



## COLLABORATIVE GENIUS

OFFICE COMMUNICATIONS SERVER GROUP CHAT CONSOLE IS ONE OF THE BEST-KEPT TECHNOLOGY SECRETS IN THE FINANCE INDUSTRY, SAYS HOWARD TRAVERS

It is a beautiful autumn day in New York with clear skies, and it's uncharacteristically warm. I am seated in a conference room at Microsoft's offices in the heart of Manhattan, surrounded by many of the key managers that run the messaging platforms for top global investment banks. The event is well attended and has been anxiously anticipated, partly because of the failures and acquisitions occurring in the banking market, but more tangibly due to the question of how the group can migrate from MindAlign to Office Communications Server (OCS) 2007 R2 Group Chat Console (GCC).

The occasion was a presentation by the Unified Communications Group to a group previously known as the MindAlign Customer Forum. The discussions were principally about the upcoming launch of OCS 2007 R2 and, more importantly for those attending, how Microsoft has integrated recent acquisition Parlano and its persistent group chat solution set, MindAlign, into the OCS 2007 R2 technology stack. The group and its business managers are a testament to the savings and benefits of persistent group chat, and are keen to make sure that Microsoft integrates the new technology into OCS in a way that protects its substantial investment. This group chat technology is not just another instant messaging feature – on its own it has

become the very backbone of its users' global communications systems.

**OFFICE COMMUNICATIONS SERVER 2007 R2**  
The new benefits of OCS 2007 R2 without GCC are not inconsiderable. Using Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 there are substantial savings to be had in terms of both cost and improved business efficiencies. Presence information about a user and the bringing together of all the disparate modes of communication are proven to save time and money.

OCS 2007 R2 combines instant messaging, audio conferencing, Web conferencing, video conferencing and enterprise voice onto one platform. There is a long list of other features that will help speed up the business processes by integrating communications into applications. The bottom line is that it will produce business efficiencies, improve productivity, reduce telephony costs and simplify collaboration.

### GROUP CHAT CONSOLE

With the fanfare and focus of OCS 2007 R2 being on telephony and cost savings, the addition of GCC will in time become one of the most important parts of the product. Having been originally developed in an investment bank (UBS), MindAlign was created to solve collaboration deficiencies within a trading environment. From 2000 to 2008 when Microsoft

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bought the technology, it had evolved into a more broad-based messaging solution supporting a huge number of operational efficiencies. You may not instantly recognise the name MindAlign, but if you were aware of an enterprise persistent group chat system it was more than likely to be MindAlign, often renamed to fit into the culture of the organisation – for example CitiChat (Citi), Grapevine (Dresdner), DBChat2 (Deutsche) and B:)Chat (Barcap).

At its core, the application allowed users to collaborate through group channels that could range from a team of five to groups covering the entire business (tens of thousands). It also provided a persistent message history and presence notification. Users could define how they wanted to be alerted to information, share information and generally work better together; especially across different offices and time zones.

Over the years there were countless examples of efficiencies in costs, but most importantly MindAlign produced more revenue and profit. In an early example, traders on separate continents sharing information in a group channel and focused on a particular market segment were able to identify an opportunity that resulted in profit from a single transaction that paid for the entire application. With one-to-one instant messaging, telephony or using conventional e-mail, neither party would have been able to find out the other's interest in the topic. The key benefits that have been found are:

- Increased revenue (commissions) through an efficient exchange of global trading opportunities
- Reduction of market data costs by increasing the flow of information and sharing experience and insight
- Improved customer relationships with better service and faster response times
- Increased knowledge exchange/capture to further leverage the knowledge of analysts and other experts
- Reduced communication costs by decreasing the volume of e-mail, telephone and network bandwidth.

However, one other area that should not be overlooked is the power of integrating the application with other internal business applications. That extra 20 per cent, to use the Microsoft analogy, holds substantial benefits and opportunities for financial institutions.

### A SUCCESSFUL COMBINATION

MindAlign was an expensive yet highly valuable product, especially compared with the client access licence of OCS. That said, it greatly enhanced the value of communications. Banks invested millions in the acquisition, implementation and adoption of the technology, and all of them recouped their

investment many times over. Microsoft and the OCS GCC team have put in a substantial effort to include the proven features within the OCS product stack. What we observed in the presentation of the GCC was that the product incorporated the rich functionality of MindAlign that fitted into the consolidated vision of OCS. Many major MindAlign clients have now started to plan their migration.

Over nine years of working with this technology, I have seen how it can change an organisation. I am totally convinced about the benefits of persistent group chat, and confident that this new technology combined with OCS 2007 R2 will make a major impact; not just in the finance industry. The proof of this is in the way it has spread across the major financial institutions and been integrated into the core fabric of the business. I personally do not believe that even Microsoft, outside of its senior management and the OCS Group, truly realises the impact that this technology will have and the way it will change our lives forever.

OCS 2007 R2 becomes generally available at the end of this year, and GCC has a virtual launch on 3 February 2009. If you look at OCS 2007 R2 only for the GCC, and implement it properly, you will save time and money, and benefit your business. **F**

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