Chapter 7 Telecommunications, the Internet, and Wireless Technology

Case 2: Unified Communications Systems With Virtual Collaboration: IBM and Forterra

Tags:  unified communications; collaboration; virtual; IBM; Lotus Sametime; Forterra OLIVE

Summary: Forterra Systems is integrating their OLIVE virtual world platform as a plug-in to the IBM Lotus Sametime unified communications application. The combined solution provides virtual collaboration for enterprises to provide ad hoc or scheduled, immersive meeting environments to share documents, video, applications, and white boards. The joint virtual collaboration solution was released in 2008.

URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVY8fmKXH9Y

Case

Unified communications systems (UCS) combine digital and analog communications tools into a single unified digital environment. UCS allows firms to unite in a single system desktop phones, instant messaging, Internet, voice mail, email, audio conferencing, calendaring, fax, cell phone, and PC clients. This gives employees, vendors and customers great flexibility in choosing the telecommunications path required based on the situation of the users.

Up until recently, business was conducted on two separate incompatible networks: the telephone network and computer networks (like the Internet). The split created problems, lots of them. Phones aren't as intuitive as they should be. Just try to start a three-way call without hanging up on someone. On a computer, you can check your e-mail, but not your voice mail. And then there's the enormous cost of purchasing, maintaining, and upgrading two complex infrastructures. And just try putting a fax into an email!

This is where unified digital communications systems come to play a large role. There are many vendors who supply these systems: Microsoft, IBM, Siemens, Cisco, and others. A successful implementation can automate and unify all forms of human and device digital communications into a common user experience.

What about those analog phones, faxes and PBXs (phone switches and answering machines)? You'll have to tear them out and replace with all digital equipment.
The video in this case extends the concept of unified communications systems through the addition of virtual reality to create a kind of telepresence with avatars.

Sources: Microsoft.com; IBM.com; Wikipedia.com.

Case Study Questions
1. What are the gains in productivity that can result through a unified communications system?
2. How does this system support collaboration?
3. How realistic is the collaborative design meeting?
4. What different kinds of communications tools does this system integrate?
5. What does virtual reality add to the unified communication system?