The ROI of Business Communications

Marty Parker
in the January 2007 issue of *Internet Telephony*

When you think Unified Communications, think about changes to your business processes. That is exactly how you will achieve a positive, even compelling, Return on Investment (ROI) for your enterprise. Without changes to your business and your business processes, there is no R (Return) in ROI, only I (Investment).

It is this concept that underlies the definition of Unified Communications as, "Communications integrated to optimize business processes." (www.ucstrategies.com)

Where do you find this Return on a UC Investment? Since we are talking about communications, you will find the returns in two places:

- Less time (i.e. labor and payroll) used for specific business transactions
- Faster transaction completion by eliminating process steps and inter-step delays

These will, of course, translate to other areas of return. If you can reduce the time to do specific jobs, perhaps your company can lower costs and increase profits, resulting in higher stock prices for the company's shareholders. If you can serve customers faster, then you will likely experience higher customer loyalty, resulting in increased revenue. Still, the basic levers are to spend less time (human resource) per transaction and to get things done more quickly.

Here is an ROI "Top Five" list, based on examples reported by customers:

- Find the right person or resource immediately, without hunting (calling multiple people) or waiting (after leaving a voice mail or sending an email message). The new "presence" tools in Instant Messaging (IM) and UC solutions will deliver this for known or internal users; the "find me" options in most UC solutions will deliver this for outside callers (i.e., customers) trying to reach your company.
- Avoid travel time, with the associated delays and costs. Many UC solutions will enable desktop video and some will provide chat rooms or other collaboration tools that enable your teams to work together without traveling.
- Accelerate team activities by quickly sharing information and facilitating the associated review, analysis or decision making. This will be based on new capabilities to find team members when needed, to prioritize team work items and to advance the dialog from message to chat to call to conference (voice, video or info sharing).
- Consolidate (unify) the communication functions (and related information access), to eliminate steps and speed the transaction. Presenting all messages in a single inbox or showing presence visibly in the contact list or email address lists can reduce time to switch between interfaces or re-enter names, numbers or addresses. Allowing calls and messages directly from an information portal (such as with most sales automation software packages), will save time and speed the transaction.
- Convert unused time into productive time. Use of mobile wireless voice and data devices (e.g. Blackberry, Windows Mobile, etc.) to deliver UC tools can convert travel or idle

business time into productive time. And almost all users of speech-enabled UC solutions report major gains in transaction speed when they are mobile.

Notice that these will not be uniform throughout your enterprise. You will find the highest ROI in certain jobs or business processes. It's perfectly OK to implement the first UC projects for only a specific group of employees.

If you find these UC opportunities in your company, how do you get the ROI? It takes just three steps:

- Change: Support the change with clear instructions, training, follow-up, and leadership communication.
- Measure: Quantify the improvements, such as by tracking reductions in messages or improvements in message response times or by measuring the elapsed time for the most typical transactions (you'll need to capture some data before you start the UC project, to see the "before" status).
- Manage: Based on the results, capture the Return by reassigning staff to other jobs, by reducing staff through normal attrition, or by increasing output (sales revenue, number of projects per year, etc.).

These are proven techniques. They have been used in call centers with dramatic ROI. They have been applied in self service — both Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and websites — to create both significant ROI and a major cultural transformation. Now they can be used to deliver the ROI of Unified Communications for your targeted work groups.

Marty Parker (marty@parkerbiz.com) is a Consultant in Unified Communications ROI, working with Vanguard Communications. He is also a Co-Founder of Unified Communications Strategies (www.UCStrategies.com).