

Smart Deployment of Unified Messaging

According to recent studies performed by Osterman Researchⁱ, 80% of companies surveyed were strongly interested in integrating email data with systems such as customer relationship management, content management and knowledge management. And 68% of businesses plan on migrating to a new messaging system within the next two years. Most telephony and IT departments are feeling the pressure to deploy Unified Messaging (UM) sooner rather than later.

But with the ongoing trend towards UM, implementation challenges are taking their toll. The same studies also found that:

- Only 25% of businesses that deployed Unified Messaging systems are satisfied with the initial system costs and deployment hurdles.
- Of over 33% of organizations that are resistant to Unified Messaging, the main reason cited is anticipated deployment problems.

The following considerations should provide some guidance in successfully deploying a Unified Messaging architecture. While Linux usage is on the rise, Microsoft Exchange continues to be the predominant platform in use today. Most of these tips are therefore focused on Microsoft Exchange 2007, the first Exchange server to natively support UM, but most are good ideas regardless of the platform used.

Architecture

The first basic consideration is whether your corporate PBX is capable of communicating directly with a Unified Messaging server over a Session Initiation Protocol (SIP), or if a SIP gateway will be needed. Consultations with Microsoft can help to determine this. Typical connections between a SIP gateway and the PBX utilize a T1 line.

Another determination is whether or not to deploy a centralized or decentralized architecture. To help answer that question, consider the following:ⁱⁱ

- Server placement
- Number of Unified Messaging servers
- SIP gateway
- Mailbox storage
- Unified Messaging site configuration

When outlining server placement, don't forget about continuity, as an overly centralized system can greatly increase risk in the event of a natural disaster.



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Columbia, SC 29212
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Capacity

To determine how many UM servers you need, calculate how many ports that you require. One recommendationⁱⁱⁱ is that no more than 60 ports should be implemented on a single server. The idea is that a single server can support about 5,000 users, and you would not want more than that many users going down in the event of an outage. You'll need to consider server redundancy to protect important company communications. You can set up SIP gateways to transfer calls from one Unified Messaging server to another in case one server fails.

Testing and User Migration

As with all new systems, a functionality test plan should be developed to validate the design. One of the primary goals of the testing should be to ensure that all features and functionality of the old voicemail system have been duplicated.

With user migration, you have the option of a "big bang" approach or a gradual migration. One challenge with migrating users in segments is that while one portion of the user population is on the new system, with the rest still on the old system, it will not be possible to exchange or forward messages between the two. There is currently no networking protocol converter that allows disparate systems to be networked to Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging.

While there are some challenges to deploying Unified Messaging, the user benefits definitely make the effort worthwhile. UM is a true business productivity driver that enhances employees' mobility and builds employee-to-employee, employee-to-customer, and employee-to-partner loyalty across the organization.

i "Osterman Research Executive Summary: Unified Messaging Market Trends, 2007-2010," Osterman Research, (2007), <http://www.ostermanresearch.com>

ii Jeff Goodwin, "Deploying Unified Messaging with Exchange Server 2007," Microsoft TechNet, (December 2007), <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/default.aspx>

iii Jeff Goodwin, "Deploying Unified Messaging with Exchange Server 2007," Microsoft TechNet, (December 2007), <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/default.aspx>



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