

Eleven communications trends for 2011

What's in store for the communications world in the year ahead? Here's one safe prediction: Users, both in the workplace and in their daily lives, are going to want more. More multimedia. Constant connectivity. Easier and richer collaboration. With those expectations as a backdrop, here are some marketplace and technology trends we believe will drive the industry in 2011:

#1: Compliance catalyzes collaboration.

Financial services reform in the United States has created stringent customer notification and regulatory compliance requirements. The robo-foreclosure scandal highlighted what can happen when organizational communications breaks down, resulting in poor customer treatment, rampant inefficiency, and public and government outcry. These are just two examples of how increased accountability demands will drive deployment of communications-enabled business processes that blend automation and human-to-human collaboration to clarify information and roles and reduce latency in both responses and decisions. New healthcare regulations could create another compliance hot spot in the near future.

#2: Consumerizing the enterprise accelerates.

The return of economic growth and hiring will bring more young people into the workforce who have been using social media and mobile technology from the time they climbed out of their cribs. They will arrive in the workplace equipped with their own devices, apps and expectations for how to communicate and collaborate. Organizations



will find themselves competing to show that they are savvy and can provide the technology resources to attract and keep top talent from Gen X and Gen Y.

#3: Social media morphs from add-on to integrated.

In 2010 many organizations recognized the no-longer-deniable importance of social media and responded by creating dedicated teams and procedures to monitor and engage in social media communications. The next phase of social media evolution will be for organizations to integrate social channels into the broader business processes of their support and sales centers. Organizations will also try to cut through the noise permeating the social media landscape by creating and carrying out clear, comprehensive social media strategies.

#4: SIP powers up small and medium enterprises.

In the past several years, large businesses have begun to substantially reduce communications costs and complexity by unifying voice, data and video with Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) technology. But for small and mid-size enterprises, SIP's costs have outweighed its benefits. Today that's no longer the case. New Internet Protocol (IP) office systems are reaching the marketplace that extend the simplicity, flexibility and cost efficiency of SIP to smaller businesses, some of which will find new, creative ways to use this transformative technology.

#5: Communications takes to the cloud.

Cloud computing-based services for the enterprise are rapidly expanding beyond back-office processing and document management services to critical,

customer-facing business functions. Contact center operators will begin to capitalize on the efficiency and flexibility offered by software as a service (SaaS), infrastructure as a service (IaaS) and platform as a service (PaaS) technologies.

#6: Virtualization reshapes the desktop-server relationship. Virtual-server infrastructures are becoming commonplace in organizations today, making the allocating and provisioning of server resources transparent to end users. A newer trend—virtualization of the desktop—is now gaining traction as organizations recognize the cost benefits of centralizing software management, replacing hard-drive-equipped computers with thin-client terminals and shifting data storage to the cloud. We may not be far from the day when the only user-owned gear is a USB card and a Bluetooth headset.

#7: Endpoints become consolidated. Many workers today have two cell phones, softphone clients on their desktop PC and laptop, and a handset and speakerphone on their desk. To combat device proliferation and the associated cost, organizations will push to have workers consolidate activity onto one or two pieces of gear, say a smartphone and laptop, or an all-in-one desktop device that combines video, voice, collaboration and PC functions.

#8: User adoption trumps deployment. Every IT dollar is precious and needs to provide business value. Even the most promising technologies can fall short if people won't or can't use them. User adoption, not deployment, will become the dominant metric for IT implementations. Adoption should become a consideration at the outset of a project rather than a post-deployment afterthought, and user preparation should go beyond "train the trainers." Organizations can improve adoption by understanding users and segmenting them by the most important usage concepts and criteria.

#9: User support and communications get a makeover. Companies are going to great lengths to improve customer support, adding social media channels, offering live chat, revving up response times and more. With so much focus on customers, though, users within the enterprise often get the short end of the stick when it comes to support. Companies will increasingly take the innovations they've brought to their customers back in house to support their users. Innovators will go beyond that—for example, using the IT help desk as a test bed for next-generation contact center concepts that will eventually be taken to customers.

#10: Communications technology helps fill skills gaps. Some industries suffer from a lack of qualified personnel to fill key

roles—for example, too few nurses to fulfill healthcare needs. Businesses will increasingly turn to communication and collaboration tools to improve staff productivity and overcome these shortages. Infrastructure, applications and devices that support worker mobility, collaboration and further automation of manual, time-consuming and non-value-added activities will take stronger hold in 2011.

#11: Fit for purpose. For the past few years, enterprise deployment of collaboration technologies has been somewhat constrained by the size of the investment, some limitations in the interoperability of networks and devices, and user reluctance to learn or adopt the new capabilities. Those days are over. In the age of "fit for purpose," vendors have designed collaboration capabilities that really do bridge the gap by being easy for both users and the IT staff that supports them. Going forward, fit-for-purpose collaboration tools will be characterized by lower upfront investment, improved integration with existing networks and devices, and far greater simplicity of use. This evolution will change the trajectory of technology adoption as both expenses and user concerns drop dramatically.

How many of these predictions will come true? Only time will tell. We'll also be interested to see what trends emerge in 2011 that aren't even on our radar today. Let's see what happens.

About Avaya

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12/10 • SVC4649