



## Presence and Chat Drive Unified Communications

Presence information—which lets users “see” who is currently online and available for a chat, call or conference—is critical to business operations in today’s virtual workplace. With more than half of employees routinely working from home or the road—and with almost all employees located in different physical locations than at least some, if not all, of their colleagues, partners and customers—communications are stymied by a lack of personalization, immediacy and transparency.

Supporting remote and branch-office workers is a major challenge for 42% of IT organizations, according to a recent Frost & Sullivan survey of more than 500 IT decision makers in the United States. The research shows that more than half of all companies in the US have deployed instant messaging, which combines presence and chat. They are using it in a variety of ways to improve business processes and to make their unified communications applications better than ever.

Presence shows which colleagues are at their desks, on a phone call, in do-not-disturb mode or simply offline, making it much easier for workers to get access to the people and information they need, when they need it. Furthermore, advanced presence capabilities show availability for both the telephone and online activity. That is, employees can indicate whether they are on the phone, but available to chat online; available for a phone call but not online; or available for any kind of communication, voice or text.

Presence information may be conveyed only through the IM channel, or it may be integrated with email and other productivity tools to make it easier for users to see without having to open another application. So-called “federation” allows companies to show a user’s availability across platforms, networks and devices, increasing security and control while enhancing productivity and lowering costs.

Think of presence as a virtual door: when it’s “open,” people are available to talk; when it’s “closed,” they are not; and when it’s “ajar,” they may be working or meeting with colleagues but willing to be interrupted, or just temporarily away from their desk. This information makes it much easier for people who work in locations that are different from those of their colleagues to identify who is available and to reach out to them in the best way, depending on that availability. This, in turn, supports more effective communication and collaboration, speeding decision making and ultimately improving the bottom line.

Customer service reps are also leveraging presence and chat to improve the customer experience. Contact-center systems and/or managers can use presence information to route calls, emails and text-based chats to available agents; agents can use the information to reach out to back-office employees to get answers to difficult or complex questions about products or services.

Presence and chat are a critical component of any IT toolset for today's employees. Companies that have not yet deployed the technology should do so as soon as possible; integrate it with email, voice, and other communications and productivity applications; and ensure that all employees are trained to use it as an effective way to get access to people and information as soon as they need it.

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