

Bold, New Access Options in Presence Management

Presence Management has redefined how executives are accessed in the business world. In fact, how presence itself is accessed has been redefined. In addition to typical interfaces available over the PC or laptop, executives can now update their presence status on smart phones such as the Apple® iPhone®, Google™ Android™, Blackberry® and Windows® Smart Phones.

Integrating these phones with your corporate Unified Communications (UC) system is easy! All that is required is a simple UC client that is easily downloaded to any mobile device. For Apple, you will be able to find a UC client in the App. Store. For Android, you can find the application in the Market. Blackberry users can download the application through App. World. For a Windows Smart Phone, the application must be provided by the vendor, preferably through a web-accessible link to the application. All of these applications are installed directly onto the mobile phone and once configured, they integrate back into the enterprise UC system. This enables users to change Presence Management settings directly from their personal mobile devices.

With the right product, the UC client will fully integrate with the phone's calendar. This means that simply setting an appointment through the phone will update presence status. Users can select status options, such as "Office," "Meeting," "Lunch," or "Away on Business," and can create their own customized locations based upon their preferences. Through "Find Me/Follow Me," when a call comes into the PBX, it is routed to whichever location the user has indicated, including their desk phone, cell phone, voicemail or any other specified number. Additionally, calls can be routed based on caller ID and unique ringtones, thereby allowing the user to know where the inbound call originates prior to answering their phone.

Architecture Requirements

In most settings, the Presence Management application will receive information about users from multiple systems, including calendar applications, workflow applications, and phone networks. While SIP aligns a single user's identity in multiple domains, the challenge with SIP resides in multiple servers that are housed at the same domain all attempting to simultaneously define the user's current presence status.

While several of those sources may be willing and able to offer simultaneous presence information on a given user, the enterprise may actually have multiple boxes maintaining presence state information, and these boxes must be synchronized. The following explanation of this issue was outlined succinctly by Microsoft's Eric Swift¹: "It's difficult to have two and synchronize, because you end up with two versions of the truth. They get out of synch, updates collide and that's a hard problem that's been looked at across many different technical areas. You run into the same problems; one of them is, which version of the truth are you going to believe? And what happens when they get out of synch? And with something like real-time presence, boy, getting out of synch can be critical."

But the answer to this problem is simple. If you select a vendor that offers Presence Management as part of one integrated phone platform, the flow of presence information will be carefully orchestrated. One vendor should be able to deliver a Unified Communications system, including Presence Management that works as part of a comprehensive package, as opposed to competing technologies from different vendors that are all trying to keep domain over a user's current presence data.



102 Timbertrace Ct.
Columbia, SC 29212
1-866-IDEACOM (433-2266)
www.ideacom.org

Presence Management in Action

The robust productivity benefits offered by Presence Management make the deployment effort very worthwhile. Imagine an executive at her son's ballgame. Three calls come in to her extension from the corporate PBX. One of the calls involves a corporate housekeeping issue. The system does not recognize the inbound caller ID as a priority number, so the call is routed to the executive's voicemail. The second call is recognized as important, so the caller hears a customized message stating that the executive cannot take their call but to please send an IM. The executive handles the conversation discretely, while not missing a single important moment of the ballgame. When the game ends, the executive uses her smart phone to update her status to available just as the third call comes in from a very important client. She accepts the call and effectively maintains a working business presence despite not being physically located at her office.

Through their smart phone, a user can also review the presence status of every employee within their organization and doesn't waste time attempting to reach an employee who is unavailable. It is also a great tool for setting up meetings and conference calls. Businesses previously referred to the "water cooler effect" as the productivity boost that occurs when workers unintentionally bump into each other throughout the day and happen to exchange progress reports and remind each other about deadlines and deliverables. The new paradigm is known as the "presence effect,"² whereby Presence Management increases the productivity of today's mobile workers to a level previously unknown at the water cooler.

Presence Management is an offering every company should make available to all employees who are not chained to their desk. Just ensure the vendor you select can provide Presence Management as part of a complete, holistic package.

¹ Eric Kraph, "Interoperability in IP Telephony and Unified Communications," No Jitter, (May 26, 2008), <http://www.nojitter.com/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=208400094&pgno=4&queryText=>

² Christopher Glenn, "This Isn't Your Father's Telecommuting," The Seamless Enterprise, (April 07, 2009), <http://seamlessenterprise.com/collaboration/this-isn%e2%80%99t-your-father%e2%80%99s-telecommuting/>



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