Is Business Instant Messaging the Missing Link in Your Unified Communications Strategy?

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You have a time-sensitive question for Lenny in accounting. It's Monday morning, so if you call him, you risk getting sucked into a conversation about last night's episode of "Game of Thrones" (always fun, but never a short chat). If you email him, he might not see your message for hours. You need a third option — something in between that combines the immediacy of a phone call with the convenience and brevity of an email.

Business instant messaging solutions can connect colleagues more effectively than traditional phone calls or emails.

That's why business instant messaging platforms have emerged as one of the most disruptive forces for enterprise communications, updating traditional means of communication with colleagues, partners, and customers. The rate of disruption continues to bound ahead, with no signs of slowing down.

Why is business instant messaging suddenly all the rage? What's next for this trend? And how does it figure into your unified communications strategy?
The Business Case for Business Instant Messaging

Ten years ago, instant messaging was mostly a way for teenagers to have five conversations at once. Now, it's one of the most popular forms of digital communication. In 2016, 71 percent of people used messaging apps, a 3 percent year-over-year increase, according to Gartner, which predicted messaging apps will be more popular than social media apps in the next two years.

Instant messaging apps and platforms play an important role in everyday communication, and these habits have seeped into the workplace as well. After all, when people find tools that make their personal lives easier, they want and expect to use the same tools at the office.

If you don't have enterprise tools for instant messaging, your employees might already be communicating with one another — and possibly with customers — via third-party messaging apps or business text messaging tools from their personal phones. However, when businesses give employees the enterprise-grade instant messaging tools they want and need to communicate, they can enjoy the benefits of unified communications.

What's Next for Enterprise Messaging?

Just when you thought your smartphone manufacturer had maxed out the number of imaginable emojis, a new software update comes out and you discover they're even more creative than you thought. Consumer texting and messaging apps are ever-evolving, upgrading, and adding new functionality, from new fonts and funny filters to embedded video chatting and better voice-recognition software.

At the same time, enterprise instant messaging is getting more strategic, automated, and scalable — particularly when it comes to marketing and customer service. For example, some companies have already begun using chatbots to interact with consumers on social media or on brand websites. These chatbots access company data and can carry on limited conversations with users, answer questions, and make recommendations based on predetermined rules.

Chatbots will only become more sophisticated, thanks to advances in artificial intelligence. As programmers improve natural language interaction and teach chatbots to be more intuitive and conversational, they will become more like advisers than assistants — less like going through a phone tree to retrieve information and more like talking to a smart person.

As more enterprises move their internal communications to the cloud, instant messaging will also become a natural part of everyday team collaboration. With unified communications systems that include business instant messaging, employees can seamlessly collaborate with colleagues from anywhere, on any device, through whatever communication method is most appropriate. So, if a quick instant message turns into an in-depth status update or a creative brainstorming session, participants can easily switch over to the business phone system. And when you finally have a chance to debrief with Lenny about "Game of Thrones" and he does his Jon Snow impression, you can switch from phone to video.

Every business and industry has different needs for instant messaging and other enterprise communication tools. That's why it's important for organizations to choose knowledgeable vendors with adaptable technology, such as constantly evolving cloud-based solutions that can integrate with the other communication solutions that power your business.

To learn more about business instant messaging solutions, connect with a Vonage Business consultant.