

WHITE PAPER

Unified Communications: Comparing Cisco and ShoreTel Solutions

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON IS CONCLUSIVE: UNLIKE CISCO, SHORETEL'S ALL-IN-ONE UC SOLUTION IS DESIGNED TO DELIVER LOWER TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP (TCO).

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ShoreTel UC at a Glance

ShoreTel's business communications system delivers voice, unified communications (UC), and contact center capabilities to enterprises of all sizes. It combines a distributed communications platform, intuitive user applications, IP phones, and an easy-to-use management system that integrates with leading business information systems.

Ingredients include:

- **UC Platform**
ShoreTel's unique purpose-built voice architecture provides a rich feature set and highly reliable distributed voice services, delivering complete communications.
- **User Applications**
The ShoreTel solution combines voice, video, and IM communications, along with contact center capabilities, in one intuitive desktop and mobile interface to create a common set of capabilities for users across an organization.
- **System Management**
From a single browser-based interface, IT staff can manage the system's capabilities. Targeted add-ons enable call flow handling, IVR scripts, and other more specialized features.
- **IP Phones**
ShoreTel offers an IP phone to suit every type of user from executive to remote office worker and from operator to call center supervisor.
- **Open Integration**
The ShoreTel distributed architecture includes an array of open interfaces (APIs) and pre-built connectors that integrate with third-party information and applications, enabling organizations to leverage their most valuable assets: people and information.

1. Introduction

From small businesses to large-scale enterprises, more and more organizations are moving to Unified Communications (UC) solutions to increase worker productivity, facilitate increased mobility, and reduce expenses. Yet selecting the right solution can determine whether a business realizes these benefits fully.

The ShoreTel UC system provides a comprehensive, integrated solution that is easy to learn and use, simple to manage, and cost-effective to operate. Compared with Cisco products, ShoreTel UC can offer numerous advantages, including streamlined deployment and management, easier scalability, and a significantly lower total cost of ownership (TCO). By selecting ShoreTel UC, businesses can capitalize on the benefits of unified communications without adding costs or complexity.

2. Adopting a unified, purpose-built solution

A UC solution must offer more than a loose collection of products. It must provide an integrated user interface that enables employees to move seamlessly among various modes of communication. It must offer a streamlined IT architecture and a single, easy-to-use management console to simplify administration. And it must be easy to scale, so organizations gain the agility to grow rapidly and cost-effectively, without having to rip and replace their previous environments.

Cisco offers multiple UC solutions, each with a distinct capacity limitation. Organizations must gauge their current and future needs wisely, since moving from one solution to the next can be costly and difficult. Furthermore, the flagship Cisco Unified Communications Manager (UCM) solution was assembled with technologies accumulated from several corporate acquisitions. The result is a complex solution that provides multiple user interfaces and requires extensive time and resources to manage.

Organizations in need of comprehensive UC solutions can avoid Cisco product shortfalls. Designed from the ground up to provide a single, all-in-one solution, the ShoreTel UC system integrates a full range of communications capabilities, including voice, video, instant messaging, and conferencing, plus advanced tools for mobility, presence detection, and collaboration. The ShoreTel solution was built to provide a seamless, integrated environment for users and a unified, easily managed solution for IT administrators. The solution scales simply to accommodate more users, additional sites, and new geographic regions, all within the same environment.

3. Accelerating deployment

To help organizations control costs and quickly capitalize on the benefits of UC, a solution must be designed for rapid implementation. Administrators must be able to install and configure the solution without months of planning, in-depth technical expertise, or excessive training. Users must be able to get up and running without a steep learning curve.

Cisco solutions require significantly more time and a higher skill level to deploy than ShoreTel UC. Even with Cisco's entry-level UC500 and UCM Express solutions, initial configuration can be a tedious process that often involves command-line interface configuration. Furthermore, a multisite environment requires administrators to install and configure the system at each site independently. When the Cisco solution is finally deployed, users must learn to navigate multiple interfaces.

By contrast, the ShoreTel UC system can be deployed quickly with minimal training so organizations can accelerate their time to value. ShoreTel UC requires only a single headquarters server, and software can be configured through a simple, browser-based console. Drop-in switches are easy to set up, while self-configuring phones minimize the IT resources needed to ensure rapid deployment.

4. Simplifying management

Managing a complex solution can easily cut into the cost benefits of UC. For example, the cost of upgrading multiple servers with different upgrade cycles can add significantly to ongoing expenses. Having to assign high-level staff to UC management, hire additional IT staff with in-depth technical expertise, or provide extensive training to existing personnel can slow the return on investment and take technical expertise away from core business development needs.

Cisco UC solutions are considerably more complex to manage and maintain than ShoreTel UC. Once the multi-server Cisco solution is deployed, administrators must use numerous interfaces to provision and manage all of the distinct applications. Furthermore, administrators need multiple, expensive training courses to fully understand how to operate and manage the solution.

The ShoreTel integrated administrator user interface

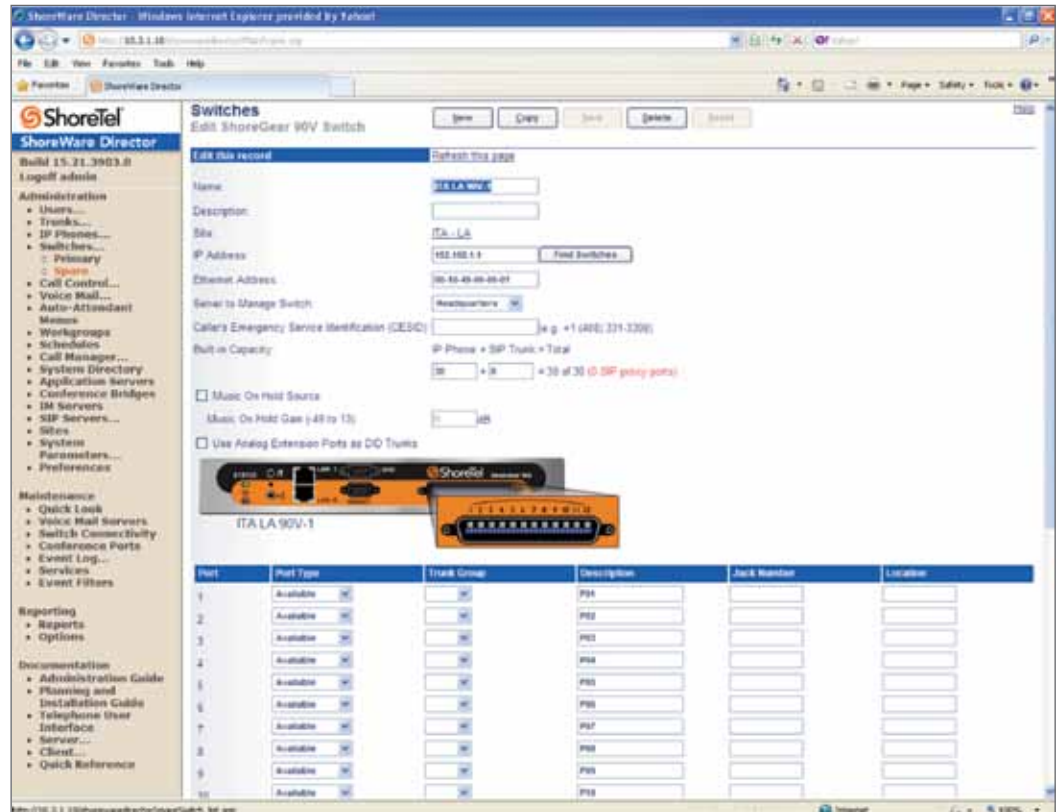


Figure 1. ShoreTel Director: Built from the ground up, ShoreTel Unified Communications provides a fully integrated, browser-based, single-administrator user interface.

Organizations can avoid complexity and reduce management costs with ShoreTel. The ShoreTel solution uses a single-image architecture that encompasses all functions. As a result, organizations have fewer servers to buy and maintain, and administrators can take advantage of seamlessly integrated management functions. Administrators can use the browser-based ShoreTel Director to manage multiple sites within a single interface. ShoreTel Director runs on the single headquarters server—no additional management systems are required. ShoreTel offers simple, inexpensive training courses to help administrators make the most of ShoreTel UC. ShoreTel training is more than 40 percent less expensive than Cisco training and requires half as many courses.

Keeping It Simple

IT system failure is a worldwide phenomenon, the cost of which represents a huge sum that could otherwise be channeled into economic growth and business development. Estimates put losses from IT failure for most developed nations at some 7 percent to 10 percent of their GDP.* The reason: most technology is inherently complex.

In the U.S. alone, IT failures cost business more than US\$1.22 trillion every year, according to some experts. Many, if not all, of these failures could be mitigated by simply eliminating complexity in the IT environment.

The ShoreTel UC system helps organizations reduce complexity and avoid expensive downtime with several key features:

- A single-image architecture that encompasses all functions
- Fewer servers to buy and maintain
- Seamlessly integrated management functions
- Browser-based ShoreTel Director to manage multiple sites within a single interface
- Single headquarters server with no added management systems required

ShoreTel UC also helps ensure uptime through cost-effective redundancy of system components and automated failover. For example, in case of a switch failure, the load is automatically distributed to other switches to avoid an outage. In an IT world growing continually more complex, ShoreTel strives for simplicity of solutions—and fewer headaches for IT managers.

* Calculations published in the white paper, "The IT Complexity Crisis: Danger and Opportunity," Roger Sessions, ObjectWatch, November 8, 2009

5. Avoiding downtime through redundancy

Given the mission-critical nature of business communications, redundancy is essential for UC solutions. Downtime can significantly damage a company's reputation and have a direct impact on revenue. The loss of a dial tone can mean a missed opportunity or the loss of a customer. Redundancy helps ensure that business communications continue even in the event of a component failure.

Yet Cisco's UC500 series, UCM Express, and UCM Business Edition solutions do not have the capability to provide redundancy. Businesses must purchase the expensive Enterprise UCM solution and then purchase and manage an additional server for each application to achieve redundancy.

The ShoreTel UC system delivers five-nines availability for mission-critical business communications. Cost-effective, $n+1$ redundancy means that only one additional switch is needed to provide redundancy for the entire system. If a switch fails, its load is automatically distributed to the other switches, protecting the system from an outage.

Furthermore, in the event of a network outage, the phone system can continue to place and receive calls on the public switched telephone network (PSTN). Because ShoreTel provides a single, scalable solution, organizations of any size can achieve the level of redundancy they need without upgrading to a new product.

6. Facilitating cost-effective, nondisruptive scalability

As organizations hire new employees to accommodate customer growth, expand into new geographic territories, or acquire other businesses, they must scale their UC solution to support more users at more sites. A UC solution must facilitate swift and cost-effective scaling to help the organization sustain business agility and control costs.

Scalability can be difficult to attain with Cisco solutions, which require that organizations upgrade to a new solution when they reach the capacity limit of an existing solution. For example, the UC500 series scales to only 100 users. If a business grows beyond that number of users, it must rip out the old system and install a new Cisco UCM Express, UCM Business Edition, or Enterprise UCM solution. There is no easy upward migration path from one Cisco solution to the next.

Organizations gain greater flexibility with ShoreTel. ShoreTel UC offers scalability from one user up to 10,000 users and 500 sites, all within the same, single solution. The modular architecture enables organizations to simply add switches as needed to sites that outgrow their capacity. With ShoreTel UC, organizations can scale quickly and cost-effectively.

The ShoreTel single-image architecture

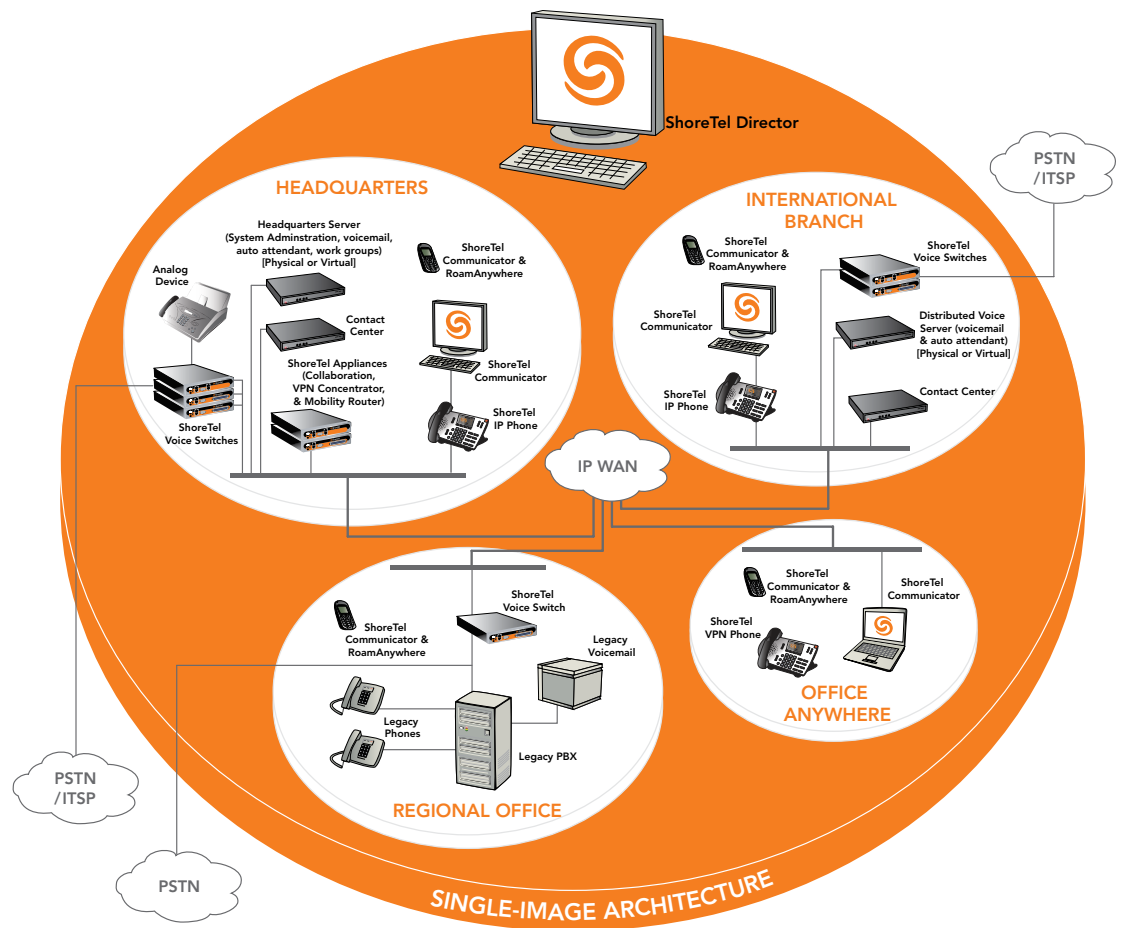


Figure 2. ShoreTel Unified Communications simplifies management with a single-image architecture.

7. Streamlining upgrades

A UC solution also should help streamline component upgrades so organizations can capitalize on the latest capabilities and maximize the solution's lifespan without excessive administrative time and effort. Products that have different upgrade cycles and different processes for various network elements force administrators to manage upgrades almost continuously. UC offerings that require administrators to perform upgrades in person can be labor intensive, especially when organizations have multiple remote sites.

With Cisco solutions, upgrading is time-consuming and costly. Each server and router must be upgraded individually, and there is a different process for each product. Moreover, Cisco has a separate charge for software support, software assurance, and hardware support.

In comparison, ShoreTel upgrades are much faster, simpler, and less expensive. Because there is a single, scalable ShoreTel solution, there is only one process for upgrades. Administrators upgrade the single, headquarters server, reboot gateways, and reboot phones. Upgrades are automatically distributed throughout the entire system. Those upgrades are free through the ShoreTel support program.

8. Accessing key functionality

A UC solution should provide a complete, integrated set of all necessary capabilities, including attendant consoles and contact center functions. Attendant consoles give users the power to manage incoming calls and direct them to where they need to go. Contact center applications provide a direct interface with customers and help ensure that customers have a good experience interacting with the company.

The Cisco attendant console and contact center offerings are bolt-on additions to the Cisco UC offerings. For attendant console capabilities with the entry-level Cisco UC500 and Cisco UCM Express solutions, organizations must select the optional Cisco Unified CallConnector, which requires the purchase of additional licenses, hardware, and support contracts. Cisco Attendant Console comes preinstalled with UCM Business Edition, but organizations must still purchase a separate license. The Enterprise UCM solution provides the option of purchasing Cisco Unified Department Attendant Console, Business Attendant Console, or Enterprise Attendant Console—applications developed by an OEM partner. Each application has distinct limits on the number of operator clients and users.

A TCO case in point: BDO Canada

ShoreTel UC enables this global company to reduce installation costs by 25 percent and ensure customer satisfaction

The Challenge

BDO Canada places a high priority on maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction with a personal touch, and partners understand the importance of serving global clients as attentively as if they were right next door. Unfortunately, BDO's aging phone system was falling increasingly behind in supporting this mission. In many cases, clients had to call a multitude of phone numbers to reach partners.

The Solution

When the firm decided to move its national headquarters to a new location, it decided to standardize on the ShoreTel UC system to provide the agility needed in a contemporary and dynamic business climate.

The Benefits

The company's national telecom manager cites that compared with the previous vendor, it costs about 25 percent less to install a ShoreTel UC system in a new office. ShoreTel's pricing structure also means that BDO can plan for growth and organizational changes with confidence, knowing that expensive post-implementation support and professional services will not be necessary.

For contact center needs, Cisco products include limited contact center functionality with basic automatic call distributor (ACD) capabilities. For more robust functionality, organizations must select optional Unified Contact Center Express, Unified Contact Center Hosted, or Unified Contact Center Enterprise solutions, each of which requires additional licenses, hardware, and support.

ShoreTel helps organizations avoid the spiraling costs of additional applications. ShoreTel Communicator with Operator Access monitors inbound call activity and shows the presence status of users. There are no additional servers required to use ShoreTel Communicator with Operator Access. For contact center needs, ShoreTel includes ShoreTel Workgroups, which can be used for advanced contact center functionality.

9. Ensuring comprehensive support

To avoid downtime, organizations must ensure that support is readily available for every element within the UC solution. Yet some support plans are expensive and difficult to manage, forcing administrators to keep track of multiple agreements.

With Cisco products, support schemes can be complex and costly. Hardware and software components, and individual upgrades, require separate support contracts. Comparatively, ensuring end-to-end support for a ShoreTel solution is much simpler and less expensive. Just as ShoreTel provides a single, comprehensive UC solution, it also delivers a single, comprehensive support program.

10. Reducing the TCO

UC solutions can help substantially reduce communication expenses, but maximizing savings requires a solution that addresses TCO. In evaluating UC solutions, organizations must consider all ownership costs—not only upfront capital costs but also the costs of management, upgrades, support, and energy consumption.

Entry-level Cisco solutions such as the UC500 and UCM Express have low upfront costs but high support costs. All of the Cisco solutions require extensive, costly training. And all solutions require significant investments in time and money to manage complex solutions with multiple servers and applications.

ShoreTel UC has the industry’s lowest TCO.¹ In addition to significantly reducing communication costs, ShoreTel UC keeps hardware acquisition, software licensing, and management costs low. Compared with the multiple-server requirements of Cisco UC products, the ShoreTel solution requires only one headquarters server and one converged conferencing appliance—organizations have less hardware to buy and operate. Streamlined management also means that administrators can spend less time and money deploying the solution and keeping it running.

For example, in a 1,500-line deployment, the ShoreTel solution delivers a TCO that is almost 65 percent lower than the Cisco solution. This takes into account the full range of costs associated with unified communications solutions—from capital costs and implementation to training and electricity.²

ShoreTel provides an easy-to-use online TCO tool so organizations can gain a clear and accurate understanding of costs before making an investment. ShoreTel guarantees that its solution will provide a lower TCO than any other solution. If the ShoreTel TCO tool or independent data determines that the ShoreTel TCO is higher than a competing solution, ShoreTel will lower its price to beat the competition.

The ShoreTel TCO advantage

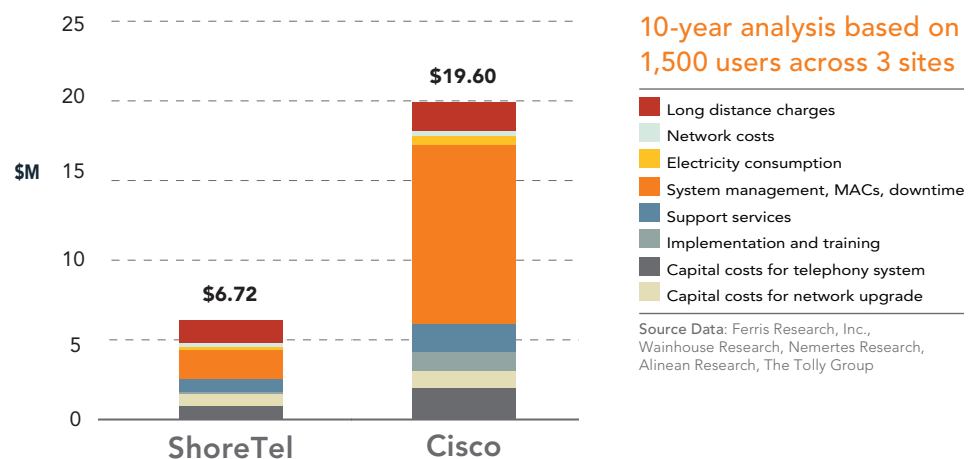


Figure 3. The ShoreTel UC system can deliver a TCO that is nearly 65 percent lower than Cisco Unified Communications Manager (10-year TCO for 1,500 lines).

11. Delivering high customer satisfaction

Given the ease of use, simple management, and low TCO of the comprehensive ShoreTel solution, it is not surprising that customers have consistently rated it highly. ShoreTel measures every customer for satisfaction, engaging a third-party organization to administer a detailed survey that rates the customer experience. For more than five years, ShoreTel has earned a quarterly customer satisfaction rating of 90 or higher. Cisco, which only measures customer satisfaction internally twice annually, does not show similar results.

12. Summary

To realize the full benefits of UC, organizations must select complete, integrated solutions that are simple to use, easy to manage, and deliver a low TCO. ShoreTel UC can meet those requirements, delivering a purpose-built solution with numerous advantages over Cisco UC solutions.

Visit shoretel.com to learn more about ShoreTel UC, find a local sales contact, or request a product demo.

¹For additional information on comparative TCO, see “Assessing the Business and Financial Impact of IP Unified Communications Systems,” by visiting www.shoretel.com/resource_center/white_papers/Assessing_the_Business_and_Financial_Impact_of_IP_Unified_Communications_Systems_.html.

²For additional information on bringing simplicity to the IT environment, see “The Case Against Complexity,” by visiting www.shoretel.com/resource_center/white_papers/The_Case_Against_Complexity.html.

About ShoreTel

ShoreTel is the provider of brilliantly simple Unified Communication (UC) solutions based on its award-winning IP business phone system. We offer organizations of all sizes integrated, voice, video, data, and mobile communications on an open, distributed IP architecture that helps significantly reduce the complexity and costs typically associated with other solutions. The feature-rich ShoreTel UC system offers the lowest total cost of ownership (TCO) and the highest customer satisfaction in the industry, in part because it is easy to deploy, manage, scale and use. Increasingly, companies around the world are finding a competitive edge by replacing business-as-usual with new thinking, and choosing ShoreTel to handle their integrated business communication. ShoreTel is based in Sunnyvale, California, and has regional offices and partners worldwide. For more information, visit shoretel.com.

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