

# What does Unified Communications mean for VoIP?

 By [Mitchell Barker](#)

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After seeing a television commercial for Apple's new iPhone 6, a friend in the US noted that it featured someone speaking on the handset and then quipped: "People actually still *do* that?"

The joke is actually not that far-fetched. With mobile phones becoming increasingly sophisticated with a convergence of communication features bundled into one device, using it to make voice calls has been on the decline in recent years. In fact, a Pew Institute survey in 2013 revealed that the number of text messages sent in the US every month soared from 14 billion in 2000 to 188 billion in 2010, and showed that Americans in the 18-29 age demographic send and receive an average of almost 88 text messages per day, compared to only making or receiving 17 phone calls.

## Too many devices

With more people allowed to bring their own mobile devices to the workplace - a phenomenon referred to as bring your own device (BYOD) - and with offices and businesses becoming more virtual as their workers remain on the move, it would appear that it would be getting easier to get hold of someone, but this is not always the case.

It is estimated that the average employee carries 2.9 devices, yet they seem harder to reach. While voice calls - either via mobile, desk phones, VoIP, or video conferencing - still form an essential part of business communications - which is why VoIP has soared in popularity, since it is so much more cost effective than making calls via landlines - it is just one way in which business communications is conducted. There is also email, instant messaging/chat, and fax.

Until recently, there has been a lack of integration of all these services, with each requiring different technologies, services and hardware. It made it costly, inefficient and complex to install, operate and run.

## Integrated technologies

Now, Unified Communications (UC) has come to the rescue in an attempt to solve this issue. UC is described as a new technological architecture whereby various communication tools are integrated, allowing businesses and individuals to manage all their communications in one entity instead of separately. It bridges the gap between VoIP, fax over IP, and other computer-related communications technologies.

According to Gartner, a complete UC solution consists of sixteen different technologies: telephony, unified messaging, desktop client, email, instant messaging, audio conferencing, collaboration, video conferencing, web conferencing, converged conferencing, notification service, personal assistant, rich presence service, communications-enabled business

processes (CEBP), contact centre and mobile solutions. A Computer World report further explained that when simplified down, a UC system should have five core capabilities: email, telephony, real time communications, calendars and directory services.

These days, UC regularly comes up when VoIP is mentioned and is even touted as an additional feature by some (while it is actually the other way around), to such an extent that many consumers are under the wrongful impression that it is the same thing. However, VoIP is just one cost saving component of UC. As a whole, it attempts to provide platform neutral communications by, for example, allowing users to access their voicemail via email, or check their email through text messaging.

## Multiple communication channels used

A good way to explain how UC could streamline the communications process between employees that are working across vast geographic distances and even different time zones, is to compare it to how it works when we currently try to reach most people at their desks during office hours.

You dial and reach someone at their reception or switchboard, and you either get put through to their voicemail or you get to leave a message with the receptionist or a different secretary, who will either deliver a written note - or in more sophisticated set-ups, an email - letting the person know that they need to phone you back. With UC, multiple communications channels will be utilised all at once, to find the most effective way to reach the person in question more quickly and to find out ahead of time whether the person you are trying to reach is available or not at the time.

No wonder that global growth consulting firm Frost and Sullivan predicts that worldwide, the combined UC market is expected to grow from US\$1144.8m to US\$2287.6m by 2019.

## ABOUT MITCHELL BARKER

Mitchell Barker is the founder and managing director of [www.whichvoip.co.za](http://www.whichvoip.co.za), which provides a central view of all the credible VoIP operators in South Africa. Under his leadership, the site has expanded to include hosted PBX and Connectivity operators, and has grown into a VoIP and Hosted PBX information resource in sub-Saharan Africa.

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