White Paper

One Click Away from Integrated Rich Media Conferencing and Collaboration

Warning: The audio conferencing, videoconferencing, instant messaging and web data collaboration industries are about to come crashing together. Fasten your seatbelts.

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VCON

Introduction

Videoconferencing as a standalone communications medium has existed in commercial form for many years without achieving mainstream use. Customers and consumers alike have voted with their dollars and frustration that standalone videoconferencing does not offer enough compelling value with the exception of a handful of niche applications like distance education. Contrast this with the rapid adoption of communications technologies like cell phones, SMS or instant messaging.

In the course of normal communications people don't want to be forced into thinking ahead of time about the exact type of value-add conferencing and collaboration tools they might need as they communicate. They just want them to be available at the click of a button. After all, this is exactly what we already have today with much of our audio conferencing experiences. If you want to add a third person to a conversation you simply hit the "conference" button on the phone. If you are on a conference call and need some quick information from the Internet you simply open the web browser on your PC.

This same general user paradigm is now extending to other forms of communication and collaboration that have not yet achieved the same mainstream use as audio conferencing. But getting there will require a tremendous degree of convergence and integration that does not yet exist. This paper will explore the real opportunity presented by integrated rich media conferencing and collaboration, and the effect it will have on industries currently isolated from each other.

Would you like some (pick from group 1) to go with that (pick from group 2)?
- **Group 1: data, voice, text chat, video**
- **Group 2: collaboration, audio conference, instant message, videoconference**

The promise is clear. Allow users to start with one form of communication and then add, or switch to, another form of communication easily and seamlessly. This allows users to make dynamic decisions about added value rather than have to plan every possibility ahead of time. As VCON's marketing slogan says, "One Click Away From Being There". The question is can this vision be achieved?

The answer is not only yes, but certain combinations are already available today. For example, Mitel, through a joint development effort with VCON, offers a solution called Voice First. With Voice First, users that place normal audio calls are automatically notified if both participants are also video-enabled. This is done by lighting the "video" button on the phone handset. If the participants feel that interactive video would add value to the conversation, one of them simply hits the "video" button and an interactive videoconference is automatically initiated between the two participants' computers. Furthermore, other functions such as transferring the call (including video) or adding additional participants (ad hoc conferencing) can also be performed simply by using the other familiar buttons on the phone.

Video

Audio ←→ Text Chat

Data
Collaboration
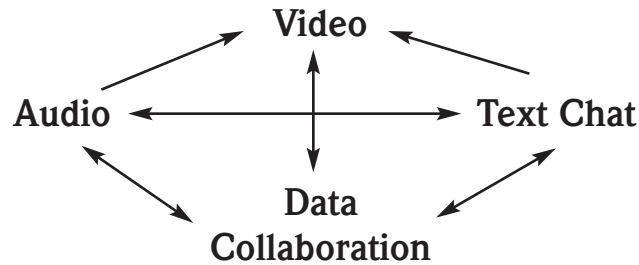
Beyond this, VCON's IPNexus application offers three elements of rich media convergence. Using instant messaging as the primary communications medium, IPNexus allows users to easily integrate various forms of web-based data collaboration (screen sharing, application sharing, and file transfer) into their chat session. Additionally, interactive videoconferencing can also be added on the fly with the push of a button - even with multiple chat participants simultaneously.

Architectural Approach

VCON's rich media conferencing and collaboration solution is delivered via a client/server architecture, which dramatically decreases the total cost of ownership and allows unprecedented scalability. The clients are predominantly software-only. Such "thin" clients are easy to distribute, install, upgrade and maintain. The clients VCON offers are as follows:

- IPNexus   Instant messaging and collaboration client
- VPoint   Software desktop videoconferencing client
- ViGO   USB desktop videoconferencing appliance
- HD3000   Settop videoconferencing appliance (conf room)
- HD5000   Multimedia videoconferencing rollabout (conf room)

Centralized on the server (or multiple networked servers) are the management tools and rich media conferencing applications. The management tools allow the administrator to centrally monitor and control all aspects of the rich media deployment. The applications are individually licensed based on the specific needs of the customer. This architecture allows smaller initial rollouts to a limited user base and a limited application set, while allowing very easy upgrades for more users and more applications. The server applications VCON offers are as follows:

- Media Xchange Manager   Management, Video PBX
- IPNexus   Instant Messaging
- VCON Conference Bridge (VCB)   Multipoint Videoconferencing, Streaming
- Conference Moderator   Web-Based Scheduling
- IGC   Audio Conferencing
- WebShare   Web-Based Data Conferencing

The Future of the Videoconferencing Industry

If the vision outlined above is true, what does it mean for the videoconferencing industry? The answer is that the videoconferencing industry as we know it today will not exist. The technology and user paradigm differences between personal and group conferencing will dramatically increase. The videoconferencing vendors that focused primarily on group videoconferencing in the conference room will drive higher quality and possibly lower cost into their products.

The desktop videoconferencing market will merge and blend with other conferencing applications as described above. Once this happens, it will be impossible to measure its size because interactive video will be seamlessly integrated into many other forms of communication. In fact, beyond the nearer term rich media convergence predicted above, interactive video will be integrated into cable TV settop boxes, videogames, and maybe even PDAs.

Summary

VCON not only recognizes these future trends, but is aggressively driving this market shift via its integrated rich media conferencing and collaboration vision. Since its founding in 1994, VCON has repeatedly been an innovator of new technologies. Doing this requires far-reaching vision and a close touch with user needs and market shifts. For more information about specific VCON solutions, please refer to various white papers and briefing presentations located on VCON's website (www.vcon.com).

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