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Local UC uptake lagging

Seamless control, ...ShoreTel vs Avaya



The uptake of unified communications (UC) in SA is slow due to ignorance of what UC is and the benefits it can bring to an organisation.

This is according to Bennie Langenhoven, managing executive of Tellumat Communication Solutions, who believes there is a perception among local businesses that UC solutions are very expensive.

On the other hand, he points out that the uptake of UC is increasing worldwide. "According to Frost & Sullivan, there is an almost 20% increase year-on-year in the use of Web collaboration. Mobility or fixed mobile convergence is another significant driver for UC, with executives and mobile workers driving the demand."

However, he is of the view that though SA is behind in terms of uptake, it is not the usual three- to five-year lag. "The awareness of UC and its benefits is increasing significantly in the local market."

Langenhoven says UC's benefits can be realised by selecting the correct UC partner.

"There is still a significant amount of ignorance in SA in terms of what UC is and the benefits it can bring the organisation", says Bennie Langenhoven of Tellumat Communication Solutions.

"It is also important that when an organisation changes to a UC solution, proper internal marketing and training gets done."

Seamless control

According to Letticia Nkumbula, Frost & Sullivan analyst, UC provides seamless control and access across multiple devices, and this has been made possible due to the convergence of telephony, messaging and other Web-based technologies.

"Providers have also become more sophisticated by offering solutions that suit the SA environment," she explains.



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Nkumbula notes that the shortage of specific skills in key areas of ICT is another critical factor facing service providers.

"This factor is felt acutely by providers of UC, as there is a need for skilled IT and telecoms personnel to co-exist in order to meet the expected standards. The required skill sets cannot be achieved easily or cheaply.

"This puts local providers at a disadvantage since they have to compete with well-established international companies that have the capacity to offer better remuneration to skilled personnel," she maintains.

Nkumbula adds that SA is an emerging market that had early exposure to enterprise tools such as instant messaging and e-mail.

"UC makes these tools more effective through improved integration. While Internet users can quickly understand the UC solution, since they have already been introduced to new communication tools, the industry will also benefit from targeting the mass consumer market among the mobile users."

She also believes that since many prospective users have invested in silo systems, the growth of UC in SA is fundamentally dependent on the ability to integrate the solution into the existing infrastructure.

"The low diffusion of new technologies in the country makes integration a viable solution. The portfolio approach among UC vendors helps to curtail the problems associated with system integration and present increased opportunities for the UC market growth," she says.

ShoreTel vs Avaya

Among the UC platforms available locally is ShoreTel, provided by Tellumat and Avaya. According to Langenhoven, ShoreTel has increased capacity from 10 000 to 20 000 users on a single system. "This can be on one site or distributed over multiple sites," he explains.

He adds that the ShoreTel platform has improved integrated collaboration tools like audio conferencing, desktop sharing and enterprise instant messaging. "This includes features like one click conference scheduling from Outlook.

"These collaboration tools are integrated into the core hardware and do not need third-party servers or applications to run, which makes it easy to use and easy to manage. The conferencing facility also supports Web and can, thus, be used for Webinars. It also has personal call manager support for Mac."



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Derek Roush, president and CEO of VocalPoint Consulting Group, a telecommunications consulting firm, says the main difference between Avaya and ShoreTel depends on which Avaya system users are looking at.

“If you are speaking of the Avaya IP Office, then the main difference is the hybrid technology that Avaya is built on versus the all IP platform that is inherent to the ShoreTel. That means you can still use digital phones on the IP Office while running IP applications.

“The ShoreTel platform is more aligned in comparison with the Avaya system. If you are comparing them to Avaya's Communication Manager, then that's another story. ShoreTel doesn't have call centre features, vectoring capabilities or security that make the Avaya Communication Manager shine.”

Roush believes the Avaya Communication Manager is still the leading system in the call centre space with Cisco running a close second.