Author: David Mario Smith, Jim Lundy

Unify Launches Circuit, Its New Collaboration Platform

Summary: *Unify launched a new collaboration platform called Circuit, previously known as Project Ansible. It is now generally available for enterprises as a SaaS solution.*

Event: On October 28, 2014, Unify released Circuit as a communication and collaboration platform that aggregates voice, video, screen sharing, messaging and file sharing in a single interface.

Analysis

Circuit has been a couple of years in the making, and during that time a lot of innovation has taken place on the mobile messaging and collaboration front. Circuit puts Unify in a heated social collaboration battle with incumbents like Microsoft and a growing set of innovative mobile messaging providers vying for mindshare.

Focus on Work

Circuit was built to address the app-switching maze that causes workers to lose context. It is built on WebRTC and supports voice and video from a browser, PC or mobile device. Circuit combines all communication and collaboration capabilities into one unified interface, so users don't have to switch between applications. All interactions take place in a conversation stream where users can share and store files and content in the context of the conversation.

This was the goal of social collaboration before Circuit, but to be truly contextual, it needs deep integration with business applications. Unify has

built connectors to integrate Circuit with any SIP-based telephony platform and with Microsoft Exchange contacts (both will be available in January 2015. In addition, Unify applied Circuit design principles to OpenScape, which we think is important from a user migration perspective.

Platform as a Service

Circuit is also a "platform as a service" (PaaS) that developers can build specific applications on. This may be the more crucial piece of the Circuit story: it will only be as successful as the ecosystem around it. The better it integrates with business applications and processes, the closer it will be to how people actually work. If it is just another destination, adoption will suffer.

Software as a Service

Unify offers Circuit as a SaaS application with basic per-user licensing starting at $14.95. This is a good starting point for enterprises wanting rich communication and collaboration capabilities that go across multiple devices. However, the price point will bring comparisons to Microsoft Office 365, which has an enterprise plan starting at $8 per user per month with an annual commitment.

Challenges And Opportunities

While Unify was taking the time to do a lot of research for Circuit, the industry kept moving on. Newer mobile messaging and collaboration offerings are leading with a mobile-first design paradigm that follows consumer-messaging trends. Unify will have to send clear messages about the business benefits of Circuit for key roles and business use cases. For example, how will sales organizations or digital marketers

benefit from Circuit? These messages have to be use-case specific. Unify will also need to address and message around a roadmap for predictiveness. Business leaders increasingly look for applications that can be smarter. Unify's go-to-market strategy, focused on business leaders, will be led by partners, who will need to speak to business leaders in specific terms and scenarios.

Along with increasing its partner ecosystem and selling through partners, Unify is also investing in its direct sales organization. The organization has been restructured with a new leader, Norm Korey, formerly of AT&T and IBM. We believe Unify is making a significant investment here in its direct sales organization, especially after replacing more than a quarter of its sales reps in the past several months.

Unify has to be careful not to alienate IT leaders and professionals as they make this transition. Circuit's real-time capabilities, such as voice, video and screen sharing, will certainly raise network issues. Unify has an opportunity to help IT support the business with Circuit.

Integration with existing infrastructures will be crucial for Unify as it launches a new offering that may be viewed as "yet another application." Circuit will need deep integration with incumbent platforms that may include other UCC systems. It cannot be, or be perceived as, a rip-and-replace investment.

Aragon Advisory

- Unify OpenScape customers should request a detailed roadmap of how Circuit design elements will affect their current investments.

- Request detailed descriptions of how Circuit will integrate with business applications and processes.

- Collaboration planners should develop strategies that focus on people and the business processes they are involved in.

Bottom Line

What Circuit is attempting is not completely new. What is new is the research that went into it, to focus on people and how they work. After our initial review and evaluation, we think it will go through further refinement to identify the most natural user interface. Only real-world experience in production environments will reveal the examples and exceptions that arise from daily work activities.

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