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Cisco Buys Assemblage, Boosting Its Cloud Collaboration Strategy

Summary: *Cisco's acquisition of Assemblage is another in a round of acquisitions aimed at advancing Cisco's cloud collaboration goals.*

Event: On June 27 2014, Cisco announced the acquisition of Assemblage, a startup that develops WebRTC/HTML5 collaboration tools. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

Analysis

Cisco's acquisition of Assemblage is an acknowledgement, we believe, that the future is about simple and easy-to-use collaboration in the browser. This acquisition fits with Cisco's Internet of Things (IoT) vision and its intercloud strategy. We believe a big part of it is about acquiring WebRTC and HTML5 engineering talent from Assemblage.

Cisco gets Assemblage's Kollaborate web and video conferencing solution, Presentation.io, which is a presentation application and Same.io for screen sharing. These applications are focused on real-time collaboration within a browser and easy access from anywhere and any device: "one-click browser-to-browser collaboration," in the company's phrase.

According to Assemblage, its technology integrates easily with third-party cloud services, supports 40 different file types, and works in compliant browsers without downloads, plug-ins or installations. Having it, and an experienced staff to implement it, should accelerate Cisco's strategy to make collaboration more open, more pervasive on mobile devices and easier to use.

Unlike the way it handled WebEx, a brand it has successfully leveraged, Cisco is likely to treat Assemblage as a technology buy. A key asset that Cisco acquired is a cadre of engineers and developers who are already skilled in using HTML5 and WebRTC to make collaboration work natively in compliant browsers without proprietary add-ons. It will likely de-emphasize the Assemblage product line and use its staff and technology to improve its existing solutions.

The Move To WebRTC

WebRTC has been touted as the next big shift for UCC (unified communication and collaboration). However, with all of the hype, the real business use cases have not been clear to enterprises, and few working implementations exist. Unify (formerly Siemens), is one of the first major UCC providers to redo their platform, renaming it Ansible and using WebRTC as its base. The concept of a one click to collaborate metaphor without downloading anything is a main benefit of a WebRTC based browser-to-browser collaboration solution. Cisco is following a trend here towards user-centric cloud collaboration.

Cisco's Collaboration Strategy

Cisco is at an inflection point as it moves toward being a software and services company. It has made major changes in its collaboration strategy. It recently stopped production of WebEx Social and announced a partnership with Jive, which will enable WebEx to be launched from the Jive social platform. In 2013 Cisco also bought Collaborate.com, which focused on mobile collaboration. We believe Cisco is modernizing its technology and moving to a more 21st-century collaboration platform.

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The Race To A Real-Time Cloud

Many vendors from the UCC space, as well as newer mobile and cloud providers such as Fuze, are racing to build cloud-based real-time collaboration services such as web and video conferencing. Even Google is making a big play here. At the same time mobile messaging is front and center as a threat to existing UCC clients such as Microsoft Lync and Cisco Jabber. The main thrust is about being user-centric and accessible from any device. We believe an aspect of this acquisition and the Collaborate.com acquisition is to get Cisco out ahead of the new generation of mobile messaging from vendors such as Biba.

Challenges and Opportunities

The challenge for Cisco will be the overlaps with WebEx and how all these acquisitions will be integrated. It will need to move toward a next generation collaboration platform that is simple, cloud-based and flexible. Cisco's collaboration platform will have to focus on the user experience, and the Assemblage platform can help bring them into the modern cloud era. Once it executes and incorporates the Assemblage technology, this acquisition will accelerate its move toward more interoperable, pervasive and user-friendly solutions.

Aragon Advisory

- Current Assemblage users should request roadmap to understand the future of their current investments.

- Cisco customers should also request detailed information on integration plans that may impact their investments in Cisco collaboration tools like WebEx.

- Cisco customers and prospect should also ask for detailed roadmaps from Cisco and other suppliers, particularly as it applies to Web and video conferencing in the cloud.

Bottom Line

While Cisco has made some missteps in collaboration, we believe the recent acquisitions will enable them to potentially reduce some time to market versus competitors. The market has moved on with more flexible and easier to use cloud based collaboration offerings. Cisco has to work on establishing itself further as a trusted enterprise collaboration provider and advisor.

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- [Cisco Gets Serious about Collaboration](#)

- [Cisco Acquires Collaborate.com For Stake In Mobile Collaboration](#)

- [Cisco Live 2014 – The Journey To IoE, Cloud And Services](#)