



Unified Communications: The Contact Center as a Starting Point

■ SDA Asia

The contact center is the logical base for the implementation of Unified Communications (UC) as it comes equipped with the metric tools that are necessary to demonstrate quick wins to senior management. In turn, a successfully deployed UC project can help the contact center to markedly extend its customer reach and maximize its potential.

Making fresh inroads in this space, Aspect Software recently launched a suite of six applications for the contact center.

SDA Asia speaks to Steven Tan, Aspect's regional marketing director for Asia Pacific and Middle East to find out about the impact of the current economic climate on the UC business, the company's partnership with Microsoft and its latest product offerings.

1. Last year, Aspect Software announced that it has become a Unified Communications (UC) provider for the contact center. How have the lines blurred between the two?

At Aspect, we saw early on, the promise that Unified Communications could bring to the contact center, where companies, recognizing the need to cut costs, saw UC as a strategic investment.

As Gartner has emphasized, the contact center is a very logical starting point for UC implementation. As the contact center is expected to handle calls from customers 24/7, UC tools can help determine the best agent or knowledge worker to handle the call, as well as help schedule and determine the availability to support customer interactions using rich presence integrated with calendaring. This helps increase customer



Steven Tan

Regional Marketing Director for Asia Pacific and Middle East, Aspect Software

satisfaction, increase collections and enhance sales and marketing efforts. These interactions can also be monitored, recorded and reported on; enabling measurable metrics that tools present in the contact center environment are ready to track.

2. How has the contact center space grown in recent years?

Contact centers are growing rapidly in India because of domestic outsourcing activities by many large telecom companies and banks. In China, e-commerce is growing very fast and those companies rely on huge call center operations. Basic call center functions have reached saturation point in mature markets like Australia. They are now looking to optimize their existing call center agents. We are offering solutions to improve their workforce effectiveness and performance.

3. You recently launched six new UC applications for the contact center. What is the rationale behind this and how do you expect it to improve the customer experience?

This product announcement is part of the company's strategy to provide solutions and services that turn the potential of unified communications into real business benefits.

The UC applications utilize a specific set of capabilities from the Aspect Unified IP and PerformanceEdge platform products that are based on a Microsoft .Net Web services platform. These applications

are different from other contact center software offerings because they consolidate UC capabilities for the contact center on a single, IT-ready standards-based software platform, reducing administrative, training and support costs. They are also purpose-built so customers can start using them sooner at a lower cost.

4. How has the current economic climate affected the UC business?

At times like this, there are two schools of thought. Some people will slam the brakes because capital budgets are constrained. But there are also opportunities for enterprises to leverage

better technologies for a lower cost of ownership in the long run. There is a short term impact in terms of business but it should not change the course of the trend which is the convergence of different technologies onto a unified communications framework.

Microsoft UC is going after the voice market pretty aggressively. Aspect Software will be providing services to support Microsoft in their move towards replacing the traditional PABX phones with Microsoft OCS voice.

5. Which business sector leads the UC market?

Enterprises are the early adopters because they see the benefit of integrating voice with their applications. The benefits are less obvious in smaller companies as you do not have as many applications to integrate or as many people based globally to take advantage of the cost reductions.

However, Aspect is exploring specific solutions for the SME market this year. For example, instead of charging for licenses we might go with a subscription model. We will announce more details in the second quarter of this year.

6. How are you positioning yourself in the enterprise sector?

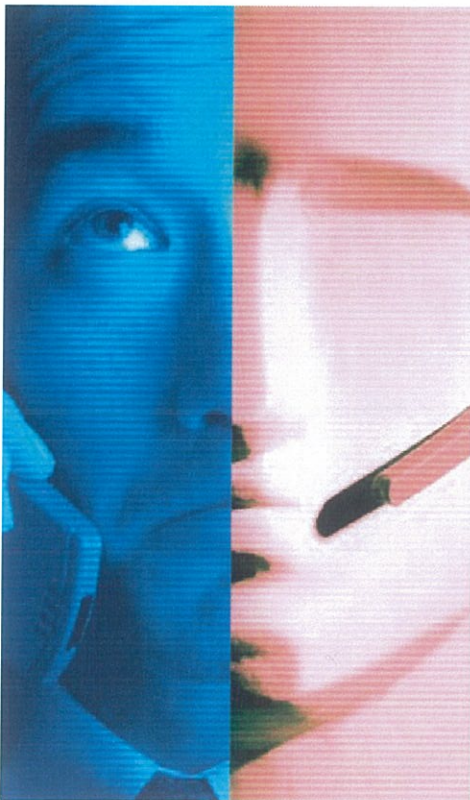
As part of the strategic alliance agreement with Microsoft, Aspect Professional Services has built a professional services and systems integration practice - unified communications services - to help customers with planning through implementation and support of Microsoft unified communications products, including Office Communications Server in their contact centers and throughout their enterprises for software-powered voice, instant messaging, presence and conferencing.

Aspect Software's Six New UC Applications for the Contact Center

- **Seamless Customer Service** delivers the tools needed for comprehensive call response, including coordinated self-service/live service and integrated assistance to improve first call resolution and enhance the overall customer experience.
- **Blended Interaction** provides inbound, outbound, self service and workforce optimization capabilities. By eliminating complex integration and providing common management, reporting and administration, Blended Interaction gives contact centers greater visibility, control and staffing efficiency in your multichannel contact center to enhance customer satisfaction and improve business results.
- **Streamlined Collections** automates early stage collections and enables expert agent engagement for a more effective delinquent account targeting strategy so contact centers can get more promises to pay faster, reduce servicing costs and write-offs, and improve collections results.
- **Productive Workforce** delivers the tools and processes to help you optimize resource utilization and adopt a continuous improvement culture. By motivating agents throughout their workforce lifecycle, contact centers can service more customers with fewer agents, reduce customer interaction costs, and improve customer service, sales and collections results.
- **Productive Workforce for Aspect eWorkforce Management** delivers the tools and processes to help Aspect eWorkforce Management users optimize resource utilization and adopt a continuous improvement culture. By motivating agents throughout their workforce lifecycle, contact centers can service more customers with fewer agents, reduce customer interaction costs, and improve customer service, sales and collections results.
- **Optimized Collections** utilizes performance, workforce and campaign management to enhance contact and calling strategies by applying the right resources at the right times to increase right party contacts, lower staffing costs, improve collector effectiveness and collections results.

What we now offer:

- UC Strategy, Planning and Architecture services that will help organizations identify the right UC opportunities, address potential pitfalls and get the right results. This includes roadmap development that outlines where and when specific functionality is deployed, and enterprise technical architecture specifications that cover software, security, management and availability requirements.
- Implementation and Integration services that will ensure successful implementation of UC technologies and applications with services for the design, installation, configurations and testing of Aspect and Microsoft UC products, with expert guidance for navigating obstacles. Aspect services also include custom application development and integration services to deliver a complete enterprise solution.



The first Aspect Professional Services team, consisting of sales, services and support, has been Microsoft certified and is ready to deploy OCS across the enterprise.

7. What are the top concerns of CIOs and CFOs right now?

The top concern on the minds of CIOs and CFOs are how to keep costs low while improving productivity and efficiency to drive business outcomes. The economic situation has made it even more of an imperative to do more with less – for example, how can technology help the business improve customer service whilst maintaining an efficient workforce. With unified communications and efficient workforce management software, that can be achieved.

8. How will your partnership with Microsoft propel your business further? What is your vision for the APAC region this year?

Microsoft and Aspect announced a multi year strategic alliance in March 2008 to help deliver unified communications (UC) to contact centers around the world. We will continue to work with Microsoft to deliver software-powered voice and unified communications as the leading option to new and existing customers. Our alliance and the resulting joint solutions are designed to enhance sales, service and support capabilities for organizations of all types and sizes, across many industries. We strongly believe that the combination of Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 and Aspect Unified IP will redefine the way companies interact with their customers.

As mentioned above, we are working closely with Microsoft to help customers with the implementation and support of Microsoft UC solutions.

We see this as a strategic role to enable the growth of Aspect globally and in the APAC region.

9. Could you please tell us more about your UC demo center at Singapore's OUB Center?

The demo center in Singapore is one of 3 demo centers globally, which are essentially facilities for hands-on software demonstrations that enable Aspect customers and prospects to experience unified communications first-hand through interaction with Aspect Unified IP and PerformanceEdge products. Those who visit the customer briefing centers will gain a better understanding of how Aspect can help streamline communications for improved business processes and a successful unified communications strategy.

10. What steps can companies take to effectively deploy UC projects.

UC is a journey.

1. Put together a project team
2. Identify the objectives of implementing UC. Eg. Some companies want mobile workers, others find value add in using it to locate experts within the enterprise
3. Conduct a feasibility study to champion the benefits of UC
4. Work with vendors who are able to provide support and services needed in the medium and the long run so that they are able to progressively upgrade and expand their UC capabilities
5. Large enterprises normally do not embark on a huge project all at once. They have to start somewhere where they can show quick wins and return on investment to their C-levels. The contact center is a logical starting point as that is where the tools for evaluation are. ■