

What do skate park, lettuce harvesting, and real estate businesses have in common? These savvy small businesses are cutting overhead costs and growing their business by better utilizing communication technologies.

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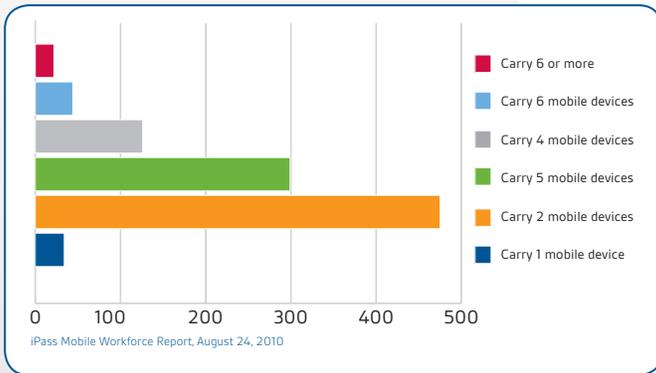
## Five Ways for SMBs to Succeed Using Unified Communications

PREPARED BY:

**BLAIR PLEASANT**

Co-Founder, UCStrategies;  
President & Principal Analyst,  
COMMfusion LLC

## NEARLY 97% OF MOBILE EMPLOYEES CARRY TWO OR MORE MOBILE DEVICES AND ALMOST 50% CARRY THREE OR MORE.



## THE CHANGING COMMUNICATION LANDSCAPE FOR SMBs

Today more than ever, communication needs to be simple and intuitive. As technology advances, the need to connect with others becomes even greater — especially for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). SMBs, defined as companies with fewer than 1,000 employees, have unique needs and must be competitive with other companies of their size, as well as with large enterprises, in order to succeed.

Changes in the workplace present both challenges and opportunities for SMBs. Today, 90% of employees work at least some time outside of their office<sup>1</sup>. Because of this, most people must use a variety of devices and communications channels in their daily lives, which can make it even more difficult to communicate efficiently and easily. To meet these challenges, leading-edge companies are turning to Unified Communications (UC). UC can help workers be more effective both outside and inside the office by enabling them to connect to the different devices, applications, and other communications systems while at the same time making communications richer, easier, and more intuitive.

The good news is that many SMBs have been using elements of UC without even knowing it. Today, thanks to new products and services aimed at the SMB market, companies of all sizes can use these solutions to improve their business communications.

## WHAT IS UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS?

UC can be summed up in six simple words — *communications integrated to optimize business processes*<sup>2</sup>. By integrating real-time and non-real-time communications with business processes and presenting a consistent unified user interface and user experience across multiple devices and media types, UC enables people to connect, communicate, and collaborate seamlessly. UC mobilizes the workforce, making it easier for information to reach the right people at the right time. The results are improved efficiency and effectiveness, reduced costs, increased revenues, and enhanced customer relationships.\*\*

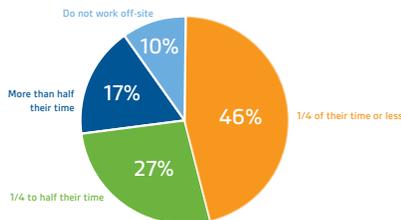
Many elements of a UC solution have been around for years. In fact, companies have been “doing UC” in a piecemeal way without even realizing it, utilizing capabilities such as IP telephony from the desktop and conferencing tools such as Skype, IM, find me/follow me, and more.

With UC, voice communications no longer requires a telephone handset. All that’s required is to connect to a UC client, whether on the desktop, a desk phone, or a mobile device – and you are good to go. Using the UC client (also called softphone or dashboard), users can view the presence information and status of colleagues and coworkers to see if someone is on the phone, out of the office, or available for a Web chat. They can initiate a communications or collaborative session by simply clicking on a person’s name and then selecting how they want to communicate, for example, by IM, audio, audio conference, or video conference.

Many companies are throwing away their desk phones and opting for softphone capabilities on their PCs in conjunction with a headset. This allows workers to work hands free while also eliminating the cost and maintenance of desk phones. One company, **Monterey Bay Property Management (MBPM)** removed all of its physical desk phones to clear up some of the desktop clutter and installed Cisco

## WE’RE WORKING ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, ANYPLACE.

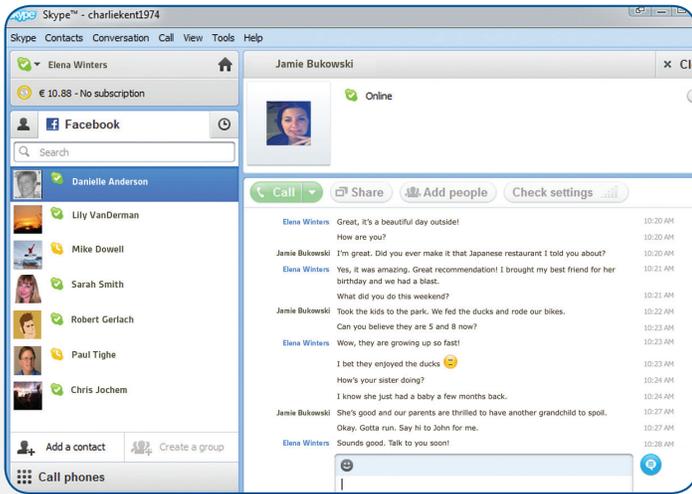
**90%** of enterprise employees in the US work off-site some of the time



How We Work: Communication Trends of Business Professionals, Plantronics, 2010

\*\* SEE TABLE AT THE END OF THE PAPER

1. HOW WE WORK: COMMUNICATION TRENDS OF BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS, PLANTRONICS, SEPTEMBER 2010  
2. UCSTRATEGIES



### Skype Presence

*“As a small company with 50 employees, we have a very limited number of salespeople, and lots of sales that have to happen first thing in the morning. It’s fast and furious until noon as people get their orders in, since there’s not a long shelf life for lettuce.”*

– Eric Knorr, Chieftain Harvesting

IP Communicator to enable its 15 workers to use the click-to-call capability via their PC softphones with headsets.

## FIVE WAYS FOR SMBs TO SUCCEED USING UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS.

### 1. UNIQUE NEEDS OF SMB TRANSLATE INTO BENEFITS FROM USING UC OR EVEN “UC LITE”

When UC was first introduced, most of the solutions were very complex and aimed at large enterprises with large IT organizations and big budgets. That’s no longer the case. With the increase in hosted services targeted at SMBs, as well as new bundled and packaged offerings that take away much of the complexity, it’s easier than ever for SMBs to access full-featured UC and collaboration solutions. As previously mentioned, many of these companies are already using elements of UC without even knowing it. They may have started with Skype or WebEx for conferencing, a

public IM service such as MSN, or unified messaging from their Exchange inbox. They have different names for it or focus on the capabilities it provides, such as forwarding calls to their cell phone or having a unified inbox to store all types of messages, but it’s still UC.

Zachary Wormhoudt, principal landscape architect, skate park builder at [Wormhoudt Inc.](#), points out that while the company has a small, in-house Avaya phone system, they primarily use Skype, which enables them to communicate via chat, voice, and video with their global partners. While he doesn’t think of this necessarily as “UC”, Zachary knows that it provides the capabilities his staff needs to communicate and collaborate efficiently.

SMBs have even more to gain by moving to UC systems than large enterprises, for a host of reasons. In today’s world, brick-and-mortar is no longer critical, and size doesn’t matter. On the Internet, a small company can look just as big as a large company. How effectively companies communicate with customers, suppliers, business partners, and employees can be the difference between business won and business lost. A breakdown in communications could easily send a customer to a competitor, and for SMBs, each and every customer is critical.

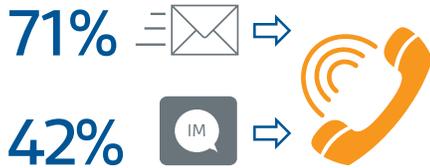
Eric Knorr is IT Manager at [Chieftain Harvesting](#), a grower/shipper of fresh vegetable products. According to Eric, “UC lets us coordinate different inbound phone numbers for complaints, inquiries, and more, and we can have those numbers ring to a specific desk and can easily change that when needed.” He adds, “As a small company with 50 employees, we have a very limited number of salespeople, and lots of sales that have to happen first thing in the morning. It’s fast and furious until noon as people get their orders in, since there’s not a long shelf life for lettuce.”

### 2. DON’T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF VOICE

UC technologies have changed the way many of us communicate. Today, people can view other people’s presence and availability status before calling them. The use of voice messaging has decreased tremendously. And with the increased use of instant messaging, as well as social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, people can get the information they need via text quickly and easily without ever having to reach for the phone. But contrary to many pundits, voice is not dead. In fact, it’s very much alive, and the role of voice communications continues

## LOST IN TRANSLATION

% of people with business email and IM issues solved by a phone call



How We Work: Communication Trends of Business Professionals, Plantronics, 2010

*“Being hands free lets people multitask while on the phone, which means they can spend their time more productively and get more accomplished.”*

– Zackary Wormhoudt, Inc.

to grow. A study conducted by Plantronics in 2010 called “How We Work: Communication Trends of Business Professionals,” surveyed more than 1,800 SMB and enterprise employees across the globe and found that 81% of the respondents said that phone calls are “critical/very important” to their overall success and productivity, outpacing everything else (with the exception of email) by 20 percentage points or more.

While email and IM are the preferred means of exchanging information, voice communications is still the method of choice for getting real-time answers and immediate attention. A study done by UCStrategies found that even with the increasing use of non-voice UC tools, voice remains the medium for real-time communications most commonly used to settle and make progress on business issues. Respondents unanimously agree that IM is useful for a quick comment or question, but not for lengthy discussions or conversations, and that email, while obviously useful, has its limitations.

### 3. EVALUATE YOUR OPTIONS

Options abound when it comes to choosing technology and software vendors that unify communications. The first choice is to rent or own — do you choose a hosted service offering (rent) or a premise-based solution (own)?

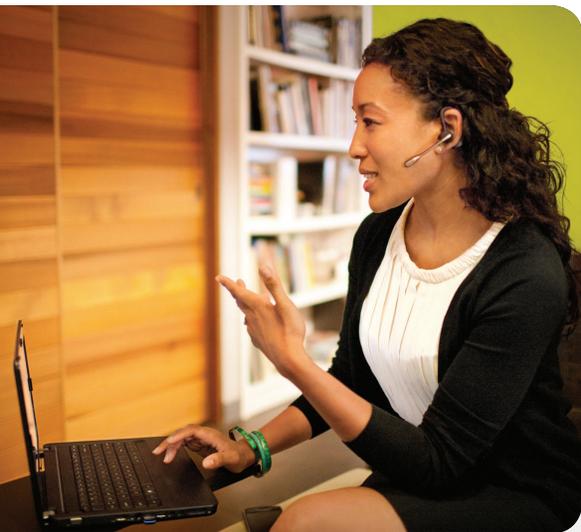
There’s a wide range of choices for hosted voice and UC service providers: traditional service providers such as carriers, new hosted providers that focus on the SMB market, and several premise-based providers that also offer hosted UC. And of course, emerging vendors such as Skype and Google, which began as consumer-oriented services, are stealthily moving into businesses of all sizes, especially SMBs. The number of businesses — of all sizes — using Skype and other public services is skyrocketing, primarily because these services are free or very low cost, with no barrier to entry and no equipment to be purchased. On the premise-based side, the battle lines are drawn between the primary switch/telephony vendors, including Avaya®, Cisco®, NEC®, and many others, and the desktop application vendors, such as Microsoft® and IBM®.

Regardless of which combination of companies and solutions are chosen, the key to creating the most streamlined and efficient long-term solution lies in understanding what your needs are first.

### 4. TALKING TO YOUR COMPUTER – CONSIDER HEADSETS AS ESSENTIAL TOOLS

UC lets computers — PCs, laptops, and tablets — become audio devices, which requires the use of quality headsets. Often overlooked, headsets are key elements of a UC solution because they enable many of the benefits that UC provides, particularly mobility and the ability to be productive and effective regardless of location. Chieftain Harvesting found that with wireless mobility “employees are not tied down to their desk and can get more done, which really boosts morale.”

For skate park builder Wormhoudt Inc., “The nature of our communications is that we may be sharing a screen and drafting diagrams while talking or panning through a 3D drawing to make sure everyone is seeing the same thing. The visual component is important — we have to be hands free to operate the computer. Being hands free lets people multitask while on the phone, which means they can spend their time more productively and get more accomplished. We can focus 100% on the objective at hand.”



Aside from the obvious benefit of mobility, headsets also provide ergonomic benefits — workers don't have to cradle phones on their shoulders, straining their necks and backs. This clearly benefits workers because it helps keep them from getting sore necks, and it also saves the company money in terms of fewer workers' compensation claims and sick days — and it makes for happier workers. Jan Leasure, managing broker at Monterey Bay Property Management (MBPM), notes, "I didn't want to see anyone on staff with a phone receiver cradled on their shoulder, which is a precursor to a workers' compensation claim. When we started using headsets, I felt really reassured that I won't have someone come to me with neck pain."

A good headset also provides superior audio quality, especially when paired with a mobile phone or when on a conference call. MBPM found that "privacy and noise abatement are also benefits in an open space environment. It can be very noisy, and the headsets let people hear better and keep them from raising their voices."

## 5. PICK THE BEST TOOL FOR THE PERSON AND THE JOB

Plantronics offers a variety of hands-free solutions for the office as well as consumers. The company's products are used around the world — and were even used on the moon! Plantronics products include wired and wireless headsets and speakerphones for mobile phones, UC applications and softphones, office telephony systems, and contact centers. They offer the freedom of hands-free communications, plus advanced technologies, such as WindSmart®, AudioIQ2™, and wideband, that deliver noise-free and more natural sound everywhere sound travels: from offices to homes, PCs to cell phones. Today, Plantronics products are used by every company in the Fortune 100, as well as by emergency call operators, air traffic controllers, business, and consumers around the world. Plantronics has several products aimed directly at SMBs to help optimize their communications tools — whether it's a full-blown UC solution or basic elements and components of a solution. Each of these also offers UC Standard versions built for UC applications and softphones from Avaya, Cisco, IBM, and others.

For example, Voyager® PRO UC is one of the latest solutions for UC. It utilizes Smart Sensor™ technology that lets users answer mobile phone and PC calls simply by placing the headset on their ear. There's no need to press buttons, open applications, or provide voice commands. The intelligent headset senses whether or not it's on a person's ear and routes the call to either the headset or handset. Voyager PRO UC also brings a new level of utility to mobile phone and PC communications by integrating with PC softphone clients. This represents an enormous value-add to communications systems by providing both context and intelligence.

## SUMMING IT UP: UC + HEADSETS + SMB = SUCCESS

UC provides a unified approach to SMBs for communicating and collaborating with anyone, anywhere, from any device. Companies recognize that voice is still the de facto gold standard for real-time communications, and that it will remain so for some time to come. IP telephony from the desktop, as well as tools such as click-to-call/click-to-conference, audio/video/Web conferencing, IM, and unified messaging, are increasingly being adopted by SMBs.

SMBs need to carefully evaluate the solution that best meets their needs based on their business requirements and what they're trying to accomplish. The key is to find a solution that's simple, reliable, and cost effective.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR – BLAIR PLEASANT

*Co-Founder, UCStrategies;  
President & Principal Analyst,  
COMMFusion LLC*

*Blair Pleasant provides consulting and market research analysis on UC and voice/data convergence markets and technologies, aimed at helping end-user and vendor clients both strategically and tactically.*

While often an afterthought, endpoints such as headsets need to be part of the UC solution. A high-quality headset that's optimized to work with a UC solution can make the difference between a good experience and a great experience, as well as overall business success.

**TABLE 1 – UC PRODUCTIVITY BENEFIT IMPACT**

UC BENEFIT APPLICATION	BOTTOM-LINE IMPACT: DIRECT OR INDIRECT	POTENTIAL RESULTS
Contact management	Indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get information needed quickly based on availability and presence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Increased employee satisfaction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reduced lag time</li> </ul>
Remote access to individuals (ability to access individuals and teams who are not in the main or same office)	Direct and Indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improved customer service</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reduced lag time</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Increased sales</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Crisis avoidance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shorten project cycle time</li> </ul>
Access to experts and resources	Direct and Indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improved customer service</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reduced lag time</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Increased sales</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reduced sales cycle</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Faster time to market</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Faster product development cycle</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improved employee satisfaction</li> </ul>
Collaboration	Direct and Indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improved employee rapport</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reduced travel</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Increased sales</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improved management of workforce</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Faster time to market</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reduced sales cycle</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Faster product development cycle</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shorten project cycle time</li> </ul>
Mobility (ability for individuals to work remotely and outside of the office)	Direct and Indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improved employee satisfaction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ability to attract and retain critical talent</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Increased sales</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reduced lag time</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Crisis avoidance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improved customer service</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shorten project cycle time</li> </ul>

Source: UCStrategies.com (May 2008)

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