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FEATURE STORY

Preparing Your Network for UC, And Keeping It Up to Snuff on an Ongoing Basis

By [Paula Bernier](#), Executive Editor, IP Communications Magazines | August 01, 2010

This article originally appeared in the August 2010 issue of [Unified Communications](#) magazine.

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Unified communications and virtualization have seen good uptake in the past couple years despite the economic downturn. Indeed, according to data recently released by Network Instruments, about 75 percent of companies were expected to have invested in these technologies by the end of 2009 due to their perceived cost savings and fast return on investments. But the same study indicates that three-fourths of those organizations lack the tools and visibility needed to monitor and troubleshoot performance problems on such platforms.

That probably shouldn't come as a surprise given performance management is often an afterthought and that ensuring high-quality end user experiences becomes even more difficult as more applications and end user devices are introduced.

Dave Kofflin, manager of sales engineering at Network Instruments, which offers tools for benchmarking and trending that are used primarily in enterprise network applications, says some companies do benchmarking and trending before deploying VoIP, but many do not. That leads some companies to Network Instruments after they deploy VoIP and have a less than optimal experience.

The Network Instruments solution provides various views into network activity. It has a solution that looks specifically at VoIP, offering MOS scores, tracking protocols and precedents around QoS, and providing insight on how VoIP impacts the load on the network. The system also offers various levels of access to ensure voice traffic remains secure during the monitoring process, adds Kofflin.

Dave Kresse, CEO with Mu Dynamics, which sells a testing appliance, adds that as more applications move onto networks, the challenges of ensuring networks are prepared to deliver a quality experience related to those apps multiplies. Indeed, there are something like 10,000 new apps introduced on the Android ([News - Alert](#)) platform each month.

"IP networks are extremely reliable from a connectivity perspective," notes Jim Melvin, president and CEO at network performance management outfit Apparent Networks ([News - Alert](#)). "You can walk into a Starbucks with Wi-Fi card and connect to anywhere in the world. But networks are not as predictable by a long shot relative to their performance."

That's why Apparent Networks sells technology (available both as a product and as a SaaS ([News - Alert](#)) offer) that looks at any IP address in the world and provides end-to-end performance data on that connection. Melvin adds that it's important to do this analysis on an ongoing basis given networks are dynamic, so anytime they reconfigure it can impact performance.

Gurmeet Lamba, senior vice president of product development at Clarus Systems, which sells testing, monitoring and configuration management software and SaaS-based services, adds that small changes that may not seem important can take into darkness a business or one of its branches.

Brendan Reidy ([News - Alert](#)), CEO of Clarus, also notes that expectations for different applications and traffic types can be very different. If the data network is down, he says, employees will simply reboot. If the phone doesn't work, however, it's a much bigger deal.

"The expectation is still five nines availability" for voice, he adds.

When it comes to UC, says Manfred Arndt, distinguished technologist for UC&C solutions at HP, virtually ever

» [Aug/Sep 2010 Table of Contents](#)

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implementation requires some network refresh. And one size does not fit all, he adds, noting that HP partners with all the leading providers in the UC space, including Alcatel-Lucent, Avaya, Microsoft and Polycom.

Arndt goes on to say that while UC and IP have seen good uptake, few organizations today are running pure IP PBX (News - Alert) solutions, so there's a need for companies like HP to provide phased UC approaches that allow customers to migrate to IP over time.

Phil Moen, president and CEO of Unimax Systems Corp., which sells telecommunications configuration management software and unified voice administration, adds that his company got its start about 20 years ago to help companies manage multiple PBXs simultaneously. More recently the company has introduced solutions to manage various PBXs, voice mail systems and communications databases. Syncing all these systems, and in a rules-based way, is a key part of not just preparing networks for UC, but also ensuring that the data that keeps unified communications running is the most current data available.

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UC, Virtualization & Performance Management

Network Instruments recently surveyed nearly 450 CIOs, network engineers, and IT managers worldwide, and explored the economy's impact on virtualization and unified communications as well as the primary challenges in managing these technologies. Below are some of its findings.

Virtualization rollouts are surging.

More than half of applications will run on virtual machines by 2011

There's been a strong embrace of video.

Companies deploying videoconferencing are expected to double by 2010.

IT was largely unaffected by layoffs.

About 65 percent of network teams haven't or do not expect to experience layoffs.

Many remain virtually in the dark.

More than half lacked appropriate tools or visibility into virtual environments.

What is the largest troubleshooting headache?

About 80 percent indicated their chief troubleshooting challenge as identifying the problem source.

Virtualization and UC are the top emerging technology challenges.

About 45 percent see virtualization as the greatest emerging monitoring challenge, followed by unified communications, cloud computing, and IPv6.

Edited by [Stefania Viscusi](#)

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