

Case Communications November Newsletter

In this Issue:

- > BT to increase rental on Access products
- > Web developer Simon Willison talks about what the OpenID project means for developers and web users
- > Apple ready to release Leopard
- > The Government calls in the Office of Fair Trading Over Microsofts sales 'Office 2007' and 'Vista' to academics.
- > Cisco VPN 's not ready for Microsoft Vista
- > Microsoft launches its Office Communications Server
- > Google to Unveil software for mobile phones
- > Ofcom issues a consultation paper to identify how and when the UK should upgrade its broadband access.
- > UK Government may intervene to help get Fibre to the home
- > Make free internet calls from your mobile phone

Welcome,

Welcome to Case Communications November 2007 newsletter.

BT to increase rental on Access products

On 1 November, BT will be increasing the rental prices on Access products. In general terms, the rental will be increasing by some 4.8%. However, additional discounts have been made available to customers within certain BT packages to negate or minimise these increases.

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Web developer Simon Willison talks about what the OpenID project means for developers and web users

Simon Wilson explains 'Open ID' at the Future of Web Apps conference in London, February 2007. Here we provide a copy of the interview on this interesting subject.

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Apple ready to release Leopard

Leopard, the latest update of the Apple Mac operating system OS X, went on sale last Friday.

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The Government calls in the Office of Fair Trading Over Microsofts sales 'Office 2007' and 'Vista' to academics.

The government agency has complained to the Office of Fair Trading over Microsofts academic licensing of Microsoft Office 2007 and the Vista operating system

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Cisco VPN 's not ready for Microsoft Vista

A number of IT Departments are moving onto Windows Vista, concerned that a company-wide deployment will lead to nightmarish compatibility problems, especially with Cisco's VPN's which are not compatible with VISTA yet.

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Microsoft launches its Office Communications Server

On the 16th October Microsoft launched its Office Communications Server (OCS) and related products in San Francisco.

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Google to Unveil software for mobile phones

Google will unveil its long-anticipated plan to bring its software to mobile phones within the next two weeks, *The Wall Street Journal* has reported, citing unnamed sources familiar with the matter.

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Ofcom issues a consultation paper to identify how and when the UK should upgrade its broadband access.

Next-generation networks (NGNs) are already being installed across the UK. BT's 21CN is the best-known and largest example but Colt's NGN is due to go live next year; Carphone Warehouse's TalkTalk NGN is a year old; and Cable & Wireless, Thus and BSKyB's Easynet are also joining in.

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UK Government may intervene to help get Fibre to the home

The UK government may intervene to promote the deployment of fibre connectivity across the country, according to the minister of state for competitiveness.

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Make free internet calls from your mobile phone

Mobile phone group 3 and eBay division Skype have launched a handset that allows Skype users to make free internet calls from their mobile phones.

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BT to increase rental on Access products

On 1 November, BT will be increasing the rental prices on Access products. In general terms, the rental will be increasing by some 4.8%. However, additional discounts have been made available to customers within certain BT packages to negate or minimise these increases.

The products affected include: Standard business PSTN line rentals; ISDN 2e rentals; ISDN 30e & DASS2; and Featureline rentals. In addition, the Business Line Reward and Business Line Start-up products will be withdrawn from new supply on 1 November.

BT has introduced the changes because most rental charges haven't increased since September 2002, with the exception of a few old ISDN variants which are in the process of being withdrawn. Since that time, the Retail Price Index (RPI) has risen by 17% (the current figure for this year being 4.8%). In effect, this means that in real terms, BT's rental charges have actually fallen over the past few years.

The Price List can be viewed at: www.bt.com/pricing

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Web developer Simon Willison talks about what the OpenID project means for developers and web users

Can you just run through exactly what OpenID is?

Simon Willison: OpenID is a decentralised system for single sign-on. So it lets you have one user account that you can use to log into lots of different sites. The thing that makes OpenID special compared to, say, Passport or Typekey or other things that have gone before, is that with OpenID you get to decide where your identity is hosted. You can host it with SixApart, or you can host it with AOL or you can host it yourself. The standard, the technology keeps on working no matter where youve put it, so you can even switch providers and say actually I used to be hosted with Six Apart and now I want to host it on my own - you can do that and your login keeps working.

So what is the fundamental problem that it solves?

SW: Everyone has too many user accounts. Ive got dozens and dozens of user accounts of sites that I use - some I use on a daily basis, some on a monthly basis. Managing all of those usernames and passwords is just incredibly difficult. Everyone knows that you should use a different password for every service, because otherwise one service gets cracked and you lose everything but of course nobody does that, because managing two or three passwords is enough work for most people.

So I create an OpenID and associate it with other identities I have around the place, and the sign-on procedure becomes basically non-existent?

SW: Exactly. In fact, if you've got an AOL messenger account already then you have an OpenID it will be `openid.aol.com/` and then your screenname. But the idea is that you find applications that support OpenID (this is currently quite a small list but its growing all the time), and you can then sign into those with your OpenID, potentially merge that with an existing user account or create a brand new user account and just continue using the

application without any further hassle.

Support is growing quickly. How is the take-up growing?

SW: The problem OpenID has is that there are two sides to OpenID there are OpenID servers, the places that will give you an OpenID, and there are consumers, the sites you can actually log in to. And of course everyone wants to be a provider, because it feels great to have lots of user accounts and loads of people have big user account databases that they can open up. But people are much more cautious about being a consumer because its a lot less well understood what that actually implies. So its all about the benefits of being a consumer and the sorts of things you can start to do once you let people log in to your site with an OpenID.

Can you give us some examples?

SW: The obvious one is that you get linked to from digg or Techcrunch and people click through to your brand new Web 2.0 service; then it asks them to create an account and half of them just walk off because they dont want to create another throwaway account just to try out your service. If you support OpenID you can instantly get a much larger signup rate because youve got a whole bunch of early adopters especially if digg is supporting OpenID, anyone who comes from digg has got an OpenID there already so you get lots more people trying out your service.

So thats the really simple case, but looking further ahead whats really exciting is the stuff you can do to innovate around OpenID. So you might find that if you let people log into your service with OpenID and theyre logged into other services as well youve got a bridge between those two services. You can say well, youre logged into this bookmark service but because you used your OpenID for your photo service as well we can start combining your photographs and your links, we can start doing clever things like that.

Would people be able to bring their different social networking identities together as well?

SW: OpenID actually does very little, it just solves the authentication problem. But its designed as a small component of a larger ecosystem, so you could build friend import and friend export on top of OpenID. You log into a site with your LiveJournal ID and the site then goes to LiveJournal and says hey,

who does this person have down as their friends?. And if those people are present in that sites system then it can set up friend relationships there. So theres potential for people to start building social networks that exist outside of the silos of individual sites, sort of decentralised social networks. First people need to start using OpenID and then they can start building on top of it.

So is this something which is finished and ready to go, or is it still in development?

SW: OpenID works today, and actually the current version of the spec thats being implemented is OpenID 1.1. Theres talk of developing OpenID 2, which covers a larger amount of ground and is under active development on the mailing list - but for all intents and purposes its ready for people to start using it, its ready to roll out.

And youve now got some pretty big backers like AOL have you heard any feedback?

SW: Thats an interesting question. Obviously the big names that are getting involved are AOL who have actually launched, theyve made 68 million AOL user accounts available as OpenIDs which is huge and Microsoft, who had Bill Gates make a big announcement at the [RSA conference](#) saying that Microsoft planned to integrate their [CardSpace](#) client-based identity solution with OpenID. I think thats something thats looking ahead to OpenID 2, but AOLs commitment is right now theyve already started supporting it.

But youve talked before about the problems and gaps that are still in OpenID. Can you explain some more about those?

SW: The biggest problem OpenID has is just in terms of explaining itself. Thats not inherent to the spec, its something thats difficult to explain to people - but people are already starting to make the effort to do that. So the problem that everyone talks about and the one thats a really legitimate concern is phishing. With OpenID because youre going to an untrusted site and trying to log in, it redirects you to your identity provider. But of course it could also redirect you to an impersonation of your identity provider, and if you werent paying attention you could have your account stolen. So the OpenID communitys been looking at a whole bunch of solutions to that, and this is where Microsoft and CardSpace come in to try and come up with a solution to phishing.

In the end, my opinion is that phishing will become a competitive area between different providers, so when you're picking your provider you might look at what measures they have in place to help protect you from phishing attacks and use that to help influence your decision.

So although OpenID has a weakness in it, you think it's the job of other providers to come up with a real solution?

SW: I think it's something that OpenID providers have to start tackling, but of course phishing is a problem that everyone on the web has, and it's incredibly difficult to take on. They do academic studies against phishing protection and find that 90 per cent of people don't even notice that the phishing protection is there. So it's really a problem for the whole industry and OpenID is actually benefiting from the amount of effort people are putting into solving this.

So how easy is it for developers or service providers to implement it? Why would they?

SW: So the reason you want to do it is that you want more users, more people trying your stuff and you want to make life better for the people who are using your service you want to make it easier for them to manage their account with you. From the point of view of implementing stuff, there are libraries available to do all of the tough encryption side of things for PHP, for Python, for Ruby, for Java and for ASP.net as well - so any web environment that you're working with has probably got libraries, relatively mature libraries, for integrating OpenID functionality already. It's just a case finding the library, reading the documentation and glueing it into your existing accounts system.

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Apple ready to release Leopard

The release ends months of waiting for Mac fans, after Apple pushed back the launch to finish development on its much-hyped iPhone. Early reviews for Leopard have been positive with Apple hoping to build on recent strong sales of its Mac computers. In the last three months, Apple sold 2.2 million Macs, up 400,000 on its previous best quarter.

The company is touting Leopard as a Vista-beater, pointing to new features not found in the new operating system (OS) from Microsoft that drives many PCs.

Apple says there are 300 new features in Leopard, but some of them are minor tweaks to the previous OS, called Tiger, rather than fully-fledged tools or enhancements.

'Few disappointments'

In the New York Times, technology columnist David Pogue wrote: "Happy surprises, and very few disappointments, lie around every corner." At the MacLiveExpo, being held in London, there was a mixed response from attendees on whether they would be rushing out to buy Leopard on day one.

Many of the delegates said they would wait for the operating system to "bed down" before they bought it.

"I never buy any operating system when it first comes out. I normally wait until it has been out for six months or a year," said David Ramage, a Mac user from Luton.

He added: "Tiger does what I need it to do right now. I've not seen anything in Leopard to make me want to buy it immediately."

For developers, a new operating system means having to work to ensure their programs run smoothly on the new platform. Ben Rudolph, director of communications at SWSOft, makers of Parallels, said Leopard was a big step forward for Apple and "would continue to drive sales of Macs". Parallels lets users run Windows and Linux alongside OS X on a single Apple machine.

Mr Rudolph said Parallels would run smoothly under Leopard, barring any last minute changes to the code released by Apple. "If that happens, we'll release a free, automatic update to account for them very soon after Leopard's launch," he said. Of the new features in Leopard, Mr Rudolph said he was looking forward to being able to take advantage of his Mac's 64-bit architecture.

The new OS takes full advantage of the latest generation of chips inside Apple machines, while running applications on older processors also.

"I'm also looking forward to new user-experience features like Stacks, which should help me organise my incredibly messy desktop, and Spaces, which lets me cycle between different desktops."

Nik Rawlinson, editor of MacUser magazine, said many users would get Leopard in its first few weeks on sale.

"When Tiger was launched it earned Apple \$120m very quickly and all the expectations are that sales will be double that."

He added: "Vista has been quite a disappointment for many people and Leopard could be the reason many people make the switch to Macs."

He said he felt Leopard had enough new features to distinguish itself from Microsoft's Vista.

"A lot of things that were previously only add-ons in the Mac world, such as the Apple TV interface, are now integrated into the OS.

"That is competing directly with Media Center on Windows PCs. Apple has seen that Microsoft has moved forward in some areas and is responding."

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The Government calls in the Office of Fair Trading Over Microsofts sales 'Office 2007' and 'Vista' to academics.

The government agency has complained to the Office of Fair Trading.

It says talks with Microsoft have not resolved "fundamental concerns" about academic licensing and about Office 2007 and the Vista operating system.

Microsoft says it wants as many people as possible to benefit from its technology at the best possible price.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is an essential subject in schools, which have to spend huge sums on installing, upgrading and maintaining equipment and software. The outstanding issues centre on the limitations Microsoft places on schools using its subscription licensing arrangements, the agency says

Becta's advice to schools considering moving to Microsoft's School Agreement subscription licensing model is that they should not do so.



It reminds schools they are legally obliged to have licensed software, but suggests they use instead what is known as "perpetual licensing".

This gives the permanent right to use the software and requires no ongoing payments beyond the purchase price.

The advantage to schools in using a subscription service such as Microsoft's is that smaller, annual payments are involved rather than a larger one-off cost.

But a spokesman for Becta said the problem was that Microsoft required schools to have licences for every PC in a school that

might use its software, whether they were actually doing so or running something else.

'Impediments' It hopes that by referring the case to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), "Microsoft will move promptly to address the issues raised".

If schools have already signed up with Microsoft, Becta says "they should consider their renewal and their buyout options" alongside any findings the OFT may make.

And it advises them to deploy Office 2007 only "when its interoperability with alternative products is satisfactory".

In a previous report, Becta said primary schools could typically save up to 50% and secondary schools more than 20% of their ICT costs if they switched to what is known as "open source" software. In its complaint it also identifies potential difficulties for schools, pupils and parents who wish to use alternatives to Microsoft's Office suite, such as Open Office or Star Office, because they may not be compatible.

"Becta is determined to get the best deal it can for schools and indeed for the wider educational system, and to make it as cost-effective and convenient as possible for educational customers to acquire the ICT products and services they choose," the agency said in a statement. "This demands an effective educational ICT marketplace and the avoidance of impediments to effective competition and choice."

A Microsoft spokesperson said: "Becta has referred Microsoft to the Office of Fair Trading and at this early stage no indication has been given as to how this issue will progress. "We want to reassure our customers, partners and the education sector that it is business as usual.

"This means we will continue working towards the same goal: enabling as many individuals and schools as possible to benefit from the transformative power of technology at the best possible price.

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- > Make free internet calls from your mobile phone

Cisco VPN 's not ready for Microsoft Vista

A number of IT Departments are moving onto Windows Vista, concerned that a company-wide deployment will lead to nightmarish compatibility problems. But for Chris Cahalin, network manager at Papa Gino's Inc. & D'Angelo Sandwich Shops, in the USA, Microsoft's latest operating system is a must-have because of its much-touted security improvements.

Cahalin applied for and gained entry into Microsoft's Vista Technology Adoption Program (TAP), which allowed participants to pick apart Vista while it was still in beta and have direct access to various engineering groups within Microsoft.

The company has now moved from testing to deployment. Laptops in the organization are the first to have Vista installed, followed by the remaining Windows devices on the network.

"We already have a district manager with Vista on his laptop, and through TAP we have a direct line to Microsoft in case of trouble," Cahalin said. "The best way to find the kinks is to use it, and these resources have really made things happen for us."

Like many early adopters, Cahalin's IT Department is experiencing the kind of compatibility issues that are typical when a new technology is deployed early. And in Papa Gino's case, the problems don't necessarily stem from bugs in Vista itself.

It didn't take long for Papa Gino's to find the biggest kink: compatibility problems between Vista and the company's VPN technology, which Cahalin deems a critical slice of the company's security program. The company uses a VPN to secure mobile machines in a business where many laptop-wielding employees travel among the company's 400 locations across New England and often get online using wireless hotspots and hotel rooms outside his IT shop's control.

Much of Cahalin's frustration is with Cisco Systems Inc., his VPN vendor, for not being prepared for Vista's arrival. Since the VPN is so important, he is now considering other vendors.

"As far as I'm concerned, Cisco is moving too slowly on this," Cahalin said. "Everyone knew Vista was coming, and all the third-party vendors should have started addressing potential compatibility problems before it was released."

Motivators for early adoption

Cahalin pointed to Papa Gino's reliance on credit card transactions and its determination not to suffer data breach's (as have some other high profile firms) as the main motivator to deploy Vista early rather than wait until the first service pack.

"Any company can suffer brand damage if customer data gets out," Cahalin said. "Credit cards have been a huge boon to our business and it is our responsibility to protect the data."

The company is also bound by regulatory requirements and industry standards such as HIPAA, Sarbanes-Oxley and the Payment Card Industry's Data Security Standard (PCI DSS), all of which demand that electronically stored data is accurate and secure from online predators.

Cahalin said the security enhancements in Vista are worth the headaches he's suffered over the VPN issue. With Vista, he said, it's a lot easier to lock down individual machines and set network policies for end users. He said it's also easier to secure and connect to legacy applications with Vista. There's even an upside to one of the security features people tend to like the least: User Account Control, which is the source of those pop-up security warnings a user sees when trying to launch certain applications.

"The pop-up boxes are something users will ignore over time, and they are bound to appear most often when people are trying to use all the legacy applications," he said. "But we can get around that simply by setting the right policy. Through policy, you can tell Vista which applications are legit and which ones are not."

Like many Windows administrators, Cahalin has long disliked that Windows would give users local administrative rights, which makes it easier for attackers to take over vulnerable machines. Vista corrects that by blocking local administrative access right out of the box, he said. As for the interface layout, Cahalin admitted it takes some getting used to. Programs and options are not in the same places as they were in earlier versions of Windows. But he said it's a small price to pay given all the extra control Vista gives IT administrators over those programs.

In the final analysis, he said, Vista offers an "astounding level of security" at no cost.

Of course, not everyone agrees. John Moyer, CEO of Portsmouth, N.H.-based security vendor BeyondTrust Corp., said he's heard from a number of customers who think Vista leaves too many decisions in the hands of the end user rather than the company security department.

"Microsoft likes to say Vista is the most secure operating system yet, but the reality is that there are a lot of applications people can't use without administrative rights, and companies don't want to deal with help desk calls every time a user gets one of those confusing, disruptive dialogue boxes," Moyer said. "They also don't like it when the end user has to make a decision on what to run with administrative privileges. There's not enough transparency for the user."

The VPN dilemma

While Microsoft is bound to bear the brunt of any frustrations people have deploying Vista, whether it's the disruption caused by all the dialogue boxes or compatibility issues, Cahalin isn't the least bit upset with the software giant over the hurdles he has faced. Instead, he blames it on Cisco's lack of preparedness on the VPN front.

"The problem is that when you use Cisco you need to live on a Cisco island," he said. "It's very proprietary. The VPN connectivity has been very spotty, and it has always been a matter of Cisco properly supporting Vista."

At the heart of the VPN problem is that Papa Gino's prefers to use a Secure Sockets Layer-Based VPN and Cisco hasn't finished the work necessary to make its SSL VPN compatible with Vista. As a temporary workaround, Cahalin is switching to Cisco's IPSec VPN, which was recently made Vista-compatible. But many IT professionals consider SSL VPNs more versatile than those based on IPSec, so the situation is not ideal, Cahalin said.

When told of the problems some Vista adopters have been having with the SSL VPN, a Cisco spokesman confirmed the company had fixed the issues on the IPsec side and is working to make SSL compatible. The networking giant declined to make someone from the VPN team available to offer more detail.

Cahalin is now exploring the possibility of ditching his Cisco 5510 Adaptive Security Appliance (ASA) for another VPN product from Juniper or another vendor. And Cisco isn't the only vendor he's critical of for not being prepared for Vista's arrival. Citrix has also been slow coming to the Vista table, he said, noting that the company only recently released version 10 of the Citrix presentation server client which is designed for Vista compatibility.

Any company that moves ahead with a major OS upgrade is destined to run into compatibility challenges, said Pete Lindstrom, a senior analyst with Midvale, Utah-based Burton Group.

There are a number of possible reasons for Cisco's VPN-Vista issues, Lindstrom said. One of the more likely scenarios is that Cisco is taking its time because so few of its customers are actively deploying Vista at this point.

"Cisco is probably waiting to see what the Vista demand is," he said. "To the extent that not many companies are on the bleeding edge like Papa Gino's and adoption is slow in the bigger picture, Cisco may just see this as a situation where they have more time to work out the VPN problems."

Keeping third-party security

While Cahalin is thrilled with Vista's security muscle, he believes it's still necessary to have multiple layers of security from multiple sources. Cahalin notes that every desktop machine Papa Gino's has purchased since March 2005 is fitted with a 'Trusted Platform Module (TPM) , a chip installed on the motherboard that's used for hardware authentication. The TPM authenticates the computer, rather than the user. To do so, the module stores information specific to the host system, such as encryption keys, digital certificates and passwords.

While Microsoft took the big step of building TPM management into Vista, Cahalin said third-party vendors are still needed to implement truly effective security. He uses a Embassy Trust security suite from Wave Systems Corp. for encryption and is considering full drive encryption options from Seagate Technology. The company has also been deploying Dell laptops with fingerprint readers.

"Long, complex passwords started to get in the way of productivity so single sign-on became a must," Cahalin said.

Between his third-party security vendors and the deployment of Vista, Cahalin said he is much more confident that his company has enough protection in place to avoid a serious data security breach. If Cisco could get its SSL VPN issues figured out, all would be right with the world, he said. Whether Cisco fixes the problem or Papa Gino's goes to another VPN vendor, he said the problem would be solved sooner rather than later.

Moyer agreed third-party security tools will continue to be necessary for the sake of defense-in-depth.

"There's a standard approach to security and it's that it has to be a layered approach," he said. "If you leave all the security to Microsoft it's like leaving the fox in charge of the hen house."

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Microsoft launches its Office Communications Server

On the 16th October Microsoft launched its Office Communications Server (OCS) and related products in San Francisco. During the launch a lone guitarist played a solo on a Gibson guitar, and as he finished Bill Gates and Jeff Raikes (business division president) delivered Microsoft's vision for this market, along with demos of what life could be like in a predominantly Microsoft world. From the user feedback before, during and after the launch, here are the main areas that seem to have the most immediate interest and also cause the most concern.

First, the bad -- the areas that caused concern:

Lack of traditional telephony features

This is probably the biggest area of concern that I can see from the traditional telephony world. By Microsoft's own admission, OCS isn't a full PBX replacement; rather, it's a communications platform that supports voice, video and messaging features. A typical PBX has several hundred features, of which only a handful are used by different organizations. The problem is that the handful varies from company to company, meaning that most of the features actually get used, just not by any one organization. Over time, Microsoft will add more features, probably through partnerships with telephony vendors, but for now there's a limited feature set.

OCS requires users to work differently

The way OCS works promotes making calls in a different way. For example, after dialing a number, the user needs to click on the "call" button instead of having the call automatically dialed. Moving to OCS will require some end-user retraining, and anyone who has had to go through just changing handsets knows what a big initiative this can be. I have mixed feelings on this. In the mobile phone world, we have become quite accustomed to hitting a dial button and click-to-call, so I'm not sure why it's an issue in the corporate world. In fact, most cell phones do not even have DTMF tones (those beeps you hear when you make a call), but with corporate telephony, we still need it. I think this becomes less of an issue over time, as the younger generation becomes part of

the workforce. In the short term, though, be prepared to do some retraining.

Scalability of the system

Despite the lengthy beta period, OCS is new and there aren't many examples of large enterprises that are using thousands of phones in production. This is something that, over time, will become less of an issue, but most companies I've talked to do not want to "fix" a phone system that isn't really broken.

Organizational issues

OCS introduces telephony to application developers, Exchange administrators, desktop managers and other areas of IT that haven't historically cared about voice. In fact, at Citrix iForum this week, Citrix released its click-to-call capabilities; now the Citrix person has an interest. This will cause organizational challenges for companies as they determine who exactly owns UC.

The simplification or removal of the traditional desktop phone

Earlier this year, Microsoft made the bold statement that the cost of delivering telephony would be cut in half within a few years. Much of the basis for this statement was the removal of the high-cost, traditional desktop phone in favor of a desktop softphone or one of the more basic phones that Microsoft supports. Again, this may be a generational trend, but the typical corporate worker wants a desktop phone rather than only using a PC.

Now for the good -- here are the things that conference attendees generally liked:

Microsoft RoundTable

This demo held a lot of user interest, but you really need to use it to appreciate it. For those who aren't familiar with RoundTable, it's a 360-degree camera that sits in a conference room and automatically changes the view depending on who is speaking. I've done calls with it and can attest to what a great experience it gives. It's also great for playing back recorded meetings and understanding who was speaking on which points, since the camera automatically changes its view.

Unified messaging

It's interesting to me that unified messaging (UM) has been around for years now, but the overall uptake of it has been very slow. So why are people interested in it now when they weren't before? I think mobility has added an element to the market that UM never

had before. If we're chained to our desk, who needs UM? Just listen to the voicemails on your phone. If you're mobile, however, having a voicemail sent to your BlackBerry lets you know immediately that you have an office voicemail, and in many cases you can listen to the message on the BlackBerry itself. I've got this up and running now, and I never need to dial into my corporate voicemail to "pick up" messages because they're delivered to me real time.

UC integrated into applications

Microsoft alluded to this and highlighted the integration with SAP's Duet software. I don't think this concept was widely understood by much of the audience, but the ones who did get it had many good ideas on how to leverage this. Over time, there will be more software with UC integrated into it, which will, in turn, drive more innovation. This is an area I wish Microsoft had spent more time on during the keynotes and demos.

Voice as an over-the-top service

I could actually categorize this in both the good and bad sections because it was among the most controversial of points. I put it in the "good" section because I like a challenge to conventional thinking. Microsoft's way of handling voice quality is very Skype-like, in that the quality and tuning is done at the endpoint device itself. This means that a bunch of stuff can happen in the middle and it remains transparent to the user. If anyone's used Skype recently, you know it works fairly well if both endpoints are Skype. However, what if the endpoints aren't all Microsoft (or Skype, in the consumer segment)? Quality becomes more of an issue, which is where the controversy arises.

Overall -- despite the hype, smoke show and guitar player rocking out -- the UC launch did what it was supposed to do. It challenged conventional thinking to consider the current voice industry as more than just a way to make calls.

Compared with PCs and mobile phones, desktop telephony hasn't really evolved that much over the past 30 years. Even many of the IP-based systems are just IP versions of older systems. If you're evaluating Microsoft now, there's no deploy-everything-Microsoft overnight. Pick a couple of the areas (like RoundTable) that you can leverage immediately and that add new functionality (lower risk), and start from there.

Case Communications November Newsletter

In this Issue:

- > BT to increase rental on Access products
- > Web developer Simon Willison talks about what the OpenID project means for developers and web users
- > Apple ready to release Leopard
- > The Government calls in the Office of Fair Trading Over Microsofts sales 'Office 2007' and 'Vista' to academics.
- > Cisco VPN 's not ready for Microsoft Vista
- > Microsoft launches its Office Communications Server
- > Google to Unveil software for mobile phones
- > Ofcom issues a consultation paper to identify how and when the UK should upgrade its broadband access.
- > UK Government may intervene to help get Fibre to the home
- > Make free internet calls from your mobile phone

Google to Unveil software for mobile phones

Google will unveil its long-anticipated plan to bring its software to mobile phones within the next two weeks, *The Wall Street Journal* has reported, citing unnamed sources familiar with the matter.

The "Google-powered" phones are expected to make it to market by mid-2008, possibly from Hutchison Whampoa's 3 UK, Taiwan's HTC, South Korea's LG Electronics, France Telecom's Orange SA and Deutsche Telekom AG's T-Mobile USA, the report said.

In addition to the ad-supported phone services bundling Google Maps, YouTube and Gmail, the operating system would be open to developers to build additional features.

Google executives have declined to comment on rumours related to the Google Phone - or GPhone which has been reported on extensively this year.

Google executives have complained that carriers have locked up the market and stifled innovation in the US telephony market. They may bid on 700 Mhz wireless spectrum chief executive Eric Schmidt said at Google's recent Analyst Day.

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- > Make free internet calls from your mobile phone

Ofcom issues a consultation paper to identify how and when the UK should upgrade its broadband access.

That takes care of the so-called "backbone" of the UK's broadband infrastructure but next-generation access (NGA, or the local loop) is another matter entirely.

While the NGNs are all fibre-based, the local loop almost entirely consists of copper. This creates a huge potential for bottlenecks, as bandwidth-intensive applications such as IP television become more prevalent.

The Broadband Stakeholder Group, an industry lobbying association, recently stated it wants to see an NGA rollout begin within the next two years, and government minister Stephen Timms also weighed into the debate a week ago with a hint that the public sector might get involved to speed things up.

Ofcom's chief executive, Ed Richards, said: "Next-generation access offers tremendous new opportunities for UK business and consumers and its potential impact on the economy is very significant."

He said NGA will be "one of the most fundamental changes to the country's infrastructure in the next 20 years" and added that "investment in next-generation access will represent a substantial commercial risk and the market should decide where and when it will be made".

BT is reluctant to spend billions of pounds installing [fibre to the home \(FTTH\) or fibre to the cabinet \(FTTC\)](#) while regulations state it would have to give rival providers equivalent access to those connections. Although estimates vary, a full FTTH rollout would probably cost in the region of £15bn. FTTC would be significantly cheaper but would still cost well into the billions.

Richards said: "We want to ensure there are no barriers to investment and provide a clear regulatory environment which will help encourage investment. But we also want to ensure that the

benefits of competition which consumers have enjoyed with current-generation broadband can also be achieved as we move to higher-speed, next-generation access."

Richards said the current regulatory regime, which forced BT to spin off its Openreach division in order to allow rivals access to its exchanges, was "the right starting point for future regulation". However, he suggested NGA networks have "different characteristics", and claimed the demand for such access remained uncertain for now.

Dougal Scott, Ofcom's director of policy development, suggested NGA is "likely to be provided by a whole range of technologies and networks", including not only NGNs and cable but also wireless and satellite (although the latter two connections would probably sit alongside wired access). He also pointed out that cable companies such as Virgin Media, which is currently trialling speeds of up to 50Mbps, already provide FTTC.

Ofcom is determined to remain neutral in the debate. It does not even view it as a certainty that the UK needs an NGA rollout as soon as possible.

Scott suggested other countries which are already rolling out NGA are doing so partly for reasons that do not apply in the UK. For example, US telcos are rolling out NGA because of the length of the local loops they are faced with; Japan has more tower blocks than the UK, making it cheaper to roll out fibre there; and France has a more uniform and suitable sewer system, which can be easily cabled.

He said: "We do have competition in broadband [cable companies] but none of the other factors are in place. The efficient time for investment in the UK might be a bit later than in other countries."

Richards also claimed there would be a "second mover" advantage in waiting for other countries to take the NGA leap.

In a statement, the Broadband Stakeholder Group welcomed Ofcom's consultation but it warned "there may be a need in the future for Ofcom to take more interventionist measures if evidence emerges that the UK economy could suffer from delayed deployment of next-generation access".

Ofcom's NGA consultation closes on 5 December. However, a separate consultation will shortly be announced by the regulator that will examine areas where the local loop consists purely of fibre, such as Ebbsfleet in Kent.

Because no copper is involved there, it is currently impossible for BT to "unbundle" the connections to rival providers - the company has a trial agreement with Ofcom to let this happen - although future technological advances may make unbundling possible. As BT intends to roll out more fibre-only deployments at new builds, the regulatory aspects of this issue need to be addressed alongside the more general NGA debate, the regulator believes

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Case Communications November Newsletter

In this Issue:

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- > Web developer Simon Willison talks about what the OpenID project means for developers and web users
- > Apple ready to release Leopard
- > The Government calls in the Office of Fair Trading Over Microsofts sales 'Office 2007' and 'Vista' to academics.
- > Cisco VPN 's not ready for Microsoft Vista
- > Microsoft launches its Office Communications Server
- > Google to Unveil software for mobile phones
- > Ofcom issues a consultation paper to identify how and when the UK should upgrade its broadband access.
- > UK Government may intervene to help get Fibre to the home
- > Make free internet calls from your mobile phone

UK Government may intervene to help get Fibre to the home

Stephen Timms, minister for competitiveness and formerly the UK's ecommerce minister, has made a speech in which he warned of the danger of falling behind other countries in broadband speeds. The speech was made to the Broadband Stakeholder Group (BSG), which recently called for a fibre rollout to keep the UK competitive.

Timms said: "When I became ecommerce minister five years ago, the UK was neck-and-neck with Croatia on broadband availability and use. Together, thanks in no small measure to the work of the Broadband Stakeholder Group, we fixed that problem and put Britain in a leading position. However, today we face a new challenge. Other countries are starting to invest in new, fibre-based infrastructure, delivering considerably higher bandwidth than is available in the UK today.

"As minister for competitiveness, I see it as one of my highest personal priorities that we have a high-performance telecommunications infrastructure in every part of the country, enabling us to compete successfully on a global basis. That is why I have decided to chair a high-level summit later this year to consider the circumstances that might trigger public-sector intervention, the form that intervention might take, and at what level it might sensibly take place."

According to sources at the BSG, that summit is likely to take place in November or December, with delegates from industry, the regulator Ofcom and the government taking part. The BSG is also apparently keen to see the government set targets for measuring the UK's broadband infrastructure against its main economic rivals.

Although the UK's broadband infrastructure is based on a fibre backbone, the "last mile" connections between homes and telephone exchanges are almost entirely copper-based. With high-bandwidth applications such as IP television becoming a reality, many industry figures are concerned at the potential bottlenecks this situation could create. However, BT is reluctant to commit to

upgrading copper connections to fibre because, under the current regulatory environment, it would then have to open up that infrastructure to its rivals.

However, the price of copper is rising and BT's outgoing chairman, Sir Christopher Bland, hinted recently that fibre to the home FTTH could become a reality in the UK, as it has elsewhere in Western Europe.

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Case Communications November Newsletter

In this Issue:

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- > Cisco VPN 's not ready for Microsoft Vista
- > Microsoft launches its Office Communications Server
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Make free internet calls from your mobile phone

The companies also said the new 3 Skypephone can send free Skype instant messages.

Frank Sixt, finance director of 3 owner Hutchinson Whampoa, said the company hopes to sell "several hundred thousand" units worldwide in the fourth quarter of this year.

The phone is being launched in nine markets including Australia, Italy and the UK. In the UK, the phone will cost £50 on pay-as-you-go and will be free for 3 contract users. It will be on sale in 3's stores from 2 November.

Sixt said the phone's non-Skype fees are the same as on its other phones, with call minutes and texts priced the same way.

Skype acting CEO, Michael van Swaaij, said in a statement: "Skype is now truly mobile. This new handset lets you make free mobile Skype calls when you are on the move to other Skype users all over the world."

Swaaij added he expects the launch to boost the group's 246 million-strong registered user base, as the service is now available to people without computers.

He said: "We think there will be significant interest from those who aren't on Skype as it is so easy to set up. You don't have to have a laptop."