

Microsoft's Stake in Aspect Targets Contact Centers

Gartner RAS Core Research Note G00156465, Drew Kraus, 19 March 2008, R2681 06282008

Microsoft and Aspect Software have announced an alliance that Microsoft hopes will speed the integration of Office Communication Server-based unified communications capabilities into Aspect's contact center offerings.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 18 March 2008, Microsoft and Aspect Software announced a strategic alliance to extend unified communications into the contact center. The alliance includes:

- Joint product development to integrate Microsoft Office Communication Server (OCS) collaboration tools into Aspect contact center solutions
- Expansion of Aspect's professional services capabilities with an offering for Microsoft OCS 2007
- A Microsoft equity stake in Aspect to accelerate solution delivery and adoption (financial terms not disclosed)

Analysis

Contact centers have provided an early proving ground for communications-enabled business processes and for adopting unified-communications-style applications – that is, integrating enterprise communications and collaboration applications such as instant messaging, presence and conferencing into contact center environments to speed resolution of customer issues that require input from employees outside the center. Most contact center vendors have announced partnerships with Microsoft, IBM and others to deliver these integrations; however, the projects typically require significant customization and may require that the contact center vendors bring in outsiders with expertise in the partner vendor's product set.

This alliance should accelerate Aspect's ability to deliver products that integrate both its Aspect Unified IP contact center platform and PerformanceEdge workforce optimization suite with Microsoft OCS. From a services angle, the alliance should accelerate Aspect's ability to deliver a complete Aspect/Microsoft services package. Microsoft, in turn, benefits by accelerating the adoption of its unified communications applications and voice platform with a contact center vendor that has a "blue chip" installed base.

Although the development fruits of the relationship are not exclusive between the vendors, the unique alliance represents a marketing opportunity for Aspect in the contact center market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Enterprises considering either new or replacement contact center systems:** Evaluate the unified communications road maps and delivery skills of all vendors. Aspect's relationship with Microsoft may give it some competitive differentiation, but customers should look for proof by the end of the year in both product and services capabilities.
- **Aspect competitors:** Continue to highlight your integrations with Microsoft, IBM and others. Stress the nonexclusive nature of the Microsoft/Aspect alliance, and revisit the Microsoft OCS installed base to market to those who might be swayed by this partnership.