Unified Communications: Comparing Cisco and ShoreTel Solutions
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1. Introduction

From small businesses to large-scale enterprises, more and more organizations are moving to Unified Communications (UC) solutions to increase worker productivity, facilitate increased mobility, and reduce expenses. Yet selecting the right solution can determine whether a business realizes these benefits fully.

The ShoreTel UC system provides a comprehensive, integrated solution that is easy to learn and use, simple to manage, and cost-effective to operate. Compared with Cisco products, ShoreTel UC can offer numerous advantages, including streamlined deployment and management, easier scalability, and a significantly lower total cost of ownership (TCO). By selecting ShoreTel UC, businesses can capitalize on the benefits of unified communications without adding costs or complexity.

2. Platform comparison

A UC solution must offer more than a loose collection of products. It must provide an integrated user interface that enables employees to move seamlessly among various modes of communication. It must offer a streamlined IT architecture and a single, easy-to-use management console to simplify administration. And it must be easy to scale, so organizations gain the agility to grow rapidly and cost-effectively, without having to rip and replace their previous environments.

Cisco offers multiple UC solutions, each with a distinct capacity limitation. Organizations must gauge their current and future needs wisely, since moving from one solution to the next can be costly and difficult. Cisco’s current product lineup includes the following products:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cisco product</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UC320</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC500 Series</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Edition 3000</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Edition 5000</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Edition 6000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified Communications Manager Express</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified Communications Manager</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, the Cisco’s “Unified” communications offerings are assembled with technologies accumulated from several corporate acquisitions. Below is a list of some of Cisco’s major acquisitions that help make-up their unified communications offerings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Company Acquired</th>
<th>Technology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 1998</td>
<td>Selsius Systems</td>
<td>Call Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1999</td>
<td>GeoTel</td>
<td>Contact Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1999</td>
<td>ArtevaUnified</td>
<td>Messaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1999</td>
<td>CalistaPBX</td>
<td>Gateways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2000</td>
<td>JetCell</td>
<td>Mobile VoIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2000</td>
<td>Komodo Technology</td>
<td>Analog Telephone Adapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2000</td>
<td>Active Voice</td>
<td>Voicemail Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>Linksys</td>
<td>IP Phones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>SignalWorks</td>
<td>Echo Cancellation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2003</td>
<td>Latitude</td>
<td>Web Conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2004</td>
<td>Dynamicsoft</td>
<td>SIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2004</td>
<td>NetSolve</td>
<td>VoIP Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2005</td>
<td>Sipura</td>
<td>Phones and Adapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2006</td>
<td>Orative</td>
<td>Mobile UC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2007</td>
<td>WebEx</td>
<td>Hosted Web Conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2007</td>
<td>Latigent</td>
<td>Contact Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>Jabber</td>
<td>Presence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As might be expected, each of the companies and technologies that Cisco acquired has different processes for management, upgrades, and deployment. The result is a complex solution that provides multiple user interfaces and requires extensive time and resources to deploy and manage.

Organizations in need of comprehensive UC solutions can avoid Cisco product shortfalls. Designed from the ground up to provide a single, all-in-one solution, the ShoreTel UC system integrates a full range of communications capabilities, including voice, video, instant messaging, and conferencing, plus advanced tools for mobility, presence detection, and collaboration. The ShoreTel solution was built to provide a seamless, integrated environment for users and a unified, easily managed solution for IT administrators. The solution scales simply to accommodate more users, additional sites, and new geographic regions, all within the same environment.
3. Deployment comparison

To help organizations control costs and quickly capitalize on the benefits of UC, a solution must be designed for rapid implementation. Administrators must be able to install and configure the solution without months of planning, in-depth technical expertise, or excessive training. Users must be able to get up and running without a steep learning curve.

Cisco solutions require significantly more time and a higher skill level to deploy than ShoreTel UC. Even with Cisco’s entry-level UC500 and UCM Express solutions, initial configuration can be a tedious process that often involves command-line interface configuration. Furthermore, a multisite environment requires administrators to install and configure the system at each site independently. To make matters even more complex, when the Cisco solution is finally deployed, users must learn to navigate multiple interfaces.

By contrast, the ShoreTel UC system can be deployed quickly with minimal training so organizations can accelerate their time to value. ShoreTel UC requires only a single headquarters server, and software can be configured through a simple, browser-based console. Drop-in switches are easy to set up, while self-configuring phones minimize the IT resources needed to ensure rapid deployment.

4. Management and administration comparison

Managing a complex solution can easily cut into the cost benefits of UC. For example, the cost of upgrading multiple servers with different upgrade cycles can add significantly to ongoing expenses. Having to assign high-level staff to UC management, hire additional IT staff with in-depth technical expertise, or provide extensive training to existing personnel can slow a business’ return on investment and take technical expertise away from core business development needs.

Cisco UC solutions are considerably more complex to manage and maintain than ShoreTel UC. Once a multi-server Cisco solution is deployed, administrators must use numerous interfaces to provision and manage all of the distinct applications. Furthermore, administrators need multiple, expensive training courses to fully understand how to operate and manage the solution.

Organizations can avoid complexity and reduce management costs with ShoreTel. The ShoreTel solution uses a single-image architecture that encompasses all functions. As a result, organizations have fewer servers to buy and maintain, and administrators can
take advantage of seamlessly integrated management functions. Administrators can use the browser-based ShoreTel Director to manage multiple sites within a single interface. ShoreTel Director runs on the single headquarters server—no additional management systems are required. ShoreTel offers simple, inexpensive training courses to help administrators make the most of ShoreTel UC. ShoreTel training is more than 40 percent less expensive than Cisco training and requires half as many courses.

5. Redundancy and remote site survivability comparison

Given the mission-critical nature of business communications, redundancy is essential for UC solutions. Downtime can significantly damage a company’s reputation and have a direct impact on revenue. The loss of dial tone can mean a missed opportunity or the loss of a customer.

ShoreTel has eliminated many of the components notorious for causing system and communications failures. Unlike Cisco servers, ShoreTel switches have no disc drives, data
connectors, or multiple boards that can turn into points of failure. With its single-image system, ShoreTel’s distributed architecture is less vulnerable to the kind of glitches that sometimes occur in centralized architectures such as Cisco’s.

Redundancy helps ensure that business communications continue even in the event of a component failure. Yet Cisco’s UC500 series, UCM Express, and Business Edition 3000 and Business Edition 5000 solutions do not have the capability to provide redundancy. Businesses must purchase higher end solutions for redundancy and then purchase and manage an additional server for each application.

The ShoreTel UC system delivers five-nines availability for mission-critical business communications. Cost-effective, n+1 redundancy means that only one additional switch is needed to provide redundancy for the entire system. If a switch fails, its load is automatically distributed to the other switches, protecting the system from an outage.

Furthermore, in the event of a network outage, the phone system can continue to place and receive calls on the public switched telephone network (PSTN). Because ShoreTel provides a single, scalable solution, organizations of any size can achieve the level of redundancy they need without upgrading to a new product.

In addition, Cisco products can struggle to provide the availability at remote sites that many organizations require. With Cisco solutions, for example, the failure of a server at the headquarters location can render phones inoperable at remote sites. In addition, Cisco’s centralized architecture relies heavily on the WAN, which typically delivers only three-nines (99.9 percent) availability. As a result, a connectivity failure could easily result in outages. Additionally, implementing Cisco redundancy and remote site survivability options are costly and add to architectural complexity. On the other hand, ShoreTel’s unique distributed architecture places call control and optionally voicemail locally at each site, ensuring uptime and access to messages.

6. Scalability comparison

As organizations hire new employees to accommodate customer growth, expand into new geographic territories, or acquire other businesses, they must scale their UC solution to support more users at more sites. A UC solution must facilitate swift and cost-effective scaling to help the organization sustain business agility and control costs.

Scalability can be difficult to attain with Cisco solutions, which require that organizations upgrade to a new solution when they reach the capacity limit of an existing solution. For example, the UC500 series scales to only 138 users. If a business grows beyond that
number of users, it must rip out the old system and install a new Cisco UCM Express, Business Edition, or Enterprise UCM solution. There is no easy upward migration path from one Cisco solution to the next.

Organizations gain greater flexibility with ShoreTel. ShoreTel UC offers scalability from one user up to 10,000 users and 500 sites, all within the same, single solution. The modular architecture enables organizations to simply add switches as needed to sites that outgrow their capacity. With ShoreTel UC, organizations can scale quickly and cost-effectively.

7. Upgrade comparison

A UC solution should help streamline component upgrades so organizations can capitalize on the latest capabilities and maximize the solution’s lifespan without excessive administrative time and effort. Products that have different upgrade cycles and different processes for various network elements force administrators to manage upgrades almost continuously. In addition, UC offerings that require administrators to perform upgrades in person can be labor intensive, especially when organizations have multiple remote sites.

With Cisco solutions, upgrading is time-consuming and costly. Each server and router must be upgraded individually, and there is a different process for each product. Moreover, Cisco has a separate charge for software support, software assurance, and hardware support.

In comparison, ShoreTel upgrades are much faster, simpler, and less expensive. Because there is a single, scalable ShoreTel solution, there is only one process for upgrades. Administrators upgrade the single, headquarters server, reboot gateways, and reboot phones. Upgrades are automatically distributed throughout the entire system. Those upgrades come at no additional cost through the ShoreTel support program.

8. Unified communications comparison

A UC solution should provide a complete, integrated set of all necessary capabilities, including attendant consoles and contact center functions. Attendant consoles give users the power to manage incoming calls and direct them to where they need to go. Contact center applications provide a direct interface with customers and help ensure that customers have a good experience interacting with the company.
The Cisco attendant console and contact center offerings are bolted-on additions to the Cisco UC offerings. For attendant console capabilities with the entry-level Cisco UC500 and Cisco UCM Express solutions, organizations must select the optional Cisco Unified CallConnector, which requires the purchase of additional licenses, hardware, and support contracts. Cisco Attendant Console comes preinstalled with Cisco Business Edition, but organizations must still purchase a separate license. The Enterprise UCM solution provides the option of purchasing Cisco Unified Department Attendant Console, Business Attendant Console, or Enterprise Attendant Console—applications developed by an OEM partner. Each application has distinct limits on the number of operator clients and users.

For contact center needs, Cisco products include limited contact center functionality with basic automatic call distributor (ACD) capabilities. For more robust functionality, organizations must select optional Unified Contact Center Express or Unified Contact Center Enterprise solutions, each of which requires additional licenses, hardware, and support.

ShoreTel helps organizations avoid the spiraling costs of additional applications. ShoreTel Communicator with Operator Access monitors inbound call activity and shows the presence status of users. There are no additional attendant console servers required to use ShoreTel Communicator with Operator Access. For contact center needs, ShoreTel includes ShoreTel Workgroups, which can be used for advanced contact center functionality.

9. Total cost of ownership comparison

UC solutions can help substantially reduce communication expenses, but maximizing savings requires a solution that addresses TCO. In evaluating UC solutions, organizations must consider all ownership costs—not only upfront capital costs but also the costs of management, upgrades, support, and energy consumption.

Entry-level Cisco solutions such as the UC500 and UCM Express have low upfront costs but high support costs. All of the Cisco solutions require extensive, costly training. And all solutions require significant investments in time and money to manage complex solutions with multiple servers and applications.

ShoreTel UC has the industry’s lowest TCO. In addition to significantly reducing communication costs, ShoreTel UC keeps hardware acquisition, software licensing, and management costs low. Compared with the multiple-server requirements of Cisco
UC products, the ShoreTel solution requires only one headquarters server and one UC appliance—organizations have less hardware to buy and operate. Streamlined management also means that administrators can spend less time and money deploying the solution and keeping it running.

Taking into account the full range of costs associated with unified communications solutions—from capital costs and implementation to training costs and electricity—the ShoreTel solution can deliver a TCO that is significantly lower than the Cisco solution.

ShoreTel provides businesses seeking a UC solution an easy-to-use online TCO tool so organizations can gain a clear and accurate understanding of costs before making an investment. ShoreTel guarantees that its solution will provide a lower TCO than any other solution. If the ShoreTel TCO tool or independent data determines that the ShoreTel TCO is higher than a competing solution, ShoreTel will lower its price to beat the competition. Below are the results of an example 10-year TCO analysis for a 500-user, 3-site deployment.

For example, in a 1,500-line deployment, the ShoreTel solution delivers a TCO that is almost 65 percent lower than the Cisco solution. This takes into account the full range of costs associated with unified communications solutions—from capital costs and implementation to training and electricity.

![Total cost of ownership (TCO) comparison](source-data)

Source data: Ferris Research, Inc., Wainhouse Research, Nemertes Research, Alinean Research, The Tolly Group
10. Customer satisfaction comparison

Given the ease of use, simple management, and low TCO of the comprehensive ShoreTel solution, it is not surprising that customers have consistently rated ShoreTel highly. ShoreTel uses the Net Promoter Score (NPS) metric to measure customer satisfaction.

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is determined by asking users a simple question: “Would you recommend ShoreTel to a friend or colleague?” with respondents rating their conviction on a scale of 1-10. These ratings are divided into three categories based on the number. A rating of 9 or 10 is considered a “promoter,” 7 or 8 is considered a “passive,” and any response six or lower is considered a “detractor.” After all the ratings are tallied, the percentage of “detractors” is subtracted from the percentage of “promoters” to come up with an NPS. So for example, if everyone gives a rating of 6 or lower, the NPS would be -100. If everyone gives a rating of 9 or 10, the NPS is 100. A more common example is if 50% are “promoters,” 30% are “passives,” and 20% are “detractors,” then the NPS would be 30 (i.e., 50-20).

Companies like Apple, Google, and Harley Davidson have received Net Promoter Scores of 50 and higher and are considered “world class” according to the creator of the NPS system, Fred Reichheld, author of The Ultimate Question. ShoreTel has consistently received scores in the 50s and 60s from its end customers. Cisco, on the other hand, only measures customer satisfaction internally twice annually, and does not publicly report results.

11. Summary

To realize the full benefits of UC, organizations must select complete, integrated solutions that are simple to use, easy to manage, and deliver a low TCO. ShoreTel UC can meet those requirements, delivering a purpose-built solution with numerous advantages over Cisco UC solutions.

Visit shoretel.com to learn more about ShoreTel UC, find a local sales contact, or request a product demo.
About ShoreTel

ShoreTel is a provider of business communication solutions whose brilliantly simple 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