

Cross-platform competence will be the key to differentiation for resellers with designs on the imminent explosion of the UK Unified Communications market, according to Paul Cheslaw, VP EMEA at solutions vendor Applied Voice & Speech Technologies (AVST).



Paul Cheslaw

AVST advances on UK market with UC launch

AVST has just launched a new version of its UC product, CallXpress 7.9, designed to give customers flexible access to four so-called 'flavours' of unified messaging (UM) – integrated voice, fax and email messages delivered to the full range of end-user devices and handsets. The vendor is about to sign Westcon as a distribution partner, signalling its intention to ramp up UK activity by promoting the benefits of the platform-independent approach to Cisco resellers in particular. "We offer a couple of 'unique' things," said Cheslaw. "Higher margins compared with competitive

"We have to develop our global presence and that's the reason for our big push in the UK"

products, and cross-platform flexibility which makes CallXpress compatible with any email, PBX or IP-PBX system. Microsoft, Nortel, Cisco or Avaya can't make that statement. They tend to support the rip and replace proposition, with UM residing on the core management platform."

Cheslaw said AVST's ability to work with legacy PBXs or incoming IP-PBXs means customers don't have to wait to develop a forward-looking UM strategy. CallXpress provides a ready-made migration path. "With vendors announcing the end of life for first-generation voicemail interfaces, a lot of people are looking at migration," he added. "We emulate all those first-generation interfaces, so users don't have to learn any new keystrokes, and the need for training and interruption to the customer's business is minimised."

Cheslaw said that according to Ovum, 70 per cent of European

enterprises will deploy UM in the UC stack by 2008. "With the increase in global and multi-national companies wanting to deploy it, we have to develop our global presence and that's the reason for our big push in the UK."

Cheslaw said that by covering the four flavours of UM, CallExpress allows resellers to offer a mix and match solution. Server-based UM stores all messages in one location, accessed by users from their preferred device or medium. "That's the Microsoft approach," said Cheslaw.

"The problem is, there is nothing to prevent you from forwarding a voicemail – perhaps to a competitor or the media, one of the risks that has inhibited the growth of UM to date. Basically, Microsoft is using UM as a vehicle to get people to deploy Exchange 2007. We believe customers should be able to choose their own UM model, have it the way they want it."

Client-based UM unifies voice and fax message access on the desktop email client, and voice, fax and email message access from the telephone, minimising impact on the Lan and relieving pressure on the email message store. Secure UM allows messages to be accessed via a secure voice portal, so that voice and fax messages don't interact with the email server and so can't be forwarded. And simplified UM means that the user is notified of a message by email, with the option of including the message as an attachment.

"To date, UM has essentially been seen as an offshoot of voicemail," said Cheslaw. "It's been inhibited by compliancy and security issues, largely because of worries about the ability to take a voicemail message and forward it out of the organisation. For example, Sarbanes-Oxley requires people to store email messages for up to seven years. Voicemail, as such, isn't governed in the same way. But the minute you put a voice file into an email or add it as an attachment, it is covered by the legislation. Customers don't want to expose themselves to the risk of discovery in this way."

Cheslaw suggested that by developing competence on a single vendor-independent UM platform, resellers will be in a prime position to help customers create tailored UM models that will address their needs according to the degree of security and flexibility required. He acknowledged that resellers will continue to face pressure from PBX and IP-PBX vendors to implement proprietary UM products, but pointed out that some vendors will themselves use CallXpress in circumstances where their own solution doesn't support a particular interface.

"We're already seeing larger resellers like Getronix using it to differentiate themselves, deploying it on Cisco, for example," he said. "They can develop competence on one UM platform that will address every PBX and IP-PBX platform in their portfolio. Many enterprises have several different PBXs, even though they've tried to standardise. And the minute they merge or make an acquisition, another one is added. Our product allows them to standardise on a single platform, and that's a big opportunity for the channel."

Need a break?

Get yourself on the best trips in the business, call Nimans today... 0870 444 3101

Panasonic

SIEMENS

PLANTRONICS

