Beyond the Walled Garden – a look into the future of Unified IP Communications

The Internet may be bringing people together—just make sure you have the right client installed. Far from breaking old business models, IP service providers continue the strategy of luring consumers into their walled gardens, effectively stranding users on islands of proprietary systems. Calls and messaging may be free within their closed ecosystem, but try to wander outside and you quickly realize the limitations.

I know people with 10 different client applications installed on their laptop just to communicate with the people they know. And take a look at the growing complexity of today's business card, overrun with an e-mail address, mobile and landline numbers, a Skype address, a Yahoo Messenger ID ... So, we have to ask. Is this really improving the way we communicate? Is this the promise of the Internet?

While proprietary systems and closed networks may provide short-term benefits like ease of use and cost savings, in the long term, users are best served by the ability to communicate with anyone on the Internet—as well as the freedom to choose the best service for them, not just the one that hosts the highest number of their contacts. And in the end, open systems will win out.

We need to look no further than AOL, the oft-cited poster child for limitations in the walled garden approach. Until the mid 90's, AOL users could exchange e-mail only with other AOL users. Today, such a concept seems inconceivable.

Like AOL in the 90's, messaging and VoIP providers will find they cannot maintain their walled gardens forever. Users will want, will need, to interact with people outside their walls. After all, it's not exactly a scary world beyond the garden. Friends, colleagues, clients are out there—and they're ready to communicate.

And it's not just IM or VoIP. We're continually creating closed islands for every form of rich media—with separate portals or clients for voice, videos, music, photos, e-mail, and chat. What if they could all be managed from a single interface—a single address, a single set of preferences, and a single presence identity? So whether I want to download a song, share a video, read the latest RSS feed, or chat with a colleague overseas, I don't need to shuffle my identity or switch from one walled garden to another.

That's what Unified Internet Communications is all about. And open standards, including SIP/SIMPLE and XMPP, can make it happen.

E-mail users today have a common format and an open shared standard for communicating: name@domain.com. When you give someone your e-mail address, there's no need to force someone to use a specific service or provider to contact you. And SIP-based communication offers the same open, universal reach. My business card lists a single IP Communications address: jdoyle@communigate.com. Since it is based on the open SIP standard, you can type it into Windows Messenger, see my presence, click to call me, or start up a videoconference.

And SIP is far more than a VoIP protocol. This extensible, transaction-based language supports instant messaging, collaboration, presence, video, mobility, as well as integration with applications.

CommuniGate Pro and Pronto!

CommuniGate Pro and Pronto! are some of the key technologies that can bring about the promise of open standards-based IP Communications. The platform supports SIP/SIMPLE and XMPP, opening up instant messaging, voice, video, and e-mail to the world beyond walls. The platform offers carrier-class scalability with a multi-cluster architecture to support more than 25 million subscribers—but just as easily scales down to a single server for home and SMB use.

The platform offers a fast, secure flash-based client that brings Rich Media communications to the desktop. Pronto! is a single dashboard, for e-mail, collaboration, secure instant messaging, RSS feeds, and Rich Media. Available for Windows, Mac, and Linux, it offers true flexibility for OS and device selection. With Pronto!, I can connect to a WiFi network at the local coffee house or anywhere in the world, and e-mail, message, blog, receive phone calls, store content, and maintain my presence—all from a single interface.

Conclusion

Just as they fueled the explosive growth of e-mail in the 90's, open standards will do the same for voice, messaging, and rich media in the coming decade—fundamentally changing the way we communicate and engage with the world around us. The garden walls have begun crumbling and soon, all consumers will be safely *outside* these walled gardens with the freedom to choose their preferred service provider, device, and operating system and use RIA (Rich Internet Applications) in the most effective way.