

## Get high performance communications with UCaaS and SD-WAN



Traditional wide-area networks (WAN) are straining under the demands of modern communications. They simply weren't built to handle the rigorous challenges accompanying today's on-demand, omni-channel user expectations. Cloud computing has created opportunities to change these dynamics.

Solutions to efficiently and effectively upgrade networks were presented in a recent webinar, "Get High Performance Communications with UCaaS and SD-WAN," sponsored by Windstream Enterprise and hosted by *American Banker* and *Information Management*. The moderator was Jim Ericson, a consultant who was a longtime editorial director at *Information Management*. Speakers included were Scott Yelton, director of Office Suite, UCaaS Product Management at Windstream Enterprise, and Yulia Duryea, director of SD-WAN Product Management at Windstream Enterprise.

The experts spotlighted how to ensure high-performance, cloud-based communications. They explained how SD-WAN and Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) are the right tools to modernize networks and help ensure a positive customer experience.

### Cloud trend accelerating

"It's important to understand that we live in a connected world," said Yelton.

"Even though we usually see the impact of all this in our personal lives first, business is soon to follow. In fact, it's estimated 60 percent of the business workload will have moved to the cloud by the end of 2018."

Even hardware and PC-intensive companies are shifting their focus to the cloud because they know that's the direction things are going, he pointed out.

"But it's not just about where we store our files or customer records or how our applications run, but how we interact with our customers, how we communicate," he said.

Customers and employees have come to expect an omni-channel experience, meaning having multiple ways to communicate — voice, chat, text, e-mail, audio, video, web conferencing, and team collaboration tools.

Last year, Windstream Enterprise saw a 32 percent jump in the installed base of unified communications users, and that trend is accelerating.

“They want it all to interconnect, and they want it all to work together seamlessly and, most important, it has to perform, it has to work well, and it has to be great quality,” he noted.

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### **Traditional network limitations**

“[Those are] some compelling numbers on both cloud-dominated environments as well as the shift to cloud domain environments,” said Duryea. “When you couple that with the virtualization of the workforce, and the digitization of IT, traditional networks are no longer fit for a purpose.”

She identified such challenges as bandwidth, routing, latency, application performance, and customer experience, which is top-of-mind in all industries today. The existing wide-area networks were not designed to handle this kind of pressure, she explained.

“They are rather integrated based on today’s requirements,” she said. “We call this the WANosaurus network. It is an outdated network topology, cumbersome and difficult to manage, often incurring disproportionately high expenses with low performance, expensive to care and feed.”

At companies with these networks, IT leaders have learned to survive on very limited visibility and control, and limited ability to prioritize applications. They have been throwing bandwidth at various big data, the Internet of things, and virtualization of the workforce. Yet 78 percent of CIOs still cannot guarantee application performance.

User experience for real-time voice/video applications is suffering. Latency, jitter, poor quality of service are a reality. Traditional WANs still have reliability issues, and they are more expensive. Companies are paying for a backup network just in case the primary network, which they’re also paying for, doesn’t do its job. Yet IT professionals are still looking at voice and network as two separate issues.

“The solution is really UCaaS, with SD-WAN,” asserted Duryea. “They ultimately have a very symbiotic relationship. You have a cloud-based communication and collaboration platform, which provides you with real-time communications for any customer touchpoints — e-mail, chat, phone to branch, to call center, employee collaboration, etc. Adding superior performance and reliability and flexibility of SD-WAN, all of a sudden, you get superior quality of experience, you get better reliability, you can guarantee performance of critical applications.”

Duryea said that a number of regional banks, community banks and credit unions have embraced the UCaaS SD-WAN solution, and called it “material to customer experience.” It’s robust and secure. Traffic is encrypted. That translates into less opportunity for mistakes and points of failure.

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Yulia Duryea  
Director of SD-WAN  
Product Management  
Windstream Enterprise

It also has the ability to segment traffic. Banking services must always be available, and this solution provides up to 100 percent SLA with no dropped sessions, she explained.

When a customer initiates a transaction at a bank, the teller looks at the screen and enters information. If that circuit drops in a standard traditional WAN environment, the session drops. The customer must wait until the teller brings that session up, which usually takes minutes. With SD-WAN, the session doesn't drop and no reboot is required. There is a little white space, and then it immediately goes back up.

"What else is material to user experience is the new banking application driven by digital transformation and the mobile strategy that banks have embarked on that really are driving this wave of UCaaS and SD-WAN," she said.

### Modern technology

Yelton described updating the Windstream Enterprise OfficeSuite Customer Portal tool is as easy as changing settings on a smart phone.

"When you go to change settings, make up dates, purchase a new app from the app store, move things around on your phone, change things, you don't pick up the phone and call Apple or the store you bought the device from," he said. "You certainly don't open up a ticket with the help desk and engage a network engineer to make changes. You make those changes yourself using native applications on the device or you do it through a Web portal."

Why can't we have the same intuitive platform to manage, buy, and make changes to our business applications that we do in our personal lives? You can have that, he said. You don't need a network or an engineer to run your iPhone, so why do you need one to run your business phone?

Another practical feature Yelton noted: managing large groups of users by creating different profiles.

"If you have users that don't have a need, necessity, or exposure to any other data or systems in the company," he demonstrated. "You can easily create that profile and apply across multiple users. And, you may want to manage what a phone profiles look like across the business. I could set a standard profile across all users from the Web interface."

Management of various locations is also possible. They can add new locations or manage capacity at existing locations. It gives them a graphical view as well as a Google Maps view of geographically where these locations are, what services they have, and how they can add services or manage them going forward.

"You've got all this power, you're going to need to see what's going on," he explained.

Windstream Enterprise and Office Suite, we have made sure that we've integrated with other key business applications.

Scott Yelton  
Director of Office Suite,  
UCaaS Product Management  
Windstream Enterprise

"Windstream Enterprise gives the ability to pull reporting and analytics on the call traffic by user, by location, or for the entire business. This reporting functionality is built natively into the tools."

All these components are available through Windstream Enterprise's Office Suite application, including Cloud-Based communications and a native contact center application designed to create a great customer experience. In addition company-wide chat, mobile apps, HD video, and audio conferencing tools that are integrated with the solution as well as visual voice mail with speech-to-text and online faxing. The ability to take your business completely online and completely mobile is a key factor in any UCaaS solution that you look at, he said.

"Windstream Enterprise and Office Suite, we have made sure that we've integrated with other key business applications," he noted. "It's not a self-contained universe anymore. It's all interconnected." We are integrated with salesforce.com as well as many other CRM's as an example.

Duryea highlighted some of the SD-WAN features added to the solution.

"We have probably touched upon most of the dynamic WAN selection and the active connectivity," she said. "But even more impressively, the phone call stays up. It is unnoticeable to most customers."

Duryea called the scale of capabilities that Windstream Enterprise is providing its customers — both in terms of granularity of the visibility as well as control — "truly unprecedented."

"It really is about the symbiotic relationship," she said. "It really is about the combination of a good UCaaS solution with a good SD-WAN solution that allows for your network to both be cloud-ready, to be application aware, and it does allow you for that hybrid design so that you have flexibility. We are not asking you to forklift your entire infrastructure. We understand that ideally just have to sweat their assets, and the beauty of this is that SD-WAN is an overlay technology."

All of this really leads to a superior customer experience, she said.

"On average, our customers see 50-percent improvement in application performance as well as 51 percent reduced part of cost of ownership," Duryea said. "And that is over the entire length of the journey. It's not an overnight, 'I'm just going to drop my existing legacy WAN and bury my UCaaS,' whether it's cloud or prem-based and just move on. It really is a journey, and we work with you, over time, to be able to transition some of the sites that matter first."

**To learn more about OfficeSuite with SD-WAN,  
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