

Hong Kong SMBs drawn to UC benefits



SMBs are waking up to unified communications which promise to increase productivity, efficiency and lower costs.

As the economic environment grows darker, small and medium businesses (SMB) are fretting over how to survive and stay afloat during these uncertain times. Business owners are eager to find ways to increase productivity, drive up efficiency and effectiveness while keeping costs low.

One area that is being targeted by leading firms is communications. Business deals come out of effective communication. As an SMB develops its business, it needs to expand its telephone systems to deal with the increasing volume of communications both within and outside of the company. However, the implementation of traditional telephone systems is complicated. There are extra costs for

teleconferencing and other telephony features that are found in today's larger enterprises.

Therefore, cost of communications usually expands dramatically as a company grows.

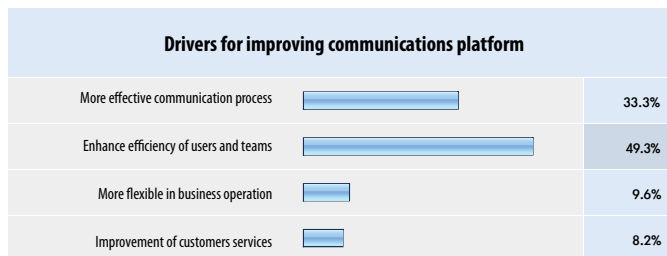
Cost driver

According to a survey done by SMB World and Nortel Networks Corporation, many local small and medium companies believe the traditional communications systems they are

using could be improved substantially to increase operational efficiency.

Many of the SMBs interviewed were seeking low cost and easy to manage alternatives. This is one key driver for the adoption of unified communications (UC) in Hong Kong.

The survey collected information from over 150 IT decision makers in the territory, including professionals in IT and communications, banking and finance, manufacturing, retailing, import and export. Over half of these came from com-



Source : SMBWorld • Nortel 2009

panies with 100 or less employees.

The findings showed how local companies are using different communication tools in their day-to-day operations. The results also revealed how a new generation of UC tools could be used to improve internal and external communications of a company, so as to increase its competitiveness.

Custom needs

Over 80% of the respondents believe there is a lot of room for improvement in their current internal and external communication systems. About 50% of the companies participated in the survey wished to replace their existing communications with more easier to use systems.

Some companies hoped to have more flexible communications that are tailor made to suit the needs of their particular industry. Others hoped to have solutions that can be integrated with their core IT systems, such as the enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, the customer relationship management (CRM) systems, etc., so as to improve productivity and customer satisfaction.

Next generation ROI

Among the companies covered in the survey, over 65% have offices or factories outside of Hong Kong. Of which, 80% said that long distance telephone calls and teleconferences were part of their

daily operations. In addition, 40% of these companies have to pay over HK\$1,000 for IDD every month. In general, using IDD services over the traditional telephone is rather expensive.

About 43% of respondents said at least 20% of their companies' employees have needs for mobile office capabilities. Respondents noted when they are 'out of office,' they may miss important communications that result in lost opportunities for creating new business.

But some companies have already replaced old systems with new communications solutions that are much more cost effective.

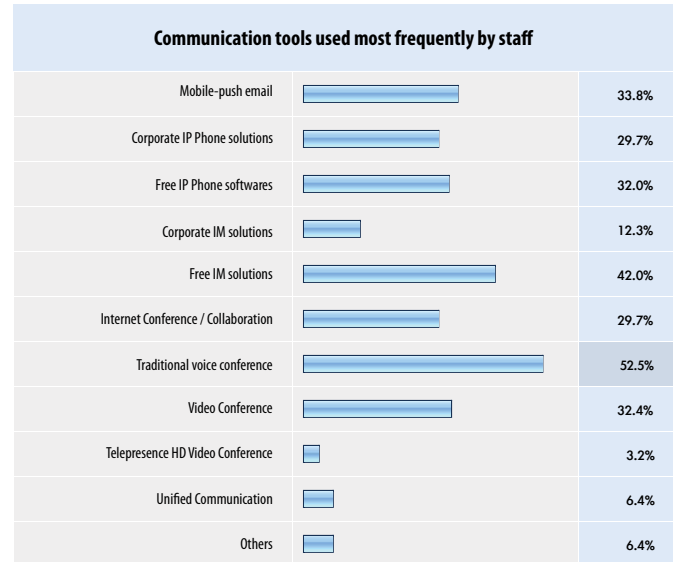
Interestingly, 12% of respondents said they are using company instant messaging solutions. In fact, using instant messaging services is already a step moving toward the concept of UC.

Via the internet, instant messaging tools allow users to know whether the individuals they wish to contact are busy or not, so that they can use the most suitable means to get in touch with the individuals. This could be SMS,

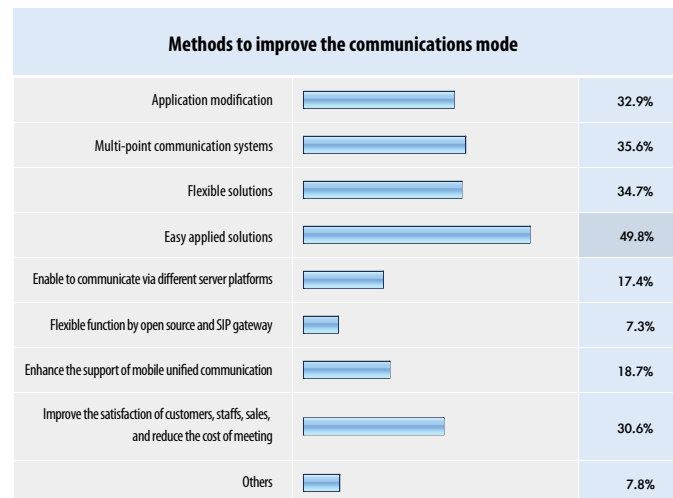
instant messaging, emails or phone calls. Doing so, it not only makes the average communication cost lower, it also raises efficiency much higher.

The survey showed the concept of UC is clearly gaining traction among local businesses. In fact, closed to 16% of respondents said their companies have already adopted UC systems. Another 30% have plans to move all of their communication systems onto one unified platform, with one single interface.

Given the advantages of UC and as more and more companies start to enjoy its benefits, those who have not adopted UC solutions might soon change their minds and follow the trend. **SMB**



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