

Aragon Research

Topic: Collaboration

Issue: Who are the collaboration providers and how will they evolve?

Author: Jim Lundy

Google Adds Voice to Hangouts, But Steps Backward On Interoperability and Federation By Reducing XMPP Support

Summary: *Google, by adding phone calls but reducing XMPP support in the new Hangouts, will impact enterprise users who want to adopt Hangouts but rely on XMPP to federate with partners.*

Event: On July 10, 2013, Google announced that it would add support for phone calls through Hangouts. Previously, on May 15, 2013, at its I/O developer conference, Google announced that it would unify its real-time services under Hangouts. It also announced plans to diminish support for XMPP in the new Hangouts system.

Analysis

Google debuted the new Hangouts in May as the unified platform for its real-time offerings such as instant messaging and video conferencing. The new Hangouts replaces Google Talk and the original Hangouts video offering. The phone calls through Hangouts feature is the first step toward integrating Google Voice into Hangouts.

However, in unifying its communication services, Google also diminished its support for the Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol (XMPP), which to us is a very big deal. XMPP had been the primary protocol behind Google's presence and messaging services, and was also the bridge for inter-enterprise federation with Google services.

Other unified communication and collaboration (UCC) vendors support XMPP, but only for

XMPP clients, whereas Google's implementation supported server-to-server federation via XMPP. In fact, server-to-server federation is one of the main benefits of XMPP. Organizations that set up and host their own XMPP-based IM and presence systems can federate with external organizations, allowing users to communicate in real time.

Enterprise Impact

This move by Google to diminish XMPP support will directly impact enterprises and users who adopt the new Hangouts offering. Users on UCC systems that are based on XMPP or support XMPP via gateways will not be able to federate or communicate with users on the new Hangouts system. Clients on other UCC systems, who federate with Google Apps for Business users, tell us they can no longer communicate with those contacts when they adopt the new Hangouts.

There are large Google Apps for Business customers, such as those in government, who rely on XMPP federation to communicate in real time with external organizations. It will be hard for these organizations to move to the new Hangouts, as it will severely reduce their ability to federate with other organizations. Eventually, Google will at least have to make the APIs to the new Hangouts available to third-party federation brokers to enable federation for its customers.

Google Apps for Business has been making great strides in enterprises, with an expanding ecosystem of partners integrating with Google Apps presence. However, if these users adopt the new Hangouts, it will end their third party

integration efforts. To be honest, this brings back memories of Google abruptly dropping Google Wave and leaving partners in the cold. That was not a fun time for those partners.

Competing With Microsoft's Lync Federation

In the meantime, Microsoft has been ramping up Lync's federation capabilities. While Microsoft is nowhere near as open as Google was, if a majority of organizations deploy Lync, it will potentially become a standard by default. Google has yet to develop a clear UCC competitor to Lync, as it has with Gmail as a competitor to Exchange/Outlook. We believe that positioning Hangouts as a unified platform is Google's competitive move against Microsoft. However, the lack of XMPP capability puts Google behind Microsoft, Cisco, IBM, Avaya and Siemens on UCC.

Aragon Advisory

- Google Apps for Business, Education and Government customers should get clear guidance from Google on the roadmap regarding federation with external users if they adopt the new Hangouts.
- Google Apps users who adopt the new Hangouts currently have to use the previous XMPP chat clients to continue federation with external users.
- Consider your external collaboration needs when developing a collaboration strategy.

Bottom Line

Google was one of the more open vendors with regard to interoperability and federation. This move away from full XMPP support towards a more proprietary platform in the new Hangouts will make customers that rely on XMPP federation hesitant to adopt it. It also opens up increased competitive fervor from Microsoft with Lync federation.

Related Aragon Research

- [Messaging Battle Heats Up Between Apple, Facebook and Google: Enterprises Should Pay Attention](#)
- [The Consumerization of Voice and Video](#)
- [Box OneCloud will Challenge Google and Microsoft](#)
- [Polycom Takes Bold Steps to Transform the Video Era](#)