



On Deck or Off with CommuniGate Pro's Pronto! 2.0 on AIR

by Richard
"Zippy" Grigonis

CommuniGate (www.communiGate.com) is a company that pioneered the Web 2.0 delivery of Unified Communications — the idea that voice, video, email, groupware, Rich Media and third-party productivity tools could all be integrated into a single account, accessible anywhere.

Their CommuniGate Pro is a scalable Unified Communications platform that enables network operators, service providers and enterprises to provide services for consumer and business. CommuniGate Pro is packaged with a Messaging Suite, Mobility Suite, Web 2.0 Suite, VoIP Suite, or customers can deliver custom applications that can be developed in the CommuniGate Programming Language (CG/PL).

But such an impressive collection of services wouldn't truly be unified unless it came to the user through a sleek, easy-to-use, easy-to-manage client interface. CommuniGate Pro's suites definitely interoperate with other client applications, including Microsoft Outlook, and Apple Mail, but the client in which you should be really interested is CommuniGate's own revolutionary Rich Media Unified Communications dashboard called Pronto! (the exclamation point is fully deserved).

Based on Adobe Flash® and Adobe Flex™ technology, Pronto! can be delivered through any Flash-enabled browser, maintaining the same look and feel across any combination of operating system and choice of Internet browser. CommuniGate Pro's various applications (and even third party ones) can "snap into" Pronto!, similar to the way functions can be plugged into a browser. You get fully integrated email, calendaring, contacts management, secure IM, presence,

voicemail management, VoIP phone, RSS Feeds and management, MyPhotos, MyVideos, MyMusic, etc.

And now, CommuniGate Systems has announced the even more exciting Pronto! 2.0.

CommuniGate Systems' Jon Doyle, Vice President of Business Development, says, "What we've achieved in the new Pronto! 2.0 is a mixture of unified communications with media delivery, specifically video media delivery, which is one of the hottest things we're putting into a new version of the client. I'm referring here to 'professional video', the kind you experience on a DVD or in a movie theater. We're able to deliver that over the Internet and into our Pronto! framework. After all, video has become a huge trend in terms of network operators finding new business models for delivery of media. Hollywood is moving everything to the Internet. But professional content is something that's protected, and you buy it, unlike what you see on YouTube or CNN. It's subject to Digital Rights Management."

"So, one of our additions to Pronto! 2.0 is the ability to play high-definition video using the Flash Media Server produced by Adobe," says Doyle. "It's the most pervasive and widely-used platform for delivery of professional content — the Adobe Flash Player has something like

a 99 percent penetration in the web, making it the most used media player, followed by the Microsoft Media Player, Quicktime, and the RealPlayer / Real Server."

"The Flash Media Server does two important things," says Doyle. "First, it has Digital Rights Management [DRM] to protect the media and content, so users have to pay for it, which makes the content owners happy. Second, it has a lot of onboard intelligence about streaming and buffering video across the Internet. That helps Pronto!, which is all about creating a doorway or opening up a dashboard, if you will, to get content to the user at the desktop. Pronto! and Flash are a terrific way to distribute licensed media. In cases of unlicensed content or something in an enterprise, you can leverage the storage management of CommuniGate Pro directly."

Doyle continues: "Another feature we've introduced in Pronto! 2.0 is H.264 protocol support, used in high-definition [HD] video. We can retrieve video content from a Flash Media Server and present it in HD mode on a user's desktop or laptop. That became possible thanks to Adobe's latest update to its Flash 9 player, a service pack codenamed MovieStar, which supports H.264 for HD video, which is the same standard used in Blu-Ray and HD-DVD high definition video players. It also has High Efficiency AAC (HE-AAC) audio support — a sort of successor to MP3 — and it has what they refer to as hardware accelerated, multi-core enhanced full screen video playback. The code name MovieStar suggests how Adobe would love get content out of Hollywood and displayed everywhere using their Flash technology. That's not implausible, since the servers that Hollywood use and the companies that provide content delivery networks, such as Limelight, use the Flash Media Server."



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"Pronto! 2.0 encompasses all communications except smoke signals, and now we've included media and entertainment applications too," says Doyle. "Of course, 'entertainment' can mean something that's not really work-related, such as a movie, but media content through Pronto! 2.0 can also be training videos, marketing videos, speeches from CEOs to employees and shareholders of large enterprises. Video on the Internet is becoming more and more important, and that's why we're putting HD video technology into Pronto! 2.0."

"Our third major innovation is that we're supporting the Adobe AIR environment," adds Doyle, "enabling you to leverage your existing HTML/Ajax, Flex, or Flash web development skills and tools to build and deploy rich Internet applications to the desktop. This means that there will now be two versions of Pronto! One is a version that you can install in your desktop PC or Mac! supported under Adobe AIR and then there's the other, Web 2.0 version that you run via a web browser."

"The Adobe AIR-supported desktop version of Pronto! 2.0 has some significant features," says Doyle. "You can drag-and-drop content and media from your desktop into Pronto! and it has much better HTML rendering. It also has the H.264 HD video and better audio, and it supports multi-session windows, so even without the Flash player you can run applications in Pronto!, such as composing email, instant messaging and so forth, but each in separate windows that are open outside of the Pronto! window. And our XIMSS-based API makes it easy for developers to add to the applications you can run in the Pronto! environment."

Get a free Pronto! 2.0 account at www.talktoip.com. A free 5-user CommuniGate Pro Community Edition can be downloaded at www.communiGate.com. The CommuniGate Pro Enterprise Suite, including Pronto!, starts at US\$899 for 25 users. ISPs and carriers can contact sales@communiGate.com for pricing information.

Why is Hollywood Going to Deliver Media over the Internet?

by Sara Radicati, Ph.D, President and CEO, The Radicati Group

The Internet today offers the movie industry a great opportunity to expand revenues and evolve risks into new business opportunities. Hollywood has seen a massive shift from tape, disk, and silver screen to the computer screen. Users have migrated to the Internet for content and media because of the easy access models and power of on-demand choice. In particular, Web 2.0 technology has opened up a new channel for the professional media, but the video entertainment industry must find ways to embrace this demand with new business models.

Margins for online sales are higher than packaging and selling through retail stores, and this is easily embraced by producers and syndication partners. The growth of online movie stores such as Comcast on-demand, Netflix and Zip.ca has demonstrated that people are willing to spend money to download movies and rich media to watch at home, or on their mobile devices whenever they want to. When available offers to the market become more consistent in quality and delivery methods,

many more people will buy or rent more using online digital media.

However, Internet piracy and its spiralling effects is much harder to control than missing DVDs in retail stores – Internet media can be transferred and shared with thousands within mere minutes. The movie industry today is facing many of the same challenges to its business models that the music industry has been experiencing for the last decade.

To date, the movie industry has been somewhat slow to move towards online distribution services, with many studios offering only tentatively backed legal online film-download services. There are growing signs, however, that this will change soon, as new experiences are sought in the home and car info-entertainment business. The industry seems ripe for change and needs to be powered by advanced technologies that can intelligently manage digital rights.

The streaming technology industry is beginning to see renewed energy with key players, such as

Microsoft and Adobe improving their technology and introducing new services and functionality for professional media delivery and content management. Network providers are finding that their network "access" models of revenue are fast becoming flat rates, and need to leverage their investments in technology with media delivery. Network operators on the broadband and mobile side are quickly adapting to change, and bringing fibre and 3G to the customer in increasingly high bandwidth options with falling rates or fees for access, driving more subscriptions.

The opportunity for network providers as they evolve is quickly becoming "what" a user can get, and less about the connection. Users of the network think less about the provider when the costs are flat; it simply becomes a matter of cost and reliability. Internet providers thus must bring to the user new interesting media experiences and make it simple to purchase and consume online.