The requirement for good management and optimization tools has become more acute among organizations as the adoption of unified communications and collaboration applications proliferates.

Proactive Service Quality Management and Optimization Tools for Communications and Collaboration Environments

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Executive Graphic

Q *Which of the following factors contributed to your organization's decision not to deploy UC&C?*

Factor	% of Respondents
Reliability concerns	31.5
Data security (i.e., voicemail, call records)	29.3
Security concerns	26.1
Other projects have higher priority	21.7
Cost — too expensive/difficult to justify investment	19.6
Challenges integrating UC technologies with existing infrastructure/interoperability concerns	19.6
Complexity — too complex/difficult to deploy	18.5
Unclear value proposition/no perceived business value	17.4
Fraud	13.0
Lack of in-house expertise/skill set to deploy	12.0
Sizable investment in existing communications platform	10.9
Employee resistance or lack of interest	9.8

Base = 92 respondent organizations with plans to use UC in more than two years/no plans to use UC

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

Source: IDC's Enterprise Communications Survey, June 2021

Introduction

Among companies that IDC talks to, the possession of good unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) performance management tools is, in too many cases, an afterthought to seemingly more important decisions, such as which vendor to choose, what solution to deploy, and what the costs are.

Many small companies (up to 99 users) and midsize companies (100–999 users), with less complex UC&C deployments than larger enterprises, typically prefer to leverage the performance management tools of their incumbent UC&C vendor. But with a mix of multivendor solutions (e.g., voice, video, collaboration, messaging) being the norm in many enterprise UC&C environments today, large customers are increasingly relying on third-party, cloud-based platforms to manage their UC&C solutions due to the inherent complexity. Third-party tools also tend to have more capability around gathering telemetry from endpoint environments such as peripheral devices and room systems.

Many popular third-party UC&C performance management platforms can be offered to customers either on premises or in the cloud, but the reality is that most of these management solutions are still deployed on premises. No matter where they are deployed, these sophisticated tools can help organizations design, deploy, and operate new communications and collaboration environments; monitor performance levels; migrate end users; and improve levels of automation (e.g., reduce manual administrative tasks such as moves/adds/changes/deletes, or MACDs), among other capabilities.

Meanwhile, vendors are increasingly enhancing their cloud-based platforms with machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI)–powered automation. Cloud-based management platforms are ideal places to integrate advanced algorithms to crunch anonymized data across multiple customer sites, leverage innovation to bridge the visibility gap between PSTN and UC&C environments, help improve operations, monitor trends, and apply automated response management.

According to IDC's June 2021 *Enterprise Communications Survey,* reliability concerns and lack of in-house expertise/skills are factors — with reliability being the number 1 concern — that contributed to organizational decisions not to deploy a UC&C solution. Today's UC&C performance management tools can address both challenges for organizations.

Managing UC&C application reliability and performance requires network observability and insight into end-user experiences. IT teams often struggle to qualify and solve application performance, voice/video quality, or latency issues because available data from the network, user feedback, and traditional monitoring tools doesn't provide substantial insight into the end-user experience. Newer, robust performance management tools can provide IT staff with end-to-end visibility into the network, UC&C application, distributed locations, devices, and end-user experiences to proactively detect and resolve problems before they impact performance. For example, resources such as bots deployed in the network can perform 24 x 7 synthetic transactions to detect — in real time — any service issues that users may have.

This functionality and automation can also help organizations address concerns over the lack of in-house expertise and skills for managing UC&C deployments today, as such skills and expertise can be difficult (and costly) for organizations to update and expand. The ability to shorten mean time to repair (MTTR) for Microsoft Teams performance from days/hours to minutes/seconds, for example, is huge for IT staff, freeing up valuable time and resources to support more IT problem solving in other areas. The current hybrid workplace — with its mix of employees in the office and in distributed locations using a variety of devices — makes it even more critical to deploy the proper tools for managing this complexity.

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Benefits

UC&C performance management platforms can provide several benefits, including the following:

» Centralized management of the full life cycle of management tools (day 1 provisioning and day 2 management and support)

» Business continuity by removing the requirement of on-premises deployment, operations, and management

» Dynamic scalability (particularly with cloud-based solutions)

» Faster access to new features

» Ability to shift from a capex model to an opex consumption model

» A transition path to UC-as-a-service (UCaaS) offerings

» Lower total cost of ownership (TCO) for UC&C investment

» The introduction of more automation into the network and UC&C environment

» The gathering of detailed data and intelligence that drive actionable advice for the business and end users

» Support for a more proactive and predictive UC&C performance management model

» Better ability to understand end-to-end performance, including real user experience, application performance, supporting network infrastructure, route to cloud, SBC, and SIP performance

In addition, IDC sees the deployment of UC&C performance management tools as an indication that an organization is leveraging a longer, strategic view/approach to a digital-era business model, as many organizations agree that they are competing in a digital-first world today.

Considerations

Identifying the source of poor performance is challenging for IT staff. The management tools deployed can help with the following areas:

» Early detection of UC&C solution outages

» PSTN connectivity

» End-to-end visibility

» Service-level agreement (SLA) reporting

» Route-to-cloud and network path analysis

» 24 x 7 service delivery

» IT service management (ITSM): alert qualification, triage, and incident synchronization

» VIP service quality management

» UC&C meeting room services

» ISP service monitoring

» Hybrid architecture reliability

The Value Proposition for Organizations

The following are important capabilities that organizations can gain from adopting UC&C performance management tools:

» **Prioritize.** Detect and prioritize voice and network issues

- Display the types of issues as well as where the issues are and who is affected

- Define custom alerts for critical locations and users

» **Optimize.** Anticipate problems before they affect business lines with 24 x 7 synthetic transactions (i.e., scripts simulating activity normally performed on an application or a website by real users)

- Fix recurring issues with performance reports (service-level agreements/operational-level agreements) and root cause analysis

- Correlate multiple monitoring data sets, including native vendor tools, for more comprehensive insight and faster identification of problems

- Provide predictive insight into problems or downtime before users are impacted

» **Resolve.** Determine who owns any network issues affecting UC&C solutions and services

- Speed service remediation

- Synchronize events and alerts with ITSM tools and processes

Key Trends

The requirement for good management and optimization tools has become even more acute among organizations as the adoption of UC&C proliferates, underscored by the following market trends:

» In 2022, total worldwide UC&C revenue is expected to reach $61.9 billion, a 12.4% year-over-year growth rate. IDC expects most of the cloud-based UC&C segments to continue to grow in 2022 and throughout the 2022–2026 forecast period, albeit at a slightly more modest rate than that of 2022.

» For many companies, COVID-19 accelerated the transformation — or plans to transform — to digital technologies such as UC&C. Organizations that are digitally resilient will be able to adapt more readily — via digital core and digital innovation investments — to future business disruptions.

» The COVID-19 pandemic was a major driver of cloud-based UC&C adoption (voice, video, messaging, meetings) over the past two years, driven by functionality, performance, scalability, cost savings, security, and the reduction of workload on IT staff who typically manage in-house and other remote applications.

» Organizations have prioritized future investments in cloud-based UC&C (versus several other IT areas) as a result of their growing level of comfort with cloud-based UC&C solutions and providers.

» UC&C underpins resilient hybrid work scenarios, making such solutions relevant to the future of work, a topic that continues to be top of mind with many workers and organizations.

Conclusion

IDC has forecast the UC&C market to continue its strong growth trend over the next several years, driven primarily by the adoption of cloud-based solutions. To the extent that vendors can demonstrate the value and benefits described in this paper, UC&C performance management platforms will continue to play an important role. Organizations, especially large enterprises with multivendor UC&C environments, should compare the benefits and advantages of a third-party performance management solution with those of the performance management solution from their incumbent vendor.

About the Analyst

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Rich Costello is a senior research analyst with IDC's Enterprise Communications Infrastructure (ECI) service and is a leading member of IDC's Unified Communications and Collaboration (UC&C) research team. He assesses the development of UC&C products and solutions among vendors in the market and evaluates the adoption of the technology by enterprise customers contemplating the migration of their existing solutions.

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