

Unified Communications in Government

Collaborating for the Public Good

For government agencies, budgets may rise and fall with economic cycles. But financial circumstances do not change citizen expectations. People count on government to maintain excellent service delivery, from processing permits to maintaining public safety. Meanwhile, environmental responsibility has emerged as a mandate in every economic climate, as agencies aim to reduce carbon footprints and the related expenses for travel, real estate, and energy.

Microsoft® Unified Communications plays a huge role, enabling new ways of working that drive down the costs of providing government services.

Microsoft Unified Communications: A New World of Work for Governments. Microsoft Unified Communications gives government workers the flexibility to reach their colleagues and access the information they need anywhere, anytime. They can work collaboratively and do their jobs whether they are working from headquarters, at home, in the field, from a temporary office space, or in any other location with an Internet connection.

Unified Communications integrates enterprise telephony with e-mail, conferencing, and instant messaging. Through presence awareness, workers can quickly and easily find the right person and click to communicate from within everyday software applications and business processes. Microsoft Unified Communications enables faster, more informed, collaborative decision-making. This allows governments to improve the way they serve and protect their citizens.

Unified Communications integrates:

- Secure, mobile e-mail
- Voice mail
- Calendaring
- Instant messaging (IM)
- Voice communications (Voice over IP, which can be integrated with the agency's PBX)
- Web conferencing
- Video conferencing
- Audio conferencing
- Presence awareness

Public Service and Administration

Microsoft Unified Communications brings extremely cost-effective new efficiencies to government services, by working with existing investments in office productivity software and telephony.

Service Delivery. Microsoft Unified Communications can improve the collaboration across agencies and between organizations. It gives civil servants a single inbox for voice mails, e-mails, and instant messages, and alerts users to the availability and status of co-workers through presence awareness.

This can speed up the cooperative effort of civil servants to gather information, resolve issues, and inform the public in all kinds of scenarios—from weather and road-condition alerts to service disruptions. When other agencies or private-sector contractors are involved, federation capability links directories so all participants can quickly communicate to exchange information and speed resolution.



Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency

The Alaska legislature meets in Juneau for 90 days out of the year, and spends the remaining time dispersed across the state's vast territory. To allow legislators to communicate and serve constituents hundreds or thousands of miles apart, the state has deployed or is planning Microsoft Unified Communications solutions such as video conferencing, video IM, and Voice over IP (VoIP) integrated into desktops.

The most visible returns are evident in:

- Improved efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of legislators and staff.
- Better quality of life for legislators and support personnel.
- Savings in money and reduced training time.

"The biggest hurdle we have in Alaska is that we are so spread out and our communication systems are everything from standard circuits to satellite. We're linked with places like Barrow, Kotzebue or Tok. Some things that seem downright easy in Seattle or Los Angeles are a lot tougher when you get up here."

Curtis Clothier

Information Services Manager

Citizen requests such as permits and licenses may be submitted through any convenient channel including Web forms, e-mails, or phone calls. The worker handles all requests via the same inbox, then can use Unified Communications technologies to quickly find co-workers, exchange information, and process the request expeditiously. This speedy resolution takes the place of e-mail trails and back-and-forth phone messages among government workers. Citizens may receive regular updates through whatever communication method they choose.

Combining Unified Communications with Web 2.0 technologies, such as mash-ups and blogs, can truly enhance service delivery to citizens. Microsoft solutions also integrate with line-of-business applications to further enhance civil-servant workflows.

Telework. Telework initiatives typically give workers the option to spend all or part of the workweek away from the office—at home or another location. Microsoft enables telework through a common collaboration platform that encompasses information-sharing, presence capability, and a full array of easy-to-use communication capabilities including voice, Web, and video conferencing.

Government telework initiatives enabled through Microsoft Unified Communications deliver all kinds of benefits:

- Reduced commuting, which lowers the carbon footprint of the agency
- Greater ability to retain employees, by offering a better work/life balance through flexible working schedules
- Increased productivity by field workers, who no longer have to routinely travel to the office
- Lower costs for transportation, real estate, and facilities
- Improved continuity-of-operations planning
- Potentially reduced real estate costs

The trend to telework is real and growing. In the U.S., federal agencies face a mandate to establish telework policies and make telework available to any eligible employee.

Telework is also a recruitment strategy for attracting younger workers who are comfortable with technology and expect flexible working arrangements from employers. Governments will need to attract those younger workers—and soon. According to the U.S. Government Accounting Office, more than 50 percent of all federal employees are eligible to retire within five years, and 70 percent of all senior managers will be eligible to retire by 2009. Worldwide, 23 to 50 percent of the government workforce in developed economies is expected to retire over the next 10 years.

Public Safety and National Security

Events over the past decade have shown that whether dealing with a crisis or preparing for one, government agencies need to interoperate and collaborate to ensure better outcomes. Information must be shared in a secure environment with role-based permissions to meet security and privacy policies. And under the extreme conditions of an emergency, workers need to reach out easily, using any communication channel.

Situational Awareness. In any crisis, it is critical that the person in charge has real-time information for making the best possible decisions, while participating agencies share a common view. Microsoft Unified Communications allows multiple agencies to share information, gathered through multiple modes of communication, including instant feedback from responders on the scene.

The ability to federate directories across agencies makes it possible to identify personnel in other jurisdictions, agencies, or locations who might be available to supply information or participate in the response effort. Presence information makes it possible to immediately determine availability and escalate an IM session or voice conversation to a video conference if necessary. Screensharing disseminates images such as radar, maps, or photos from an incident scene quickly. Individual users in the field may communicate using laptops and join video conferences using an inexpensive webcam.



Emergency Response. Maximally effective real-time emergency response demands that responding agencies be able to communicate via the most appropriate method. Microsoft Unified Communications integrates disparate communication methods including radio, telephony, and messaging systems over a common platform. Location and presence information allows dispatchers to send the most available and appropriate resource.

The Polycom® CX5000 Unified Conference Station—an inexpensive, portable unit—allows a command center to be set up in minutes. It is the centerpiece of a secure, on-demand conferencing solution that allows collaboration anytime, anywhere for effective operational planning and decision-making.

Another innovative solution—from Twisted Pair, a Microsoft Technology Partner—integrates Microsoft Unified Communications with Land Mobile Radio. Dispatchers can use the Unified Communications federation capabilities to view presence and communicate with first responders from multiple military, fire, and police agencies. Responders can securely communicate with other teams in the field even though they might be using different channels and radio frequencies. PC, cellular device, and PDA users can communicate with radio users. This broadens the ability to respond to a regional emergency, while building on the investment in legacy radio systems.

Operational Readiness. Training and preplanning are essential for coordinating response prior to a disaster, but aren't always practical on restricted budgets. Travel is expensive, teams may be in remote locations, and personnel need to be available locally should a situation arise. Microsoft Unified Communications allows instructors to extend training, planning sessions, simulations, and post-incident debriefings to mobile personnel through audio, video, and Web conferencing. Organizations increase personnel preparedness, while saving time, money, and materials.

Wyoming Department of Health

The Wyoming Department of Health offers health and human services across a large U.S. state. Many workers are stationed at public health nursing offices in remote locations, and wintertime travel is difficult over icy roads.

A Microsoft Unified Communications solution allows the department to:

- Enhance productivity and safety by keeping employees off the road.
- Reduce costs for travel and telephony.
- Enhance the security of confidential data.
- Replace e-mails with face-to-face interaction.
- Track down remote co-workers through presence capability, improving efficiency.

"With employees spending less time on the road, they can spend more time working and serving the citizens of Wyoming. Our citizens win by saving money and getting higher productivity out of their state employees."

Andy Corbin
Information Technology Director

The State of Montana

The state government wanted a more effective and cost-efficient way for its 11,560 employees to communicate across 600 widely dispersed locations. The state is responding with a unified communications strategy based on Microsoft technologies including e-mail, instant messaging, presence information, Internet telephony, and Web conferencing.

The strategy has allowed Montana to:

- Save \$100,000 on telephony costs at one office alone.
- Improve responsiveness through presence capability and instant text messaging.
- Support a government directive to reduce energy costs by 20 percent.

"With VoIP, we saved \$100,000 on the switches and other hardware we would have needed for a dedicated phone system. We were up and running with voice capability from day one. If we'd had to work with telecommunications vendors to install a system, it could have taken weeks or months."

Dick Clark
Chief Information Officer

Learn more about how Microsoft Unified Communications can help government agencies achieve higher levels of efficiency, while lowering the costs of serving and protecting citizens. Visit www.microsoft.com/UC

