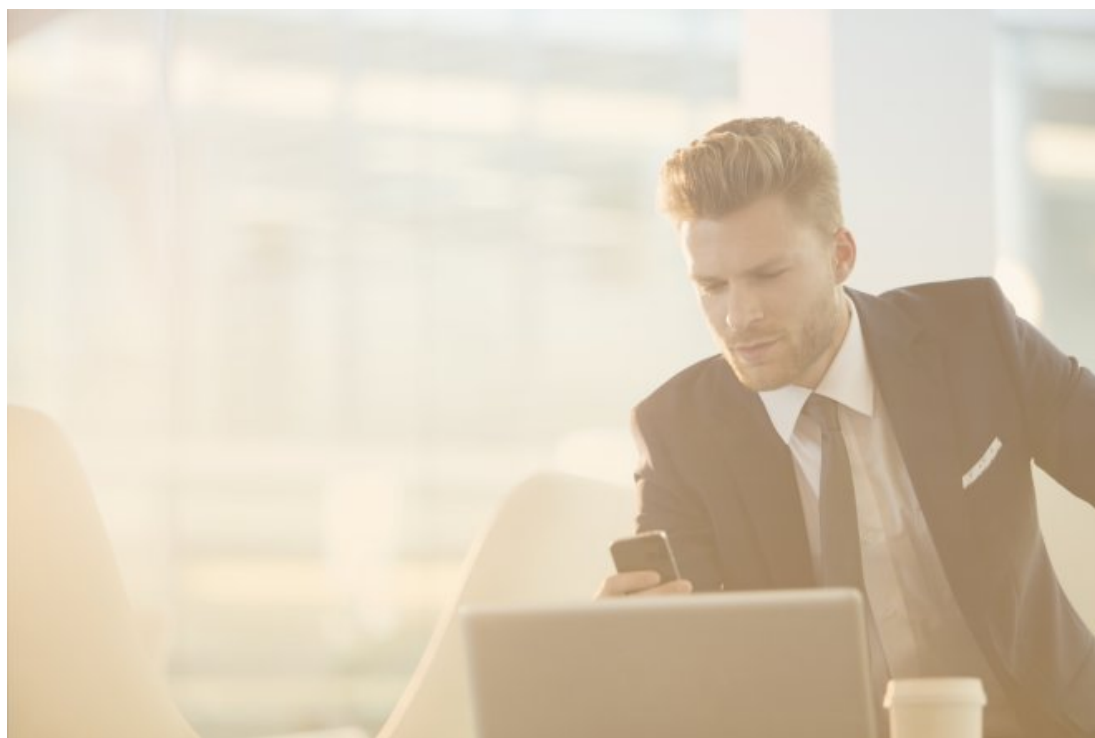


What is Unified Communications? Solutions to Empower Enterprise

By VONAGE STAFF



Unified communications lets employees take business communications to the next level.

If you want a concise answer, start with this concept: Unified communications is a business communications system that keeps your teams working instead of waiting for answers or struggling with different technologies when they need to exchange information.

Taking this unified communications definition to the next level, when one talks about unified communications, they're talking about layers of functionality, and a suite of tools empowering the enterprise to work efficiently and with sophistication. As will be discussed in the following paragraphs, the unified communications solutions available to your organization are as dynamic as the conversations that engage your business.

What is Unified Communications?

Here's one way to explain unified communications benefits in the enterprise ecosystem: Unified communications products and tools facilitate the interactive use of multiple channels and media. So, on a more granular level, what does that mean? The answers lie in the

distinct actions unified communications systems enable your teams to take over the course of a conversation.

- **Multiple Communications Channels:** Across any given enterprise workflow, stakeholders communicate and share media in different ways. Unified communications systems create an environment in which collaborators can exchange voice, video, and other media without the complications of individual bespoke setups between parties.
- **Automatic Handling of Multiple Channels:** More than just facilitating the start of multichannel communications, unified communications handles the changing needs within a given conversation on the fly. If the parameters around connections change, its call-control capabilities kick in.
- **Messaging as a Spectrum:** Incoming information is no static affair for the enterprise. Texts, voice messages — even the occasional fax — all of these media types demand a centralized approach to collecting and supplying your teams with the data they need to handle. This is unified messaging, as TechTarget defines it. For example, a user with a smartphone in a download-challenged environment could be empowered by unified communications to get an email by voice. It's this bringing together of different communication mediums that helps put the *unified* in unified communications. This is also a prime example of how IT business applications are evolving in this space.
- **Collaborative Tools:** These days, conferencing with collaborators is seldom a voice-only event. Participants expect the power and flexibility of file sharing, virtual whiteboards, and even directly accessible workspaces that allow for in-the-moment creativity. When you think about unified communications and what the technology in play can do for the enterprise, these collaborative tools are a central feature of the solutions at work — and an excellent example of how IT business applications are growing with the help of unified communications.
- **Presence Monitoring:** Finally, perhaps most importantly, unified communications systems provide users with immediate and dynamic updates about stakeholders' availability. Is a product director online? Can the head of an engineering team join a conversation happening right this very moment? Rather than pinging and waiting, unified communications means instant notification and the green light to proceed based on real-time presence.

All of this management, control, and integration of methods is possible because unified communications can connect both back-end and front-end systems. This technology leverages not only the deeper IP components — enterprise's central telephony elements, for example — but also web conference hardware and the software that allows for call management, voice response, and all the other pieces that help turn a business communications environment into a seamless and collaborative space.

When business leadership asks "What is unified communications?" the question is really "How can technology make the enterprise more powerful?"

Fueling Business- and Consumer-Facing Apps

Stemming from the definitions of unified communications, Gartner notes these products integrate media channels, networks, and both business and consumer applications.

So, what's next for unified communications?

The role of IT business apps is clear, though an important addition would be the role of customer relationship management apps — the very nature of a digital system such as unified communications means that data collected around customer-facing communications can be analyzed for future best practices as well.

Not only have enterprises historically looked to consumer applications such as Twitter and Skype for direction, but today's unified communications developers are learning from consumer apps such as Workplace by Facebook, as Network World notes.

The bottom line comes down to progress around increasingly collaborative and efficient enterprise workflows. When business leadership asks "What is unified communications?" the question is really, "How can technology make the enterprise more powerful?"

Unified communications answers that call.

Connect with a Vonage Business representative to learn more about how unified communications solutions can empower your teams to collaborate and innovate.