Avaya plus Skype for Business: The Best of Both Worlds

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As unified communications (UC) solutions evolve and grow, many organizations are beginning to adopt a solution that adds a second supplier's system to their legacy Voice over IP (VoIP) and UC systems. Some UC users who are deploying their first UC solution may also find a multi-vendor approach attractive, integrating the best features of one supplier with the value-added features of another. Skype for Business (formerly Microsoft Lync), integrated with the Avaya UC portfolio, is a well-tested example that brings together the best features of both partners.

Begin with the Avaya Advantage

Avaya has been delivering superior enterprise voice systems for decades, growing its extensive feature set over the years based on customer needs that address very specific use-cases. Known for "five-nines" of reliability, which is key whenever real time communications is mission critical, Avaya systems can support a range of needs from the small office up to an enterprise with 250,000 users in architectures that can be deployed using geographic redundancy to improve reliability without reducing scalability. Avaya systems feature a user-friendly, graphics-based interface that makes it easy to display and analyze essential data. Additionally, Avaya offers a lower total cost of ownership (TCO): a 2014 research report from Nemertes[1] revealed that Avaya systems had some of the industry's lowest five-year TCO.

Avaya systems provide added security, offering a more secure VPN access for remote workers using Avaya VPN gateways, routers, and client software. The Avaya identity engine solution serves both employees and guests on campus, quickly offering more secure, authorized access to the network and profile-specific applications.

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Delivering a full and flexible portfolio of solution elements, Avaya offers applications, soft clients, and devices that range from an IP Office "in a box" up to a full suite of UC and Contact Center applications. For example, Avaya Contact Center solutions help customers transform their businesses with platforms that are simple and intelligent so users can stay ahead of their end-customers' expectations. The Avaya contact center portfolio comes complete with a market-leading feature set that includes assisted service, self-service, and performance management. The Avaya portfolio extends to video capabilities that address room telepresence and executive desktops, also incorporating features that support the shifting trend towards desktop and mobile video.

Avaya continues to refresh its portfolio and features. Because support for BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) has emerged as a key requirement in the last three years, Avaya has incorporated into its solutions support for voice, video, content sharing, and UC capabilities across a wide array of tablets and smartphones. BYOD support from Avaya is not limited to client software features and the user experience; it also includes the applications and security tools that allow IT managers to feel comfortable with BYOD deployment.

Finally, Avaya solutions are all about choice. Predisposed to open interoperability, Avaya supports a wide variety of mobile devices and the broadest possible array of interoperability when it comes to video endpoints. Avaya session management support includes Cisco, Siemens, Alcatel, Microsoft, and others. Additionally, Avaya voice and video services are available from inside the Skype for Business experience.

Three Ways to Incorporate Avaya with Skype for Business

Avaya can interoperate with Skype for Business in three ways. The most rudimentary level uses SIP as a trunking interface that allows calls to go between the Skype for Business system and the Avaya infrastructure. However, this method is not preferred because it sets a parallel real-time communications system for voice. This can become more complicated to implement and manage because the architecture can create islands of users. Also, the duplicate features can create duplicated expenses.

The second methodology uses Remote Call Control, or RCC. This is a server-side integration that Microsoft has used since 2005, going back to the infrastructure that used Microsoft's Live Communication Server (LCS.) This interoperability provides features such as a click-to-call, but it is complex to set

up and implement, making it more expensive to deploy. Furthermore, Microsoft has been scaling down LCS support over time.

The final interoperability technique is client-side integration that uses the standard Microsoft APIs. These are the same APIs that developers have used to extend Microsoft Lync, now supporting Skype for Business. The solution is easier to deploy than the first two approaches discussed above, and it works with both a premise-based Skype for Business solution as well as a cloud-based Microsoft Office 365 environment. Consequently, Avaya recommends this approach over the first two options.

Why Avaya is the Top Choice for Microsoft Interoperability: the User Experience

Avaya enables users to maintain the Microsoft experience. While some competitors try to re-craft the Microsoft experience into their own solution, Avaya is committed to giving users the elegant experience they are really looking for. Avaya integrations with Skype for Business allow users to have the Skype for Business interface on their PC along with the underlying Avaya quality of service infrastructure and management tools needed for voice, data, and video.

When using Avaya with the Skype for Business client, users can seamlessly move from a contact's directory listing to presence to instant messaging to voice to video—and presence is integrated with both IM and telephony services. This feature is especially convenient when users who are on the phone have an incoming call they need to answer; they can answer the second caller with an instant message without interrupting their original conversation. Other supported features include the ability to transfer calls or create ad hoc conferences from within the Skype for Business experience.

Avaya with Skype for Business also enables a user to choose a preferred voice path, using the desktop interface to manage call routing. When on the road, the user can use a soft phone on his or her laptop, and if connection issues arise, the user can direct inbound and outbound calls to any phone, such as a mobile device or home phone, without having to disclose that number. Remote workers can bring up their Skype for Business client and seamlessly connect without the need of a VPN because Avaya offers standards-based connectivity using SIP and a session border controller (SBC).

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Extending beyond simple telephony presence and IM, the integrated solution also supports the ability to see other system users, and connect via a desktop browser using click-to–call or click-to-video from within Microsoft Outlook, the Office Suite, SharePoint, or other applications.

The principal behind Avaya's ongoing integration efforts extends beyond Skype for Business, Microsoft Lync, and Microsoft Outlook. For instance, by using a browser-based application such as Google Docs, a web portal, a cloud-based application, or a web page, the Avaya solution can implement an optimal dial plan based on the user's location and the called number. All the user has to do is click to communicate, and the Avaya features seamlessly take care of the background services. As a result, the user experience is feature-rich and the user can control communications with their chosen interface. All the underlying complexity is hidden from view.

Making it Easy for the IT Department

Multi-vendor integrations are complex, and the reality is that IT managers will need to pull together a whole series of third-party providers to successfully complete a Microsoft enterprise voice implementation. Fortunately, Avaya can help eliminate many of the integration points.

For instance, when deploying the client integration recommended above, Avaya provides a configuration tool that the IT department can implement in minutes. The tool defines all the needed information, creates a file, and silently pushes the update to users. The next time a user opens Skype for Business and selects the click-to-call feature, the call will automatically be routed through the Avaya environment.

A solution that integrates Avaya with Skype for Business is less expensive than a Microsoft-only solution, delivering a lower total cost of ownership. In a 2014 Nemertes Research study[2], the first year and five year TCO for an Avaya solution were in the bottom one-third of vendors studied, while first year and five year costs for a Microsoft unified communications and IP telephony system were among the most expensive. Additionally, for a joint solution, only the basic entry-level software licenses are required from Avaya and Microsoft, further minimizing integration costs.

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About Avaya

Avaya is a leading, global provider of customer and team engagement solutions and services available in a variety of flexible on-premise and cloud deployment options. Avaya's fabric-based networking solutions help simplify and accelerate the deployment of business critical applications and services. For more information, please visit **www.avaya.com**.

The Bottom Line

IT managers have many good reasons to deploy a multi-vendor solution, including:

• Protecting an existing communications investment

• Choosing an architecture that delivers a feature set not available from a single vendor

• Making collaboration easier for users who are comfortable with their existing applications

A hybrid Avaya and Skype for Business solution addresses all of these reasons, and more. If users want to keep their Microsoft experience with Skype for Business and Microsoft Windows desktops, Avaya can preserve that user experience while embedding Avaya enterprise-grade voice and video services. Avaya can also provide a lower total cost of ownership when compared to other single-vendor or multi-vendor architectures that deliver IP telephony and unified communications. Ultimately, Avaya provides a platform and an architecture that's designed for interoperability - helping customers evolve the communications system they have today into a collaboration solution that meets their current business needs, while maintaining the agility to address tomorrow's requirements.

[1, 2] Lisa Durant, "IP Telephony and Unified Communications Total Cost of Ownership," Nemertes Research, 2014.

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