



# Voice Transformation

## Taking the First Steps

Voice has been – and will continue to be – a foundational component in business communications. But the aging, disconnected voice infrastructures of today are doing more than just impeding productivity, they’re impeding progress. They’re keeping your organization from adopting next-generation voice features and from integrating voice into a broader unified communications (UC) strategy.

Here, AT&T Voice Communications Consultant Wayne Crolley outlines the critical steps companies can take to transform voice communications across the enterprise. Rupesh Chokshi, Director of Product Management for AT&T also joins the conversation to talk about IP-based platforms, and the role they play in enabling voice communications now and in the future.

**Q: Wayne, let’s start by defining what’s meant by the term “voice transformation.”**

**A: Wayne:** Sure. Basically, it means evolving your voice services to connect your employees, partners and suppliers virtually anywhere they are, using nearly any wired or wireless device.

As a consultant, I’ve learned that most customers understand the importance of voice transformation. The challenge is understanding how to define a vision for that transformation, what the end state should be and where to start. They understand the why, but not the how. Our job as consultants is to help them create a common vision and plan and to clearly identify each step along the way to bring that plan to fruition.

**Q: What’s the first step to defining a common vision for voice?**

**A: Wayne:** Start by reaching out to users and business units within your organization to create a cross-functional working team of stakeholders. Since they will be the ones using the voice solutions everyday, it’s important to get their input and support upfront. Engage them in developing a guiding vision for how voice can be used to improve communication and collaboration. Use this opportunity to gather their requirements and map business process and workflows.

Take a “day in the life of a user” approach. Identify the roles people play in the organization and the types of voice communications they use or want to use as part of their jobs to make them more efficient. And, don’t forget to explore how you need to communicate and collaborate with external partners. It’s now possible to develop collaboration solutions with your external ecosystem, even if the members are using communication and collaboration solutions from multiple suppliers. Then, develop a technology roadmap based on what you learned, so the specific voice solutions you choose support user needs and business processes.

**Q: Once you have a technology roadmap, how do you proceed from there?**

**A: Wayne:** Take an inventory of the existing equipment and voice solutions you have in place today. Identify gaps between what you need and what you have. Think about investment protection and how to leverage your current infrastructure as you transition from where you are to where you want to go.

So, for example, rather than migrating to a completely new voice platform, you could take a hybrid approach to ease your transition: Combine legacy TDM or PBX systems with new IP-based voice solutions.

**Q: So, you’re talking about putting voice with data?**

**A: Rupesh:** Exactly. It’s called Voice Over Internet Protocol, or VoIP, and it lets you run both voice and data on the same network. VoIP is the enabler – the platform from which you can launch your voice transformation. It’s key to voice transformation, because it can transport voice anywhere there’s high-speed Internet access.

VoIP can also create the hybrid voice environment Wayne mentioned. For example, SIP Trunking, or Session Initiated Protocol Trunking, is a VoIP service that uses the Internet to connect PBX and key systems to the traditional phone network. So, instead of being held back by older technologies, customers can leap ahead with next-generation voice features and leverage existing investments.

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**Q: What are some examples of new voice capabilities?**

**A. Rupesh:** Collaboration services that combine voice with Web and video technologies in a single tool for virtual meetings over the Internet. Routing contact center calls anywhere in the world automatically, based upon call volumes, agent expertise or other factors. Or having a single phone number that rings on both fixed and mobile phones simultaneously to reduce phone tag.

**Wayne:** That brings up another important point. You need to look at voice beyond the wire and across a continuum of endpoints – from desk phones to mobile phones and PC soft phones. This is your opportunity to change how you empower users with voice services where and when they need them – that’s really the essence of voice transformation.

**Q: We talked about involving users upfront to gain their support. How do you gain executive-level support for this initiative?**

**A. Wayne:** A beacon application is a great way to build a business case for voice transformation. So, ask your team of stakeholders to identify a very specific case where a new voice technology could be integrated into a business process. It’s called communications-enabling a business process or CEBP. For example, you can add a “click to chat” feature on your support website to provide faster access to experts. Or, you can use automated notifications to “ping” stakeholders during a contract approval process to shorten the sales cycle. You could reduce travel costs by collaborating across geographies with a video conference, and the possibilities go on.

At the end of the project, the team can report to executives: Here is the collaboration technology we used and here are the business results. It’s a proof point for transformation and a foundation to build on their success.

**Q: Return on investment is always top of mind. What are some of the cost efficiencies customers might hope to see from this transformation?**

**A. Rupesh:** With voice on an IP network, such as IP VPN (Virtual Private Network), you can scale easily to add new unified communications and conferencing features and functions offered by emerging voice capabilities. For example, you can support multi-modal communications in a contact center – from voice calls to chat, email and conferencing – without requiring new networking equipment.

Since SIP compresses voice as it travels the IP network, you can also increase the number of calls you can handle, without the increased cost of adding transport lines.

With soft phone support, you can even make and receive phone calls directly from a PC to reduce the amount of desk phones you need to buy. And, you don’t have to wait years to get these ROI benefits, because these capabilities are available now.

**Q: Why should customers choose AT&T? How is your approach to voice transformation different?**

**A. Wayne:** First of all, we have 135 years of experience in delivering voice services. We also have well-defined, industry-recognized processes and practices for helping customers map their transition from where they are now to where they want to go. We have teams of system integration experts with a vendoragnostic perspective, so we can be a single point of responsibility for a multi-vendor voice environment. For example, we can enable teams using Microsoft® Lync® or Cisco Jabber® to integrate with AT&T UC Voice and AT&T Conferencing, to bring together telephony, conferencing and collaboration tools in a single offering.

**Rupesh:** We have the ability to implement, as well. We have a very broad voice portfolio that supports on-premises solutions or voice services hosted and managed by AT&T. We introduced a cloud-based IP telephony solution, AT&T UC Voice. You help reduce your up-front capital equipment expenses and pay a per-user, per-month fee for voice services. But, the added benefit is that this solution tightly integrates voice with a range of unified communications tools, such as presence, chat, voicemail, conferencing and point-to-point video behind a single interface. You can offer your employees an expanded array of tools to support faster, more productive interactions.

**Q: Any final thoughts or advice for readers?**

**A. Wayne:** When you think about voice transformation, think beyond voice. Consider how it can be part of an overall unified communications strategy that integrates with other tools, like messaging, video conferencing, IM and presence. Keep in mind that, tools, by themselves are just tools. But, when you align them with your business processes and your organization’s initiatives, that’s where they really shine.

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