workers can benefit from increased productivity and organizations can optimize office space spending.

A best of breed unified communication solution also facilitates telecommuting, which can result in savings that extend beyond the technology itself. According to Osterman Research, the average organization saves roughly $600 per employee each year in facilities costs when employees are able to work from home even just one day a week.

Most best of breed services are capable of working on any mobile operating system, which eliminates the need for organizations to make additional device purchases for their employees. Businesses that have deployed a BYOD program can especially benefit from the enhanced mobility that best of breed provides.

Simplicity

Best of breed solutions also simplify the process of designing, deploying and managing unified communications services. This allows companies to quickly make changes as their needs evolve. For example, when an organization makes adjustments to its workforce, it will likely need to add or reduce the number of supported users. By utilizing an open framework, best of breed provides the scalability to respond to growing demand for functionality or support more users.

Roland Corporation, a leading manufacturer and distributor of electronic musical instruments in the U.S., recently implemented a ShoreTel UC solution that offered a simply designed architecture. ShoreTel’s solution provided a comprehensive platform for integrating Roland’s business applications with its call center.
Roland had been using a 3Com VCX phone system to facilitate the operation of its very busy contact center. The center required the use of a third-party attendant console, but the old system relied on integrating with additional software. Furthermore, Roland received notice from 3Com that the company would be discontinuing support for existing products.

“We first considered doing nothing, just keeping the old system,” said Dave Williams, IT director for Roland. “But with the potential lack of ongoing technical and product support, including no more product upgrades, we decided to consider other options. Also we’d experienced recent failures along some of the integration points with third-party software, and were also looking to reduce the costs, complexities and risks of its business communications system.”

Following the deployment of its ShoreTel UC solution, Roland reported that the technology was simple to configure, allowing the company to easily make the transition from its discontinued 3Com VCX system to an all-in-one UC service. The robust and flexible contact center solution allowed Roland to provide better service and other benefits, including:

- Improved flexibility for seamless integrations and easy collaboration
- High availability VoIP incorporating a simpler design with a distributed architecture
- Increased employee productivity

“We chose ShoreTel for its functionality, excellent phone quality, its flexible and reliable architecture and the lowest TCO,” said Dave Williams, IT director for Roland Corporation U.S. “ShoreTel has a knowledgeable technical team and offers great ongoing support. It’s truly an all-in-one solution.”

Consistency and reliability
Along with enhanced flexibility, a best of breed solution will improve the reliability and resiliency of a UC service, according to Osterman. Open best of breed solutions benefit from increased interoperability, which has the ability to prolong the life of existing infrastructure. This means that with implementation, businesses can enjoy greater organizational flexibility.

It is also important to note that best of breed solutions enable the type of organizational flexibility that supports innovation. As technological advances occur at a rapid pace, it is necessary for businesses to adapt alongside the emergence of new communication solutions.
4. Disadvantages of a Single Vendor System

There are a number of notable disadvantages of using a single vendor system, and many of these services lack the flexibility that can be particularly valuable in today’s quick-moving corporate environment. In addition, a lack of interoperability can produce substantial challenges for daily operations.

**Lack of Interoperability**

The Osterman Research report indicated that single vendor technology provides only “minimal interoperability.” This means the UC solution may not be able to integrate with other applications that could potentially benefit a business’ operations. This could be a particularly sizable disadvantage when considering the large number of interconnected parts involved in making unified communications technology effective.

The issue stems from concerns that supporting a potential competitor’s technology would result in lost revenue. However, this limits the capabilities of single-vendor solutions. Many of these options also require substantial investments in both initial deployment and continued management.

“[Q]uite often a single vendor technology simply will not interoperate with leading competitive solutions, thereby limiting the utility of the technology to a reasonably small subset of the user environment,” the report stated.

Interoperability should be a requirement for businesses considering UC solutions, a TMCNet report stated. The source indicated that this should be a priority for business decision-makers to deploy the application that is best-suited for an individual task. This is a necessary component of enhancing enterprise collaboration efforts.

When an organization selects a single-vendor solution, it is essentially locked in to that vendor and the associated third-party ecosystem. This means that unless a company takes the more extreme and expensive option of replacing the technology, it has to make do with the functionality of that solution and the terms the vendor sets. However, with open vendor solutions, a company can explore outside of single-vendor approaches and take advantage of the best technology available without the introduction of corporate politics to its UC infrastructure strategies.

**Lack of Flexibility**

When dedicated to a single vendor, businesses could lose the flexibility of UC solutions that offer best of breed features. Using single-vendor solutions, businesses are at the mercy of that vendor as to when to upgrade services, while best of breed places more control in the customer’s hands. Single-vendor systems are tied to that vendor for all UC tools and applications, and with this approach, businesses could miss out on the most up-to-date technology. Additionally, best of breed extends the lifespan for existing infrastructure and offers greater organizational flexibility because of the interoperability associated with open solutions.
5. Best of Breed Solutions Offer the Most Benefits for the Enterprise

A business has many options when choosing a unified communications solution. Both open and closed services are available as well as single-vendor solutions and best of breed services. With a best of breed system in particular, the lower total cost of ownership, as well as advantages like flexibility, ease of use and interoperability, make it an attractive solution for many companies in the long term.

With an increasing number of businesses making investments in unified communications technology, it will be critical that they maximize the value of those purchases. According to a Research and Markets report, the total UC-capable market for on-premise UC reached $12.23 billion in 2011, which was an 8 percent increase from the previous year. Analysts predicted continued momentum for the technology, expecting the market for UC to reach $20.76 billion by 2016.

“The need for UCC has never been greater, as the growth of the mobile workforce has led to the need for workers to communicate regardless of their location or device, and the rise of video communication and tools such as social software have created new ways for people to interact,” the report stated.

As more organizations rush to adopt the technology that will help them innovate, they must be careful to avoid solutions that provide limited long-term value. By leveraging a best of breed approach to unified communications, companies can avoid the inefficiencies that stem from vendor lock-in, customize solutions for their unique needs and open the door to future growth.
About ShoreTel
ShoreTel is a provider of business communication solutions whose brilliantly simply unified communications platforms, applications and mobile UC solutions promise a new rhythm of workforce engagement and collaboration. With costly complexity eliminated by design from its award winning, all-in-one IP phone system, UC and contact center solution, and its industry leading hosted business phone system, workers enjoy a freedom and self-reliance that other providers can’t match. Users have full control to engage and collaborate, no matter the time, place or device, for the lowest cost and demand on IT resources in the industry. ShoreTel is headquartered in Sunnyvale, California, and has regional offices and partners worldwide. For more information, visit shoretel.com or shoretelsky.com