The Impact of Unified Communications in Manufacturing

In manufacturing as in any industry, strong team relationships are an essential element of business success. Creating a team environment requires the participation of a strong leader with the support of upper management. But for manufacturers that have multiple locations across the country and even across the world, a unified communications solution should also be incorporated.

In addition to the non-real-time forms of unified messaging (integrated voicemail, email, SMS and fax) that we’ve grown accustomed to using every day, unified communications (UC) integrates real-time communications such as instant messaging, presence awareness, telephony, call control, video conferencing, and data sharing applications like whiteboarding. In the process of encouraging teamwork, these real-time collaboration tools can help manufacturers cut costs and enhance operational efficiencies, improve quality assurance, and boost supply chain and production performance.

Reduce costs and bring teams together

Travel expenses are often a major part of a manufacturing company’s budget. It’s typical for managers and employees to perform site visits to oversee development activities in different locations around the globe. After all, productive communication between business associates is imperative to ensuring successful project completion. But with unified communications, you can dramatically cut back on the costs associated with employee travel. Reducing travel through unified communications has another significant benefit. Less flying and driving for face-to-face meetings creates less of an environmental impact, adding to a company’s green initiatives and enhancing corporate citizenship.

The video conferencing feature that comes with UC applications such as Samsung’s OfficeServ Communicator allows two or more colleagues in different locations to have face-to-face meetings on a moment’s notice. This application is much simpler and more cost-effective than external conferencing services. In fact, many companies have paid for their entire UC solution through these service reductions. And unlike external conferencing services, OfficeServ Communicator allows you to set up video conferences on the fly. Simply attach a web cam to your PC and make a call to a similarly equipped remote worker and the video call is automatically set up. With a quick click of the mouse you can also enable the built-in recording function so you can save and playback all audio and video from the meeting.

Another area for out-of-pocket reductions is telephone long distance toll costs and cell phone bills. Many companies see significant cost reductions when they switch to an IP-based solution. Utilizing the advanced instant messaging feature that comes with most unified solutions helps to eliminate excessive calling by using instant messaging to ask a quick question rather than make a phone call. Presence awareness allows users to see that the person is available before making a phone call, which greatly reduces calls to voicemail. The savings can also be seen with mobile calls and especially international calling.

Improve quality assurance

In the world of manufacturing, quality means everything. A high-quality product can make a company’s brand image soar, while poor quality can cause permanent, irreparable damage to its reputation. It can be quite arduous and time consuming to ensure good quality in a dispersed manufacturing environment. This is because components are often sourced from different worldwide suppliers, and product samples often have to be physically shipped to and from remote locations for inspection.

Unified communications can play a major role in overcoming these challenges. For instance, collaboration solutions can be used for quality assurance activities such as remote product tracking, validation tests and product line status updates. The video conferencing application may even allow remote visual inspection of parts to help quickly
address production issues. HD voice and video solutions provide the detail required to ensure optimum quality levels. Remote meetings with development, sales teams and customers also help to address product quality issues as they arise. Business associates can spontaneously connect and send one another quick updates with instant messaging. You can effortlessly share files within the chat window and even brainstorm with one another in real-time right from your desktops using the whiteboarding application. Chat sessions can quickly escalate to a phone call, then shift to a video conference with a group discussion, and finally share documents for editing.

Enhance supply chain and production efficiencies

The video conferencing, messaging, and whiteboarding capabilities discussed above can also play a major role in increasing the productivity and efficiency of engineers and the overall design process. This will ultimately speed time to market and increase the design quality for new products as well as improve collaboration with customers, partners, and employees throughout the global organization. It also helps to remove the distance and cultural barriers often involved with globalization. Since companies manufacture around the clock in different geographical locations, they need to ensure seamless communication throughout a dispersed development or manufacturing team. The diverse communications channels afforded by a unified communications solution does just that by allowing employees to choose between voice, video, chat, and whiteboarding.

The increased collaboration and strong sense of teamwork fostered by UC solutions help manufacturers save money, improve supply chain processes, and ensure a better quality end product. While traditional forms of communication methods can sometimes impose barriers – playing “telephone tag” and creating long email chains with miscommunications between parties – UC solutions can reduce errors and rework, and ultimately simplify and speed up the way we communicate. Better communication with employees leads to a greater ability to meet increasing customer expectations. You’ll have more decision-making confidence, which helps to reduce or eliminate delays. And the constant flow of information between manufacturing locations, suppliers, vendors, and customers ultimately results in improved customer satisfaction and faster response to market.