

March 2014, HAPPIEST MINDS TECHNOLOGIES

Top Challenges and Benefits of Unified Communications in the Manufacturing Industry

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Abstract

Business communications has undergone a sea of change in recent years. This change is evident in all aspects of communication including a manufacturer interacting with a customer or employees increasing their productivity by means of better customer service. Communications is fast becoming a driving force for the manufacturing industry. This paper attempts to throw light on the top challenges faced by modern day manufacturing industries and how Unified Communications (UC) can address those issues.

Introduction

Defining Unified Communications

The definition of Unified Communications by Gartner has been further refined this year that encapsulates the true essence of the term. It reads as, “The primary goal of Unified Communications (UC) is to improve user productivity and to enhance business processes.” Gartner defines UC products (equipment, software and services) as those that facilitate the use of multiple enterprise communications methods to obtain that goal.

Unified Communications plays a vital role in the manufacturing industry. Manufacturers require a communications network that can be used over the entire value chain. But, what exactly does Unified Communication mean? UC is not a telephonic device, neither is it a product. UC is a collaborative solution converging audio, video, email, voicemail, instant messaging & multimodal conferencing. The objective of UC is to ensure that communication with any person in any part of the world is possible at any time. The benefits of UC can be resonated to all markets, ranging from small and medium to large enterprises. Here is how we address the challenges of manufacturing industry with Unified Communications.

Description

Manufacturing industries are constantly looking for ways to streamline processes and improve business efficiencies. Some of the key challenges faced by manufacturing industries today are:

- Inefficiencies in supply chain, inventory management and production
- Delay in response time leading to slow and inefficient customer service
- Methods of improving manufacturing processes with less costs without compromising on quality
- Longer hours in identifying right person to address a problem
- Acquiring and retaining talent, faster innovation on newer products
- Lack of access to tools for globally distributed workforce

Let us take a look at top benefits addressed by Unified Communications in the manufacturing industry:

Mobility & BYOD: Mobility is one of the key factors that influence the success of UC. According to IDC research, it is estimated that the number of people accessing the internet through mobile devices will far outnumber the ones using PC or laptop. By the year 2015, the number of Smartphone users is believed to be around 2 billion. This is a clear indication that Smartphone usage will increase exponentially so much so that it will not be surprising if desk phones become obsolete and end user mobile will become an enterprise device for communications. All the Smartphones will have Unified Communications features supporting enterprise email, presence, audio and video conferencing and content sharing. The video conferencing, messaging, and content sharing capabilities play a major role in increasing the productivity and efficiency of engineers, in decreasing time to market and improving the collaboration between employees and customers. Accessing manufacturing related data from a mobile will directly increase supply chain management, similarly manufacturing workers will start using Smartphones to monitor and control industrial equipment.

Presence and Instant Messaging: Although most of the production processes have reduced human intervention by making use of automation tools, there is still a lot of scope for enhancements using Unified Communications. For instance, when a problem crops up it is possible to resolve the issue quickly and efficiently by finding the best technical staff available through constant monitoring of the production environment.

Audio, Video and Web Collaboration: Even though audio has been the primary mode of communication for customer service, video is fast catching up as a latest technology for face to face communication. Manufacturers extensively use contact centers to support their customers as the effectiveness of the support, be it positive or negative, directly impacts the brand value and cost margins of an enterprise. Contact centers that use audio, video or web services for multimodal collaboration helps in improving business value and enhancing customer experience.

Using Video & Web tools helps in resolving customer issues instantly at the first call rather than depending on multiple call-backs. Skill based presence allows an agent to communicate with an expert through a video call and fix issues instantly, thereby achieving first call resolution.

Communication Enabled Business Processes: Unified Communications also helps in managing supply chain to production operations, be it inventory of raw materials, availability of production team or supplier communication. By integrating production data with UC, it is possible to send automated details to suppliers and communicate details like quantity changes or quality improvements which help the supplier to take necessary actions. Messages can also be sent to employees for increasing efficiency and avoid delays. Even though much of the automation is implemented using the ERP range of products, integrating ERP with Unified Communications will help streamline production department, distribution and sales.

Conclusion

Manufacturing is a rapidly growing sector. Customer demands and heavy competition requires continuous development of innovative products and new launches in the market. In order to reap actual benefits of Unified Communication, manufacturing players should integrate their business processes with unified collaboration tools. With innovation as a key driver for success in the manufacturing industry, UC acts as catalyst by improving collaboration.

References:

www.gartner.com

<http://www.idc.com/>

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