

Presence Boosts Mobile Phone Productivity

Mobile presence technology is capable of showing real-time status changes for people on a global scale, empowering employees with agility and connectivity to reach co-workers and respond to messages faster and more efficiently than ever before. This emerging technology will be a source of competitive advantage for businesses that invest in solutions for a mobile workforce.

Cisco® Unified Communications, which includes IP telephony, unified messaging, customer contact, Web and video conferencing, and presence technology, is dramatically helping businesses communicate more efficiently. Now Cisco is extending and enhancing the mobility component of Cisco Unified Communications. The combination is allowing knowledge workers who are mobile—whether on a retail floor or at an airport or at a Wi-Fi hotspot in a local coffee shop—to also enjoy the efficiencies and speed of Cisco Unified Communications.

Introduction

In the real world, a sales executive turns off his mobile phone while traveling across the country to visit a customer. He is not able to answer your call. Your manager has just ended her meeting and is now available for you to call her mobile phone, but you do not know whether she is available to discuss a critical project. Now imagine that you can select a setting on your phone that lets you know when co-workers are available to take your calls. Imagine that people can know when you are busy and not able to answer a call. Welcome to the sophisticated world of presence technology, which allows people to know when a person is connected to the network and when he or she is available to talk.

Inefficient communications are the cause of internal business decision delays, according to Forrester Research—specifically, the inability to quickly reach mobile and remote colleagues. With Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator, presence technology provides rich communications capabilities on mobile phones and smartphones, all from a single, intuitive interface. Presence is here today with Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator, an integral part of the Cisco Unified Communications family of products.

Presence is Here Today

Presence is an emerging technology that can provide real benefits in accelerating communication and collaboration between people.

A traditional model of presence is seen in today's computer-based instant messaging (IM) applications. If you are online and want a quick back-and-forth communication with a friend or colleague, IM is a fast and easy alternative to e-mail. One valuable aspect of IM is the capability to see on your display whether your friend or colleague is currently logged on to the network and whether there has been any recent typing on his or her personal computer. This presence information allows individuals to share information about their status with others on the network. If a colleague is online and active, you can type and send your message. It will pop up on the recipient's screen instantly, and a reply will probably appear on your screen within seconds. If you had used e-mail instead, you would not know whether your recipient was online, or present, to

read your message, nor should you necessarily expect to see a response to your message any time soon.

On mobile phones, the notion of presence can be broadened to include user-based presence or availability status. Availability status allows people to convey not only that they are present on the system, but also that they are able to accept a call or message at a given time. Availability can also include location or other attributes associated with a person's ability to communicate.

Most likely, your mobile phone has caller ID but does not support presence or availability features. Specifically, caller ID does not help the caller place the call at the best time for you to receive it. The caller does not know whether your phone is turned on, or whether you are available and interested in receiving a call. If you are busy, the caller must wait for the ring sequence, listen to your greeting, and leave a message.

On many occasions, callers are satisfied with leaving a voicemail message. They may prefer not to speak live to the recipient, or they consider an issue resolved because they have passed on the necessary information. That approach is acceptable for many tasks, and there are many situations in which a simple one-way message is sufficient. But if you actually need to speak to someone and require a live conversation, you want your call answered.

Are You Available to Talk Right Now?

For busy mobile professionals, who receive dozens of calls each day, the challenges associated with managing so many calls can present real problems. While employees are busy and not able to use their phones, messages stack up in voicemail, and tasks are delayed until there is time to retrieve and respond to missed calls. At other times, mobile phones ring indiscriminately, leaving workers with just a few seconds to decide whether to take a call.

In reality, most calls do end up in voicemail. Industry research indicates that only about 20 to 30 percent of all calls placed actually reach the intended recipient the first time. This is a waste of time for both parties. In business, where delays can directly affect results, these seemingly modest delays can have negative consequences that affect both revenue and profitability.

Mobile phones have emerged as the ubiquitous, always-on and always-present device. A recent study by BBDO revealed that as many as 75 percent of U.S. mobile phone users keep their phones turned on and within reach 16 hours or more each day. Of those, many leave their mobile phones and e-mail devices powered on and nearby even while they sleep.

Until recently, mobile phones were used exclusively for their convenience and basic voice capability. But as technology has evolved and needs have changed, mobile phones have become increasingly sophisticated. Now, they connect to the Internet and IP data networks, and it is much easier to add presence capability and other applications to them. No matter where employees are, they can now share their availability status and observe the current status of other users. This new capability adds needed intelligence to everyday communications. Mobile phones linked to personal calendar applications can automatically change your status to "busy" when you start a meeting, and return your status to "available" when it is over. Similarly, you can change your status to "unavailable" as you go to sleep with your phone beside you.

Improving the Effectiveness of Business Communications

Business success depends on employees' ability to make decisions quickly and act on new information. "Sorry, I am not available, please leave a message," does not help. Worse, the caller has no idea when the recipient will be available to hear the message and reply.

Research on phone use shows that some business executives spend 2 hours each day leaving, listening to and responding to voicemail messages. The daily volume of messages from IM, e-mail, and voicemail affect worker productivity. It has become a cliché for busy managers to rush into the hallway following a meeting, call their office voicemail from their mobile phones, jot down names and phone numbers, and then prioritize callbacks. As calls are returned, too many result in new voicemail messages and new delays.

But presence capabilities on mobile phones change all that, especially in organizations in which people are motivated to reach one another to perform their jobs and keep business moving. Because mobility is closely aligned with productivity, employees who use mobile solutions such as presence increase their output and improve cycle time by eliminating bottlenecks in everyday communications.

Presence on mobile phones is a simple solution for employees who regularly use mobile phones for business purposes. In an enterprise, you can quickly identify communities of people who call each other regularly and rely on timely conversations to complete tasks and resolve issues. Even small improvements in their ability to reach one another can have significant benefits for the organization.

For example, a system that allows an employee to quickly see who is currently available from a mobile handset eliminates the need to dial multiple numbers using the trial-and-error method to reach a colleague. Instead, the employee can easily see who is available, and place a call to the appropriate person—no wasted calls, no time wasted leaving voicemail messages, and no wasted callbacks from other employees hours or days after the problem was resolved.

Presence solutions can have a direct effect on business processes. If a field service representative is visiting a customer site and needs help in an area outside of her expertise, she would traditionally call the dispatcher or her supervisor to seek assistance, leave a message, or schedule another visit. But with presence, she can use her mobile handset to identify which expert is available to help her and reach that person by phone so she can request the necessary information or support.

Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator

Part of the Cisco Unified Communications family of products, Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator is an easy-to-use software application for mobile handsets that facilitates more effective communications for mobile employees. By extending enterprise communications applications and services to mobile phones and smart phones, Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator streamlines the communication experience, allowing real-time collaboration across the enterprise. With Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator, you can place and receive calls, access company directory contacts, check presence information, and review voicemail messages, as well as receive Cisco Unified MeetingPlace® notifications and other vital information—all from a single, intuitive interface linked to Cisco Unified Communications.

Presence capability is integral to Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator and provides employees with up-to-date availability information. By looking at the phone display (Figure 1), an employee can easily see who is available and who is busy. By simply selecting the user's name, an employee can dial a call.

Figure 1. Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator



As Figure 1 shows, presence information displayed beside names in the directory reveals who is available (green check mark) and who is busy (blue). It also shows who is offline or unavailable (red).

Share Your Availability, Maintain Your Privacy

Of course, you do not want everyone to know your availability, and you do not want to lose your privacy. The capability to provide presence information selectively is what separates enterprise presence solutions from consumer solutions such as those offered by AOL, Yahoo, and Microsoft. Enterprise presence solutions have gained acceptance within leading corporations, where IT staff can manage the system, set security policies, and help ensure privacy of the information.

As an enterprise-class solution for mobile phones, Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator also provides the necessary security. Presence information is shared through enterprise-managed servers, and identification and authorization measures are used to maintain privacy. Additionally, communications themselves are protected with encryption and other mechanisms.

A Competitive Edge

Employee mobility has changed the face of the global workforce, but it has created new challenges for technology. Increasing demands for business responsiveness increase the need for timely conversations and real-time access to information. Employees who use mobile solutions can increase their personal productivity by accomplishing more in less time while also improving the effectiveness of communications across the enterprise. New functions such as presence optimize mobile communications by conveying important information about people and their current availability. When combined with other communications functions, presence is a breakthrough that greatly improves the way people use mobile phones to reach one another and helps them respond more quickly to critical business issues. Ultimately, presence can streamline communications and more easily connect people anywhere, anytime, and on any device. These benefits offer greater business agility and responsiveness for a global mobile workforce intent on accelerating business.

