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Topic: Unified Communications & Collaboration

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

Cisco Innovates with the Cisco Spark Board – Redefines Meetings and Workspaces

Summary: On January 24th, 2017, Cisco announced the Cisco Spark Board, a new Interactive Meeting Device that integrates with its Cisco Spark Application and [UCC Services](#).

Event: Cisco held an event for Press and Analysts in San Francisco, where it unveiled the Cisco Spark Board, which will be offered in a 55 or 70 inch configuration.

Analysis

The Cisco Spark Board represents true innovation in a crowded Video and UCC Market where complexity rules. With a next generation meeting device that combines voice and video meetings with networked whiteboarding, Cisco has redefined how people can collaborate and get work done.

The ease of use of the Cisco Spark Board and Cisco Spark Apps that run on mobile devices and PCs will force others to rethink their approach to collaboration as well as sharing and working on content. While there will be comparisons to the Microsoft Surface Hub devices, Cisco Spark represents a next generation design.

In a departure from previous announcement events, where the focus had been on how many products could be announced, Cisco's simple approach of unveiling one new product mimics the approach that others, such as Apple, use.

Cisco Spark Board: Redefining a Room Meeting Device

The Cisco Spark Board has all of the capabilities of a large iPad, except it goes further. It has Advanced Voice capabilities for speaking (Speaker Track), enterprise grade video, and it also supports basic and advanced meetings.

The whiteboarding feature, which others such as LogMeIn have but don't actively promote, will be very popular for two reasons. First, it is a shared whiteboard that all users can work on and edit (and access later for more editing). Second, Cisco has added built-in file encryption, so that any content, particularly sensitive content, is automatically encrypted.

Meetings and the Cisco Spark Board

One of the powerful features about starting a meeting with a Spark Board is that it can be a new meeting or a repeat meeting that can be started from an iPhone and then swiped to the Spark Board. While others enable this kind of functionality, the simplicity and elegance of Cisco's Spark Board design will attract buyers.

Cisco is in a transition to integrate from its legacy WebEx Meetings with Cisco Spark Meetings, but with its new FLEX Licensing Plans, we expect Cisco to minimize product overlap. Currently within the Cisco Spark service, there are basic

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meetings and Advanced Meetings available (Webex).

Video and the Cisco Spark Board

To us, the demonstration of Video Conferencing via the Spark Board went beyond a standard video meeting and looked immersive. Two people on opposite ends of the conference looked like they were in the same room. With 4K Cameras and a 4K Screen, it provided the extra fidelity to make the experience look immersive, which some would call Telepresence-like. Cisco indicated that actual resolution of the video conference on a Cisco Spark Board is 1080P.

Cisco Spark: Chatbots and Integrations

Cisco did have an update on its Developer Efforts around Spark, which has a full Chatbot framework. Analysts attending the event received information from a Chatbot called Ebo that was easy to talk to and provided event and weather information.

Cisco also reinforced a previous announcement that Cisco Spark will be integrated with Salesforce later in 2017. This will be done via a series of APIs.

Cisco Returns to Hardware and Software Innovation

There has been an underwhelming amount of innovation in the overall UCC market. Cisco can now claim that it has successfully reclaimed the Innovation leadership prize in UCC, at least for now.

Cisco Versus Microsoft

Cisco still faces tough competition from Microsoft, whose face-off product against Spark is Skype for Business (Voice, Video, and IM) and Microsoft Teams (Messaging).

Cisco and Microsoft have been battling to own the UCC market for years. Cisco's strength lies in its

broad portfolio of offerings, while Microsoft has been winning with Office 365 and Skype for Business (SkB).

Just like the Content Management market, we have entered an era where it is not one vendor takes all in UCC. There will be different use cases in the enterprise where different solutions will be deployed. A multi-vendor approach will be the way forward, and our take is that most enterprises will deploy solutions from both Cisco and Microsoft.

Aragon Advisory

- Enterprises should evaluate the Cisco Spark Board as an alternative to large monitors in conference rooms, in part because of its utility and price point.
- Enterprises should evaluate all providers of Collaboration and Communications for overall ease of use.
- Enterprises need to understand licensing models for Web and Video Conferencing.

Bottom Line

Enterprises looking for better ways to collaborate in offices, with clients, and with remote workers should evaluate Cisco Spark and the innovation offered by the Cisco Spark Board. Enterprises should also realize that multi-vendor deployments in UCC are becoming the norm.

Related Aragon Research

- [The Aragon Research Globe for Web and Video Conferencing, 2016](#)
- [The Future of UCC and the Rise of Platforms](#)