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Mobility Trends in Financial Services

An Executive Interview with Humphrey Chen, Avaya

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Recent Avaya-sponsored research conducted by Forrester Consulting on unified communications in financial services revealed that 50% of financial services employees are mobile 25% of the time during the work week.¹ To explore what financial services firms are doing to optimize their mobile workers' performance, we interviewed Humphrey D. Chen, Director of Product Management for United Clients in Avaya Unified Communications Division.

At Avaya, Mr. Chen oversees mobile communications technologies — including IP Softphone with support for Microsoft Office Communicator, Lotus Sametime & Lenovo Thinkpads; Avaya Extension to Cellular, Avaya one-X™ Mobile; Avaya one-X™ Portal and the Avaya next-generation IP Softphone & SIP Softphone (previously one-X™ Desktop Edition).

Mr. Chen holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an MBA from the Harvard Business School.



Avaya: In the financial services sector, what is the level of demand for mobility applications and, are particular drivers emerging?

Our research shows that mobility is growing rapidly in the financial services sector. There appear to be three primary drivers; flexibility, accountability and cost effectiveness.

1. By flexibility we mean that financial services organizations are recognizing that to be most effective, employees need a smooth transition into and out of the office.

And since mobile device use in the office is increasing, when they are in the office, employees also need the ability to transition seamlessly to and from mobile devices. The driver is the need to provide as much communications continuity as possible for employees.

This is becoming more important to employees as well as employers. The accommodation of employees' ever evolving need for flexibility of time and location has become an important factor in hiring and keeping the best employee talent.

2. Properly managed mobility also greatly enhances accountability. All business communications — including mobile — can be routed through the same network and be monitored, measured and even recorded when needed. Such controlled, unified communications are also more easily audited, for more complete regulatory compliance.
3. When mobile communications are fully included in an organization's unified communications plan it can also result in great opportunities for cost savings. For example, organizations are using least-cost routing, where all calls go through the network. This allows the organization to route calls via the path that makes the most economic sense. They can maximize use of whatever global network they have in place. Carrier integrated gateways (for example, GSM) also allow mobile work-related calls to be treated as "in network." Such calls, effectively, become "free."

Avaya: What jobs have the most demand for this kind of unified mobile communications?

The best way to answer this question may be to ask, "Who isn't mobile?" Any time workers are away from their desks, they are, essentially, mobile. Many mobility specialists define a mobile worker as "anyone who has a cell phone." Today, that includes virtually all information workers, since cell phones are no longer an elite tool.

In fact, the ratio between desk and mobile phone use in the U.S. is already 1:1. The mobile phone ratio is even higher abroad. So, virtually everyone deals with mobile communications.

Salespeople present the most obvious case for mobility in financial services. But workers who don't want to be limited to just working at their desks are what we'd call a mobile worker.

Unfortunately, this mobility has also resulted in people dealing with the inefficiencies of multiple directories and contact lists in their Outlook or Notes applications and on their mobile phones. With today's technology, a banker, claims adjuster, or wealth manager should not have to work with multiple, often non-auditable, voice message systems. The inefficiencies extend beyond each worker, since the IT departments find these multiple setups difficult and expensive to maintain or support.

It makes sense for solution providers to support all functions, and to support them as transparently as possible. Information workers want as little discontinuity as possible when they leave or come back to their offices.

Giving employees the functionality they need involves, essentially, giving their mobile devices all or almost all the communications applications capabilities their desktop devices (including their PC's) have.

So virtually any organization and an employee in almost any position can benefit from more unified communications.

Avaya: What do you see as core mobility capabilities for information workers in the finance sector today?

The goal of communications solutions providers today is to allow the mobile or remote worker to duplicate his or her desk-top capabilities no matter where they are and how fast they are moving — with equal security and maximum cost savings.

Exact mobility requirements are dictated in each case by the way people work. For example, people who want to start their workday when they enter the car or go to the train station for their commute appreciate seamless mobility that allows them to have full functionality while mobile.

Later in the day, an employee may want to make a smooth transition from work to a social engagement, while carrying on business conversations. Such applications have been called "relationship savers," since they enable people to arrive where they need to be, on time for social or family obligations, yet continue important conversations while in transit. An example of a technology that enables this is Avaya's "easy-mobile-switcher."

With such applications, a business associate or customer at the other end of the line has no idea that the employee has transitioned from the desk phone to the cell phone. All calls, including cell phone calls, appear to be coming from the office. The mobile worker can also receive calls on cell phones through an office number — with nothing to alert the caller that their call was picked up on a mobile device.

Other scenarios where seamless mobility is useful? When employees are on the road they make heavy use of cell phones. For instance, a commercial lending officer with client meetings is likely to be on his or her cell phone throughout the entire day.

Home or mobile workers who are not required to be in the office are another example. Mobility solutions allow them to work while the outside world perceives them as working from the office. This enables organizations to hire and retain people who have high-level skills but need lifestyle/location flexibility.

There is also a need in the financial services sector for some special capabilities. Particularly in wealth management, there may be a need to record certain communications. Avaya can make this capability available even if a call is initiated from a cell phone.

This fixed-to-mobile convergence permits such a greater degree of mobile and remote working that it allows an organization to offer many employment incentives in terms of lifestyle. It can have great impact on employee recruitment and retention.

Avaya: Given that the ability to work from home is becoming more feasible and more important to employees, what trends do you see in the enterprise-connected home office arena?

We have mentioned a trend toward more multi-tasking in a more integrated manner, with more choices and more options. A properly provisioned organization can offer the exact capabilities an employee needs — wherever the workplace is located.

Manufacturers are aware of this trend, and to support and take advantage of it, are trying to invent better Internet devices. The iPhone is definitely an advance, and there are parallel developments in the Blackberry, Windows Mobile and smart-phone environments. Due to this proliferation of devices providers try to make their communications applications device-neutral. As customers move to more sophisticated devices they will still be able to make use of the devices' full capabilities.

At Avaya, we believe we have succeeded in this regard. For example, we offer an application called one-X Mobile, which enables organizations of all sizes to provide home-office workers with capabilities identical to those working in the office, easily and simply, with an equal level of security.

We are also moving communications applications into laptops as well as PCs, in order to support employees who travel frequently as well as the telecommuters with a home office. Previously, laptop mobility involved working with limited capabilities — something of a “lowest common denominator.” But today, laptops such as the Lenovo Thinkpads provide extensive mobility capabilities. We take advantage of these expanded capabilities in designing mobility applications.

Avaya: Security is top-of-mind for financial services firms. What are security considerations IT managers should address when formulating their enterprise mobility strategies?

Using IP telephony, an organization can leverage 128-bit security just about anywhere. It doesn't matter what device it is going through. The same rigor has to be applied inside and outside the office. As providers support more devices and platforms, they leverage the security inherent in all of those platforms.

There are always security concerns as employees move from network to network. Related issues are accountability and audit-ability. So it is always necessary to work toward having a “single source of truth.” No matter where a call is initiated, and whether it initiates on a mobile phone, soft-phone at home, or a VPN hard phone, there must be a single repository that keeps track of what has happened, what device was used, and where and when it happened.

This makes communications and logging more transparent, which in turn makes it easier to be compliant. Previously this information was available only on difficult to access logs/reports but with today's applications end-users can have easier access to their own information.

However, no organization can guarantee the security of public, unencrypted WIFI networks and therefore need to put in place supporting operational security processes if such networks are used.

Avaya: Can you talk about dual-mode and WiFi adoption in the industry?

Dual-mode WiFi devices are already in the hands of the early adopters in the North American marketplace. But this is more visible in the consumer rather than enterprise arena.

The successful adoption of WiFi will depend on the versatility of available dual-mode devices. The iPhone is an example of more versatile devices coming to market. Adoption of such devices can be a predictor of wider adoption of WiFi.

On the other hand, the higher price of these devices can be a structural inhibitor to mass adoption. And such devices require specially configured access points.

In terms of progress, the question is whether IT departments will configure access points and this will enable wider adoption of more devices, or whether employees' wider use of such devices will prompt IT departments to configure access points.

There is also the issue of network dependencies. Not too many years ago such devices required up to ten network dependencies to operate. Today, it is closer to three or four. As the number of these dependencies continues to go down, it will be easier and more cost effective for IT departments to more easily support dual-mode successfully.

There are also industry-specific considerations. For instance many hotels choose to have WiFi broadly available in their high traffic areas, where both employees and guests are likely to value it. On the other hand, an investment bank might find little value in WiFi enabling the small space between someone's desk and the conference room. So today, there is a perceived lack of need for WiFi devices in many financial services firms. If a company believes that the vast majority of their workforce is deskbound, then they might perceive dual mode/WiFi capabilities as having limited value.

One thing that may accelerate the use of dual-mode devices is the adoption of secure wireless networks from companies like Aruba and Meru Networks. As financial services firms expand their branch network or remodel existing branches, they will be choosing between wired, wireless or a combination? As more secure wireless networks are in place supporting voice over IP seamlessly, we'll see more dual mode devices.

Avaya: Any general predictions about where the industry is headed?

The increasing convergence of voice, data and applications will require providers to deal with ever increasing modalities and complication. But the goal of providers will continue to be making things as simple and seamless as possible for the end user.

This is a market opportunity, so there will be increasing competition to provide this kind of environment, with Microsoft, among others, entering the marketplace and helping expand the possibilities.

Overall, it is an exciting time for mobility. Innovation should continue to accelerate. Providers will engineer superior end-user experiences, make use of social networking applications, and provide software that is more extensible using session-initiated protocol (SIP).

At Avaya, in particular, we're proud of the commitment we have to continually improve seamless mobility, regardless of platforms and devices.

¹ Unified Communications Accelerates Business Processes, Forrester Consulting, Sponsored by Avaya, 2007

About Avaya

Avaya delivers Intelligent Communications solutions that help companies transform their businesses to achieve market-place advantage. More than 1 million businesses worldwide, including more than 90 percent of the FORTUNE 500®, use Avaya solutions for IP Telephony,

Unified Communications, Contact Centers and Communications Enabled Business Processes.

Avaya Global Services provides comprehensive service and support for companies, small to large. For more information visit the Avaya Web site: <http://www.avaya.com>.

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