

Communications Enabled Business Process Solutions Slash Latency

By Mack Leathurby, Editor In Chief | March, 2007



Intelligent Communications for the enterprise have truly arrived in 2007 with advanced communications enabled business processes (CEBP) solutions can simplify business process complexity and deliver real time, responsive actions that can be used to impact a company's top and bottom line. When companies align Intelligent Communications powered by CEBP solutions with their business imperatives, companies can be transformed in ways that really pay off. Let's look at what this transformation is all about by more closely examining CEBP as one of the key enablers of Intelligent Communications.

“Communication enabled business processes allow the communication functions to be tightly integrated directly with the systems and applications that the individuals are using.”

Bern Elliot, Steve Blood, and Bob Hafner, “Achieving Agility Through Communication-Enabled Business Processes, Gartner Research note, April 2006

Customer data is growing at 50% annually. That's just one among many examples of the information complexity and business velocity that confronts most companies today. Traditional business processes often can't keep pace and therefore don't deliver actionable information to the right people at the right time – because of inherent human delay. Why does this latency persist? Because communications – the fundamental enabler of agility – has remained a separate technology tool businesspeople rely upon to handle or fix the work that data-driven business processes can't manage.

Now, the technical barriers between business processes and communications are essentially being eliminated with the increasing adoption of IP telephony and the transformation of communications capabilities into software services that can be used within business processes. Business processes – not just the isolated applications but the complete process – now can be enabled with real-time communication interactions. This approach creates a closed loop between communications and data-driven processes and slashes latency as humans interact responsively with both people and systems – driving strategic business impact as well as cutting communications costs.

2 + 2 = 5: Exponential Impact of Converged Communications Plus Processes

To understand what's possible in a converged network environment when communications and business processes are no longer separated, consider the impact of communications enablement on two very different but commonplace sets of business processes:

- Sales processes, which are largely communications-driven
- Supply chain management processes, which are extensively data- driven

“Communications enabled business applications add a new dimension to...person-person, system-person, and system-system communication-driven activities... The business efficiencies that can be gained are enormous and over time can potentially put the economy on another productivity growth curve.”

Nick Lippis, Lippis Report Issue 67:
Extracting Human and System Delay
from Business Process, Sept. 18, 2006

In sales, latency in communications is the make-or-break factor for many deals. If a sales manager is working to close a major new deal but doesn't know about supply or product issues the customer is experiencing or when they will be fixed, then an aggressive competitor can take advantage and win the business. By proactively engaging the right sales managers in resolution processes with the right product, supply and even transportation people, CEBP ensures that everyone is in the loop. Removing latency allows sales managers to communicate more proactively with their customers and ensure new deals get closed.

In today's highly interdependent supply chains, businesses now find it essential to remove latency and respond immediately to exceptions when the supply chain breaks down. In day-to-day operations, enterprise resource planning (ERP) and supply chain management systems (SCM) are the primary tools for managing far-flung, often global supply chains and maintaining Just-in-Time inventories. But what happens when

inevitable breakdowns occur? Humans need to intervene. Reaction time is critical – the breakdown event must be detected, as quickly as possible, and the right person or people must be notified through any communications means necessary. This is where CEBP comes in to action. Gwyne Wade, Vice President for the new CEBP solutions at Avaya, discusses additional CEBP examples in her article later in this newsletter. Customer case studies including Whirlpool in the consumer manufacturing area and Computer Resources in the healthcare area can also be found at www.avaya.com/cebp.

Small Changes, Big Impacts

Communications enabled business processes are new to most CIOs and enterprise technology managers – so while they are eager to move forward, the key question often is “where and how to start?” Typically, the low-hanging fruit includes processes that are strategic, have undesired latency, and offer strong return on investment that can fuel communications enablement of additional processes.

Defining strategic goals and examining how process latency impacts these goals is usually a useful starting point. For instance, strategic objectives may include improving disaster recovery, customer satisfaction, employee productivity, or supply chain agility. In the past, achieving the goal of removing human latency from these key processes has required extensive and expensive communications expertise, along with the ability to take a holistic view of business and communications processes. Now however, with service oriented architecture (SOA) that encapsulate complex capabilities in simple, standards-based service wrappers, businesses have the opportunity to integrate previously disparate communications and data applications more quickly and cost effectively.

While the ability to deploy SOA or reuse other types of services is one important aspect of today’s technology driven enterprise, the real advantage for a business with CEBP solutions is the ability to treat communications as just another business service – something you can integrate into any business process to make it more seamless and eliminate latency. This evolution of IP telephony communications “promises to extract delay, both human and system from business process, increasing enterprise agility or the ability of a company to react to real time events or market changes,” writes Nick Lippis in his report *Extracting Human and System Delay from Business Process*.

“The compelling benefits of service-oriented architectures—easier communication and interaction among applications—and the increasingly mature offerings from vendors are enticing more IT executives to give it a close look.

Janaki Akella, Kishore Kanakamedala, and Roger P. Roberts, “What’s on CIO agendas in 2007: A McKinsey Survey,” McKinsey Quarterly, January 2007

A redesign-based approach with CEBP allows companies to be both holistic and incremental - look at the big picture, then move forward making small but high-leverage changes that create a controlled snowball effect for improving the business. Furthermore, the first companies that make this move to Intelligent Communications with CEBP are going to gain a real competitive edge in their market as they reduce human and process latencies via intelligent business communication applications. For these initial adopters and for all enterprises that follow this strategy, the potential payoff is huge.

“Avaya is... a company with a definite technical mission. And if it succeeds, then we will finally have the convergence of telecomms and computing. Oh... and there will be (significant) business benefits.”

Robin Bloor, “Avaya and SOA,” IT Analysis, Nov. 22, 2006

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