Wikipedia's definition of Unified Communications (UC):

UC is the <u>integration of real-time communication services,</u> such as:
>Instant messaging (chat)
>Presence information
>Telephony (including IP telephony)
>Video conferencing
>Data sharing
>Call control and speech recognition

<u>with non-real-time communication services,</u> such as: Unified messaging (integrated voicemail, email, SMS, and fax).

UC is not a single product, but <u>a set of products </u>that provides a <u>consistent unified user interface and user experience across multiple devices and media types.</u>

Unified Communications is a combination of business tools that can be used to increase employee productivity, improve customer service and lower communication costs. In order to attain these lofty goals, specific objectives for a 'successful' UC project must be determined in advance; as with any IT project.

In order to determine these objectives, we need to look at the benefits that can be gained from implementing a UC solution, what are the costs and how can it work in your organization: What is the overall value of implementing a UC solution.

UC provides three main benefits:

Operational – reductions in financial costs by converging communication networks, reducing IT management and travel

Productivity – better organized and streamlined communication improves decision making, innovation and production cycles

Strategic – UC can support management initiatives with improving internal collaboration and innovation, improving customer contact and additional business objectives

Business Value:

The business value of UC can be seen in multiple areas; the following reflect values based on keeping teams connected:

>**Cycle time** – reduce process cycle time, reaching the right person at the right time, reduces time wasted on unproductive communication, the number of email and voice mail messages and as a consequence the time required to reach decisions. Improving the cycle time also reduces delay and worker frustration, increasing employee productivity.

Collaboration Tools: IM, Conference Bridge, extension to extension dialing in a multi-site environment.

Decision Making – connecting and collaborating with the right colleagues in real time, on a pre-agreed schedule cuts the possibilities for both error and delay in decision making.
UC Tools: Conference Bridge, extension to extension dialing in a multi-site environment.

Innovation – Connecting remote team members with the appropriate skill sets, regardless of their location, allows their expertise to be utilized anywhere, at any time.
UC Tools: Mobility, Conference Bridge

What benefits have Companies experienced from using UC?

Key benefits, as identified from feedback from 402 North American and European Network and Technology decision-makers at businesses [1K+ employees] implementing UC, were found to be:

70%	improved collaboration between dispersed teams	**47%**	improved customer experience/satisfaction
35%	faster problem resolution	**31%**	improved project management
25%	improved relationships with business partners	**22%**	shortened cycles for decision making

How to calculate cost?

The need is to identify relevant "current state" costs of all functions that a UC rollout would replace, update or be required, including carrier services, hardware and software maintenance costs, projections of future upgrades and associated IT support staff.

- UC can reduce or eliminate carrier communication expenses – multi-site organizations typically incur long distance charges for internal communications, while moving traffic to a corporate WAN (Wide Area Network), can substantially reduce this expense
- Centralized trunking reduces costs by as much as 20% and allows for Least Cost Routing (LCR)
- UC sites can operate on virtual servers, eliminating additional hardware and energy costs
- Consolidating UC capabilities optimizes software licenses
- Physical moves, staff replacements and other changes are typically expensive with older PBX systems. UC network systems needs little management, lowering costs

- Conference bridges, audio, web and video conferencing reduces travel times and associated costs
- Utilizing new mobility and BYOD tools can enable the 'work from anywhere' concept, enable single phone number reach and reduce cellular and roaming costs.

What questions should be asked before implementing a UC system?

As an increasing number of organizations implement unified communications systems within their IT infrastructure, *they gain a competitive edge over those who have not yet incorporated UC* into their business.

According to a recent white paper from BT titled "The great technology take-up: How unified communications is changing the way we work," (British Telecom, 2012) the revolution to make the switch to integrated communication systems is happening with or without other businesses joining in. "So be a part of it," stated the white paper. "Take advantage of it. Build a better future."

To achieve breakthrough results, it's important to think about communications in a new way. The tools are important, but the tools themselves are not 'unified communications." The key is to organize these tools to support communications requirements within a business enterprise's operations – *the workflows and processes that create revenues and profits or otherwise help accomplish an organization's goals*. UC is "communications integrated to optimize business processes." This definition captures the essence of the way UC can help businesses meet their goals. It's not so much a system as it is a way of thinking about the impact of the next generation of communications capabilities on businesses large and small.

Every industry has specific aspects of its business that need to be considered. For example, Forrester's survey (Forrester's Networks and Telecommunications Survey) found that in the insurance industry, claims processing is done through a complex set of decisions, roles and organizations. Using UC, claims processors could access others, share documents and resolve issues in real time that would, in the past, have taken several days. Improving the speed of this process saved time, and this in turn improved customer satisfaction, cost-effectiveness and bottom-line savings

An important step for discovering ways that UC can impact business is to identify "use cases" – how do people, in the ordinary course of their activities, use communications? And what are the opportunities UC offers? In reviewing many different implementations of UC, most fall into one of two distinct use cases.

• **UC for user productivity (UC-U)** concentrates on helping individual users better manage their communications. Frequently this includes the use of instant messaging, click-to communicate, hovering over a name in a document to determine presence status, and rapid set up of audio, video, or Web conferences.

• **UC for business processes (UC-B)** is focused on enhancing business activities by integrating communications capabilities within workflows and processes. The use cases for UC-B focus on identifying specific places in workflows or business processes where communications bottlenecks and breakdowns impede meeting goals.

i.   ***Contact management***. Helping callers reach the intended party, or providing alternatives ("Your party is not available. Would you like to speak to someone on his team?"). The opportunity is to dramatically increase access in order to provide immediate services, answer questions, or provide information.

ii.   ***Resource identification for issue resolution***. Resource identification for issue resolution. Finding an appropriately skilled and available individual to timely solve a problem or provide answers. The opportunity is to speed transactions, solve problems more rapidly, and get to the right "skill" as quickly as possible.

iii.   ***Collaboration acceleration***. Creating workspaces and providing tools to enable ad hoc or ongoing teams to work together effectively often on a project basis. The impact is to speed project completion, better disseminate information to team members, and make better decisions.

iv.   ***Seamless information to mobile personnel***. Facilitating access to people and information sources for personnel working outside of an office environment. This overcomes limitations often imposed on staffers working remotely or relying on mobile devices.

v.   ***Communications-enabled portals***. Providing secure access to people and information through the use of browsers and other portal technologies. This can provide access to enterprise personnel from outside the corporate network, or me This can provide access to enterprise personnel from outside the corporate network, or methods to enable secure access for customers, suppliers, and business partners.

Mobile Emergence - BYOD

The Bring Your Own Device trend has been progressively working its way into business infrastructures. With the emergence of smartphones and tablets being used as primary computing devices, UC can provide enterprise mobility solutions that will meet this computing demand and help successfully deploy BYOD.   Accommodating all devices will help make employee hardware more effective for job processes regardless of the device being used.

UC solutions provide an increased level of scalability, which can save an organization during an expansion or merger process. Such technology can be upgraded and bolstered on an extension-by-extension basis, when a business grows, administrators can simply add lines to the existing infrastructure instead of replacing the entire system. Businesses can save money on IT support and services as VOIP systems are designed to function easily and efficiently. This is especially important within a small to medium business setting, as many smaller organizations do not have IT staff on call.

Designing the Project
- Start with an overview of the company's processes
- Zero in on those that have high value or high volume and where communication challenges impede the process

- Determine which of these 'hot spots' can be mitigated by applying UC capabilities
- Translate these opportunities into use cases for how processes will work and the benefits available
- Organize and prioritize opportunities to create a roadmap of UC projects
- Design an action plan for implementation

Once opportunities are identified, dive into the specific business process and workflows. Look for areas where communications challenges impede these processes. Typically, there will be many such opportunities identified. Prioritize opportunities based on the impact that correcting the problem will have and the ease of deploying the capabilities needed to improve the situation. Pick a few, high visibility opportunities and work on deploying them effectively. Measure the results and use this success to find and encourage other business transformations.

Now What?

Part of any successful UC implementation is finding the right product for your company. There are some basic keys to look for:

- Ease of use for management and administration – lower your IT costs
- Ease of use by employees – if it's not easy they won't use it and all your planning won't work
- Highly reliable with no single source of failure – build in redundancy at low cost
- Scalable – if your company's long term plans include growth, make sure the system is easily scalable so that more people or offices can be added to the same system

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