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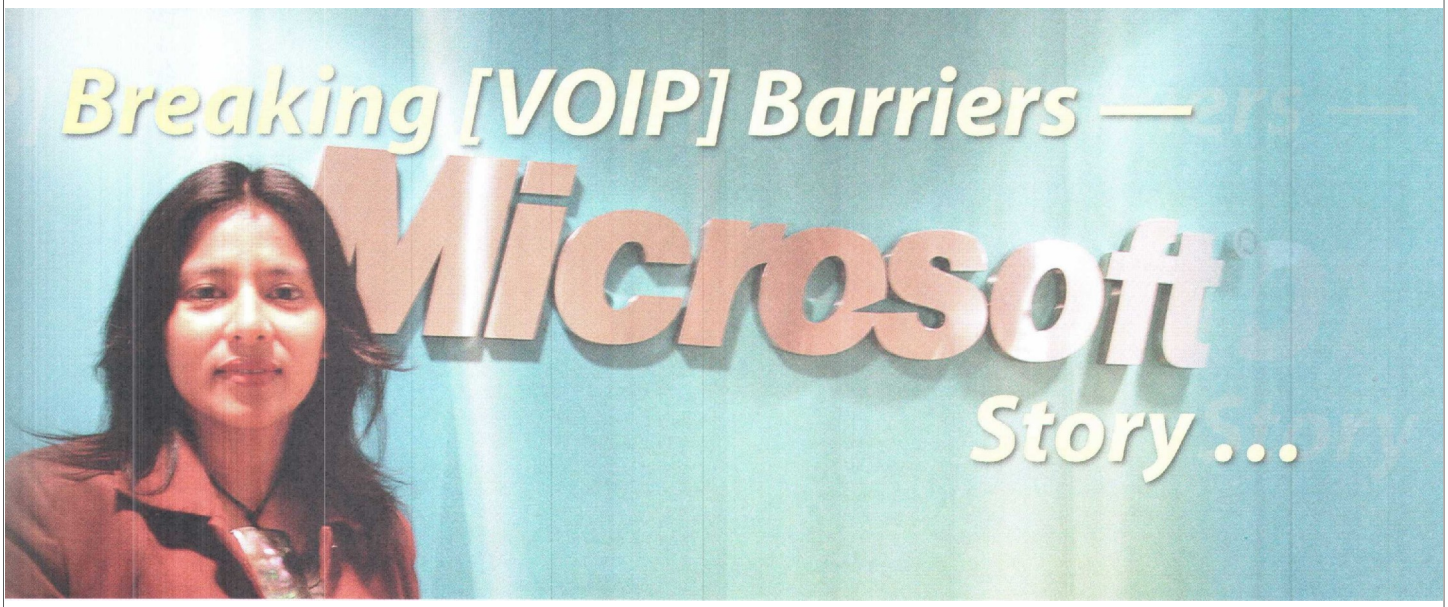

from anywhere. That's what today's professionals need and want – to be able to communicate with anyone from anywhere and using any device.

The technology is available now. It's not something that we hope to achieve in the future. Microsoft says with its Unified Communications vision through Office Communications Server (OCS), Office Communicator and Exchange Server 2007, professionals can remain mobile while having full access to communication services like e-mail, voicemail, Instant Messaging , fax and even multi-party conferencing as well as Voice call. All this is accessible using a desktop PC, portable laptops, smart devices like PDA, mobile phones, any web browser or even traditional plain old telephones.

Thirty years ago hardware ruled. If you wanted faster systems with better quality and higher speeds, you added more hardware. As far as communication was concerned, this involved hacking walls, tearing down and replacing cables as well as buying new phones. Today, that scenario has changed because the focus is now on software instead of hardware.

Today, the quality of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) calls can be improved not by changing the cables but by changing the software.

According to an independent benchmark study conducted by Psytechnics (http://www.psytechnics.com/site/sections/news/2007/2007_03_06.php), a firm specialising in voice-quality research, the listening and call quality offered by a pre-release version of OCS 2007 was "considerably better than that provided by (a leading provider's) IP phones and CallManager."

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With OCS and Exchange Server, users just need one login name and a single password for their Smartphone, PC, e-mail and voicemail to access all their usual communication services.

The unified platform has built-in encryption technology which allows administrators to monitor access levels while ensuring security.

Haniza Zakariya, Product Marketing Manager of Unified Communications Group at Microsoft Malaysia, explains, "As an example of simplifying and uniting different user experiences, let's take the subject line in an e-mail. I wouldn't send you an e-mail without including a subject line; why shouldn't telephone calls include one as well? With OCS 2007, I can simply click on a person's name in an e-mail to initiate a telephone call, and a subject line is displayed on that person's phone to indicate exactly what I'm calling about.

"Another example of the unified messaging power in Exchange Server and OCS is that, when I'm looking at an e-mail, I can use Presence to see if my colleagues are in meetings, on calls, travelling or available to communicate with me. If the e-mail topic is urgent, and I see that the person who sent the e-mail is at her desk, and with one click, I can go directly from the e-mail into an instant messaging conversation or a phone call with her. I can drag and drop another person's name into the conversation for a conference call. With another click, I could initiate a web conference or a video call. This is how I simplify my communications."

The OCS 2007 and Exchange Server 2007 interoperate with Microsoft Office so that if a user is typing in the name of the recipient in the e-mail client, he will be able to see if the recipient is away from his desk or out of the office.

The voice call capabilities in OCS also allows users to launch instant messaging or phone conversations directly from within an Office Outlook e-mail so you can make PC to PC, PC to phone or phone to PC calls.

Gartner Research has found that the cost of branded IP handsets – typically 40%-45% of the cost of telephony installation – is still a major obstacle for companies wanting to adopt IP telephony.

OCS allows companies to use existing equipment instead of ripping and replacing infrastructure. The software works with existing PBX systems, networks and desk phones via open, published interfaces and standards. This increases choice while also reduces cost in the long run.

With OCS, customers can have a single platform to integrate all forms of communication rather than maintain VoIP as a separate infrastructure from e-mail, Instant Messaging, conferencing and other forms of communications.

According to Microsoft, this integration gives IT professionals greater control over the pace of their IP telephony deployments so that they can get the most out of the infrastructure they already have in place (such as Microsoft Active Directory , Microsoft Exchange Server platform and existing PBX).

With the shift in emphasis from hardware to software, Microsoft is poised to lead the communications industry.

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A) **ECONOMIC VALUE** – OCS leverages the existing investment in voice and telephony while providing a foundation for future growth. Additionally, the Microsoft eco-system brings the next wave of cost reductions in VoIP, allowing the market to determine its price;

B) **INNOVATION** – Software allows companies to customise and adapt solutions to meet enterprise needs; and

C) **CUSTOMER CHOICE** – Microsoft is committed to delivering a software-based approach to VoIP and building an eco-system of partners to provide the phones, gateways, etc.

Currently in Malaysia, MIMOS Berhad and Western Digital are some of the few who are already on Rapid Deployment Program testing the OCS 2007 Public Beta for conferencing and voice.

In the two months since Microsoft published the interoperability specification, global telephony and networking companies such as Alcatel-Lucent, Avaya Inc, Cisco Systems Inc, Ericsson, Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories Inc, Mitel Networks Corp, NEC Corp, Nortel Networks and Siemens Enterprise Communications, and gateway providers AudioCodes Ltd, Dialogic Corp and Quintum Technologies Inc have stated their support for the interoperability specification for Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007. Together these vendors provide interoperability with approximately 90% of communications systems.

In three years' time, Microsoft believes that more than 100 million people will have the ability to make phone calls from Outlook, SharePoint and other Microsoft Office system applications. This is more than twice the number of enterprise VoIP lines deployed today.

According to research by In-Stat, the overall enterprise VoIP market is expected to grow 1500% by 2010.

Haniza ended by saying, "We believe that the decision towards implementing the unified communications platform is no longer an option for enterprises. We believe that IP-based systems will displace analogue systems and it has already taken place now and that companies will want to derive new value from those investments. We think the opportunity to have Web, audio and video conferencing integrated in an intuitive way is exciting, and new devices like our RoundTable device will provide an immersive conferencing experience that extends the meeting environment across multiple locations.

"We'll see advances in business phone hardware, and a new class of Voice over IP phones will emerge that are both lower in cost and much richer in their capabilities compared to today's typical business desktop phone. So there will be a wide range of technologies coming together to make it possible to improve the way we communicate and put PEOPLE in control of their communications."

Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007

Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007