

Teleconference move keeps services intact

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More flexible teleconferencing solutions, with the option of facilities hosted by an external supplier, are helping public sector agencies achieve required efficiency dividends without slashing core services.

One example is a recent release of a flexible conference centre and collaboration solution by UXC subsidiary Integ, which combines video and internet links with voice, either IP telephony or traditional landline.

As an example of increased commercial flexibility, the conferencing centre can be had as a stand-alone installation, or it can be added to a pre-existing hosted Integ telecommunications service called iTaaS. The iTaaS stands for Integ's Telephony as a Service.

Ian Poole, CEO of Integ, said the new conferencing offering had already proved very effective when deployed within Integ itself in the last few months.

"We're using it all the time," he said. "It's not just the extra productivity, it's getting things done. Collaboration needs voice as well as internet; emails alone can just go on and on.

"We find resolution time so much quicker. The key thing we've done is make it simple for the Australian market. We don't have an upfront fee, a timing fee or a management fee."

Including conventional landline for voice as well as the new IP telephony facilitates access from remote locations, including mobile phones, for dispersed organisations, from local councils to federal agencies

with offices all around Australia.

In a separate study of converged communications, Gary Tsang, enterprise communications analyst for research group Telsyte said about 40 per cent of mid-market and large organisations in Australia were expected to move to cloud computing in the next three years, particularly government agencies, health, education and the telecom/media sector.

Cloud computing, where data storage and processing is handled externally by an outside supplier, saves departments the capital and operating costs of internal IT installations.

The main inhibitors were security fears, with users wanting to be sure their off-site data was secure, and the need for affordable and reliable bandwidth from telecommunications carriage services.

For federal agencies, the mandated annual efficiency dividend is subtracted from annual budgets to focus bureaucrats' attention on productivity. It returned to 1.25 per cent in the last federal budget after a short-lived, election-induced climb to 3.25 per cent.

In smaller agencies, or where the services are labour intensive (welfare agencies, heritage conservation), efficiency dividends are blamed for damaging services, for example, the free work of volunteers foregone because an agency can no longer afford the one salaried staffer needed to supervise them.

In these circumstances, savings on travel and accommodation from teleconferencing, plus capital savings from hosted telephony and cloud computing, stand out as effective cost minimisation measures.