



Colt demonstrates the benefits of a Unified Communications and Collaboration strategy

Colt proved an internal business case for Unified Communications & Collaboration and de-risked its internal roll-out.

Colt is Europe's information delivery platform, enabling its customers to share, process and store their vital business information. Colt provides customers with a powerful resource that combines network and IT infrastructure with expertise in IT managed services, networking and communication solutions. Colt operates a 13-country, 25,000km network that includes metropolitan area networks in 34 major European cities with direct fibre connections into 17,000 buildings and 19 Colt data centres.

Like many of our customers, at Colt we are always seeking ways in which technology can help us to innovate, enable us to serve our end customers better, support more flexible working practices and proactively underpin the culture of our company.

We rely on our IT department to not only deliver and support the multitude of IT systems that underpin our customer services, but also to support our internal operations – 5,000 employees spread across 15 countries.

And as with so many of our customers, our IT department is under increasing pressure to deliver both customer-facing and internal transformation projects to tight budgets and short timeframes.

In May 2009, our CEO, Rakesh Bhasin, challenged our CIO, Mark Leonard, to 'Show me what great looks like!' by demonstrating the benefits of a Unified Communications approach and how this could prove a transformational way forward for Colt.

At the heart of this challenge was a desire to give our employees the latest business tools to do their job, increased flexibility and ultimately, increased choice. All these points are very much aligned to Colt's refreshed strategy and new brand which officially 'launched' the same month. In many ways the benefits of a Unified Communications approach are a key supporting pillar of our new brand and culture.

Business Challenges

At Colt we faced a number of the generic business challenges that many companies face:

- A need to refresh hardware and networks
- An ineffective use of office space
- The challenge of collaboration across multiple countries, and
- Rising operating costs

In addition to those 'usual' challenges, we also had:

- A decentralised telephony model with 10 PBXs across the business, and
- An IT desktop refresh which was long overdue

Building the business case

When talking about Unified Communications & Collaboration (UC&C) there are multiple definitions. Everyone has different ideas as to what is meant by UC&C and a different understanding of what should be included in such a solution. This makes agreeing a definition and then building and proving a business case that delivers tangible benefits incredibly challenging!

In the opinion of Chris Hewertson, Director of IT Transformation, the solution needed to be broader than simply voice, integrated with Instant Messaging and Microsoft Outlook. And the business case needed to be built around more than just the technology alone or the numbers would never stack up.

Given all this, we took a holistic approach from the very start of the project. It wasn't just about the technology and the benefits that this could deliver - customer, workspace and employee benefits were all considered and built into the business case. Working style and supporting the cultural agenda of the company were vital components.

The Project

The project approach was based around a pilot with 200 users across three sites and had clearly defined objectives, benefits and success criteria. Success was measured using a combination of personal (user) and programme success factors.

The pilot - which was supported by a full day's training for all users, floorwalkers and numerous opportunities for feedback - delivered:

Hardware	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New notebooks and netbooks - Windows 2007• Desktop video conferencing• Microsoft round table (conferencing cameras)
Messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Microsoft OCS (voice, video, messaging)• Microsoft Exchange and Microsoft Outlook 2007 (e-mail)• Microsoft Live meeting (conferencing solution)
Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wi-Fi upgraded or rolled out in three pilot locations• Guest Wi-Fi enabled• iPass (public Wi-Fi hotspot and 3G mobile access)
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avaya IP telephony backbone• Avaya OneX soft phones and hard phones• Bluetooth and standard USB headsets
Productivity tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Microsoft Office 2010• Microsoft Sharepoint

All of the communication tools were unified - integrated with each other. Voice-mails are delivered as e-mails and users can click on Outlook contacts to initiate a call from their desk phone.

In January 2010, the pilot users were surveyed against the personal and programme factors that had been defined at the outset, with the following results:

Personal success factors:

- “It works for me and my customers” - 91% agreed
- “It gives me the freedom to work flexibly” - 95% agreed
- “I can do great work and be effective” - 85% agreed
- “It’s removed the barriers” - 73% agreed
- “It gives me what I need to be successful” - 82% agreed

Programme success factors:

- 95% of respondents report that they either now have the tools to allow them to work effectively or that the situation has improved
- 86% rated the project better or significantly better when compared to previous IT projects
- 75% rated the delivery better or significantly better when compared against the agreed ‘wish list’

In terms of timescales, the challenge from our CEO was issued in May 2009, technical implementation started in July 2009 and by October 2009 the full Unified Communications solution (as outlined) had been rolled out to 200 users.

Business benefits

As well as the user benefits, the pilot delivered substantial business benefits. Most importantly it was a key proof point underpinning Colt’s cultural change.

Secondly it demonstrated the power of Unified Communications & Collaboration and also the demand for it from the business.

And from an IT perspective it allowed us to become more familiar with the technology and gave us a chance to try out different vendors and evaluate their capability. It also dramatically de-risked the wider roll-out through the lessons learnt and informed our future strategy.

Key challenges and learnings

Being at the forefront of any new technology roll-out usually means feeling some pain and the pilot was no exception. There were a number of key challenges we faced and some key learnings that emerged.

It was highly challenging to find vendors who fully understood a leading-edge Unified Communications & Collaboration solution end-to-end. We worked with multiple vendors in order to deliver the solution and this experience has helped us to identify who to use in the full implementation.

There were a number of challenges around the technical integration of voice with Microsoft Exchange.

The pilot gave us some key learnings around the different hardware and software and what is best for our business. We were able to evaluate different options in a ‘safe’ environment.

We had planned it but realised more than ever the importance of training. Significant training and hand holding was required in order to realise the benefits. And from a support perspective, a full UC&C solution requires a whole new technical support paradigm, requiring multi-skilled resources who can monitor and fault find across the entire suite of UC&C services.



Next steps and vision

The success of these proof points has already helped to support the business case for the next phase of the project and the IT team has already started planning the enterprise wide solution, which involves scaling up from 200 pilot users to 5000 people in 15 countries.

The full roll-out of our Unified Communications & Collaboration will be a cloud-based model. Through the use of virtual desktop technology and simple but secure access methods, our ultimate vision is a true 'consumerisation of IT' which gives employees the choice and the flexibility to work anywhere, from any device. It's about shifting the traditional concept of a dependant 'user' culture to one where employees are viewed as consumers, can use their own PCs and can receive a ubiquitous IT experience whether at home or at work.

To bring this to life, there are a number of steps that we're considering and that we'd advise anyone looking to implement a UC&C solution to consider:

- A WAN upgrade - ensuring that the right network infrastructure is in place
- Consolidation of PBXs in order to fully realise the benefits of UC
- Rolling out Microsoft Office 2010, Microsoft OCS 2007 and Microsoft Exchange 2010
- A LAN upgrade and voice-quality Wi-Fi in major sites
- One mobile contract across all locations
- An extensive training plan to support increased users - this is key as benefits grow exponentially with the number of users

If you'd like to learn more about Colt's experience with Unified Communications & Collaboration and how we can help you implement your own solution, please contact ucc@colt.net

