



Defining a Framework for the Business Communications and Collaboration Future

As we approach the 10-year anniversary of the term "unified communications," I think it's a good time to focus on a higher-level view of products and services that enhance enterprise communications and collaboration and ask ourselves whether the name -- and concept -- is still a good fit to describe these next-generation capabilities. Personally, I think it's time to move on, and I have a replacement to suggest: business communications and collaboration, or **BCC**.

Should we abandon UC? For almost 10 years, from 2006 forward, we have talked about UC -- first for its future potential and now as the current technology -- and today's reality is that we have a number of solutions that fit under the UC umbrella. That's because the very term "unified" presents a market challenge.

What are we unifying? For some, the unifying applies to devices, as in single-number reach, while for others, it is about bringing together the different modalities (or in contact center parlance, "channels") of text, audio, and video into a cohesive solution. Still others think about unifying in terms of presence and context, or about adding communications to applications, whether for improved personal productivity or organizational process. And then there are those who think about UC in regards to presence, IM, and new features. In other words, UC has come to include just about everything, with little way of discerning the variations. UC is the kitchen sink of communications, unifying everything into a singularity. All of this unifying of this and that reduces the significance and value of the word in describing today's goal of communications and collaboration.

I won't belabor the point here any longer, but rather leave you to ask yourself whether the "UC" label is really meaningful any longer. Rather, I'd like to explore the idea of establishing a framework for the application of communications and collaboration to the modern enterprise or organization. With this framework, the focus should be on meeting an organization's communications and collaboration needs, looking at those requirements in terms of an event and its participants and not on underlying technology.

What we need to focus on for the next 10 years is how to apply the new and transformational communications and collaboration tools to the enterprise. Whether they are IM and presence, video, Web collaboration, WebRTC, or social, the technologies are changing how we work. This is the **BCC** marketplace. While it is all focused on communications, we cannot fall into the singularity trap we did with UC. To prevent **BCC** from becoming a black hole, we will need to segment it based on some factors of use and need. I propose using two dimensions in our framework:

Organization vs. user - This dimension of the **BCC** solution set defines whether the solution is for the organization as an entity or for a specific user within the organization. This dimension distinguishes those **BCC** events intended for a specific user, such as a phone call to that individual or a meeting the employee is hosting, from those that take place at an organizational level. The latter would include communications and collaboration as it applies to customer service and webinars, for example.

Meeting vs. Representation - This dimension defines **BCC** event type. The first type of event is a meeting to which attendees receive invites and participation is pre-defined both in terms of time and location, either by an employee or the organization. In a meeting event, the originator of the event is internal to the organization. This compares to an event that is initiated by someone external to the organization. In this case, the external party originates the event by “arriving” and requesting some form of communications or collaboration with the organization or a specific user.

For purposes of descriptions, a **BCC** event to which attendees are invited by an employee or the organization would be called a “meeting,” managed by the **BCC** system; if the event is driven by someone coming to the organization or employee, the **BCC** system is “representing” the organization or employee. A representation event is essentially a defined mechanism for others to reach either the organization or an individual. Email addresses and telephone numbers provide current examples of representation, while Web pages and social apps are emerging representation designations. Social networks like LinkedIn and Facebook are examples of Web representation sites.

Quadrants of BCC

The matrix at right shows the two sets of categories defining four specific areas of **BCC** capabilities. Each category addresses a specific and very different communications and collaboration activity within the overall organization. While the areas will likely have some common capabilities, each will have different capabilities, too. All four areas of **BCC** may be delivered by a single solution or different solutions based on organizational needs. Each category defines a specific set of capabilities by the communications initialization and the type of **BCC** event that is happening. Requirements for each category are very different. The chart shows some of the characteristics for the category, as well as the example of typical solution that applies to that category.

Organization	Organization Representation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reachability • Availability • Response Management • Immediate • Function based • Contact Center 	Organization Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process Driven • Application Focused • Individual or Group • CEBP
	Employee Representation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reachability • Availability • Personal Management • Immediate • Individual • The Phone System 	Employee Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduled • Team • Convenient • Hosting • Tools • WebEX or G-T-M
	Representation	Meeting

This is a bit more detail on each of the categories.

- **Employee Representation** – This category comprises the set of capabilities required to represent an employee. It includes the capability to define specific ways to reach (phone numbers, Web URLs, SIP address, etc.) and interact (presence, availability, etc.) with the represented employee for an optimal experience ; a rich set of modalities (text, audio, video, document and screen sharing, co-editing); and the ability to provide services across devices and locations where the employee may be. The **BCC** event is not being initiated by the represented employee, but rather by another employee, an external individual or entity, or the organization itself. The key is to assure that employees can manage this for themselves and optimize the



capability across devices, modalities and events. In the telephony world, the PBX and an individual DID or extension number were the representation for a user into the PSTN.

- **Employee Meeting** – an ad hoc or scheduled **BCC** event initiated by the employee and to which he or she is inviting other participants, either internal or external, to participate. The critical capabilities are easy scheduling and invitations; commonly used access parameters like URLs; and the right modalities including file, app and screen sharing with collaboration tools. In addition, meeting management tools like recording and moderation are potential values in this area. Today these services are often provided by products like WebEx or GoToMeeting, as part of a larger package.
- **Organization Representation** – a category representing the organization for external interactions is critical for most, if not all, organizations. This is where products and services provide an optimal environment for externally **BCC** initiated events to be managed for the organization, not an individual. As more of these interactions start with the Web and self-service, integration into that environment will be critical. As in the other dimensions, providing a range of modalities (channels) and device support is critical. However, in this area the organization is being represented, so the employees have a different role when participating as they are acting on behalf of the represented organization, not on their own as in the Employee Representation category. Today this is often implemented as a contact center, either implemented on the PBX or as a stand-alone solution.
- **Organization Meeting** – this is an event where the organization, as a process or by an individual acting on behalf of the organization, reaches out to initiate a **BCC** event. This could be a webinar or an outbound telemarketing communication, or initiated by an organization process to complete a transaction or manage an exception. A key difference is that there may be multiple systems in this category in an organization, each tuned to the specific application or process. Another difference is that multimodality within a specific **BCC** application may be less important as the modality is often defined by the process, not the individuals. Today solutions such as GoToWebinar or On24.

The model defines a set of categories of capabilities that the next generation of **BCC** managers must understand and provide for their organizations. A fundamental question is whether a single vendor or multiple vendors across the categories is the right decision for your organization and the required capabilities. These solutions may have different vendors today; however, many vendors are moving to have more comprehensive solutions sets across all four areas.

Deciding whether a single or multivendor solution is best for your organization raises a number of questions about each area and specific needs and use cases. For employees, is it important to have the same tools and experience for both scheduled meetings as well as when someone comes to interact directly? Is the same representation tool appropriate for the organization and the employees/users? Today the contact center adds a set of capabilities onto the PBX telephony representation for the organization. Are these exclusive to the contact center or could they be of general value? How will your organization extend representation beyond the phone number to the Web and other factors? These are some of the questions that need to be answered, at an industry level as well as for individual organizations as we move forward into **BCC**.



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Viewing all four spaces as a single UC environment is not necessarily the right answer for every organization. In some or many cases, a single solution may meet the needs of an organization and reduce the number of vendors and complexity. However, each organization needs to understand its overall needs and requirements for both the organization and the users and how to map those to the potential options for each area in order to make the best choices for how to provide the services. The key to enabling the organization and employees/users with the right tools is understanding their needs and how a solution differentiates in meeting those needs.

I believe this framework can provide a foundation for both the discussion of the capabilities required by organizations in the future as well as how different vendors fit into providing those services and how each are differentiated. I look forward to interactions within the real-time communications and collaboration community and with end-user organizations and the overall industry that provides these capabilities about this as a model for our shared future.