Food for Thought

Comms Business Magazine talks to Andy Powell, Solutions Evangelist at ShoreTel about the PBX market for 50+ users.

Comms Business Magazine (CBM): Where do you see the market for 50-user plus systems going?

Andy Powell (AP): What we're seeing is a change of mindset– it's no longer about where we work but how we work. The proliferation of smartphones and tablets means that workers prefer to use their personal devices (BYOD) and work location has become a matter of convenience and choice. This is even more relevant for small to medium size companies where the pressure to reduce travel cost and carbon footprint are even stronger. With increasing number of companies moving to BYOD strategy, the key issue would be to integrate these personal devices into existing communication infrastructures securely and cost effectively. This user driven market has to match the drive to reduce costs as well as deliver improved services. When these are in place you can look to retain and acquire new customers.

Food for thought is what we do with the cloud, users are experimenting themselves and corporate IT sometime needs to catch up instead of trying to firewall it all. We can therefore mitigate risk in new ventures, free up capital and ensure the best return from technology. Interestingly it's mixed and hybrid solutions which can potentially get a maximum return.

Battery driven devices are at the heart of mobility and improvements in battery technology will also drive further growth in this area.

The mobile phone market is dynamic and dominated by upgrade philosophy. The quest for revenue will see increasing number of alliances between mobile service providers and fixed line service providers in the future. This will mean that devices will be fully integrated with your business desktop and should integrate naturally.

CBM: What integrated applications are you providing for the channel?

AP: A lot of BYOD applications will and are being delivered via new channels like the Appstore, ShoreTel is no exception. These BYOD apps are going to get more feature rich to embrace all UC technologies like video that can connect to your video conferencing suite.

The channel plays a key role in helping small and midsize businesses implement and support all kinds of IT systems. While good product and value-added applications are important, we believe that it is the ability of resellers to communicate with customers, understand and adapt solution to their needs and become trusted advisors rather than just selling technology is key for the channel. This requires the partner to deliver effective Professional Services. To this end, ShoreTel works closely with its reseller partners to ensure that they have been trained and acquired the skills and tools necessary to sell and service ShoreTel solutions.

From a product perspective, ShoreTel's solutions are brilliantly simple, easy to implement and integrate well with third party applications. This makes it easy for resellers to up-sell with more functionality and features. We have a comprehensive portfolio of integrated applications ranging from basic features like instant messaging to contact centre technology and mobility solutions so they can communicate where ever they like cost effectively. This enables our channel to provide end-users with the best possible solution, our lowest total cost of ownership guarantee, makes it even more attractive for the channel to sell ShoreTel products.

CBM: With hosted telephony passing through the one million users mark is an impact being felt by CPE solution providers?

AP: An increasing number of organisations are moving to hosted telephony, however a hosted solution is only as good as the network it uses and as more vendors include it in their portfolio, service delivery will become the key differentiator. Organisations that respond to a service problem in minutes rather than hours will win. We are not being impacted but we are at the forefront of making it happen. We are also investing in solution sales programmes for our channel to help them understand how to identify and develop these new opportunities and help deal with the challenges around security, commercial modelling and integration that this brings.

For smaller organisations, CPE might not be the most attractive solution as for some manufactuers it carries a degree of complexity and involves not only the cost of buying, installing and maintaining your own UC system but also requires space to house, power and cool the system, not to mention the additional resources required to maintain it. One of the options is to provide a hybrid solution combining hosted and a small amount of CPE. ShoreTels unique architecture enables this. This hybrid approach enables customers to have a conversation around resilience and availability yet provide all the ease of use and management of a hosted solution. ShoreTel has responded to a demand for cloud based solutions and recently acquired M5 in the US, a hosted UC pioneer. This has put ShoreTel in a great position to provide both hosted and on premise solution and will lead to ground breaking new application and approaches going forward.

The changing market dynamics will push vendors to include all three types of solutions in their portfolio – the wider the range of solution types, the better will be resellers' chances of increasing revenue and margins while making the customer experience stronger.

Andy Powell, Solutions Evangelist at ShoreTel