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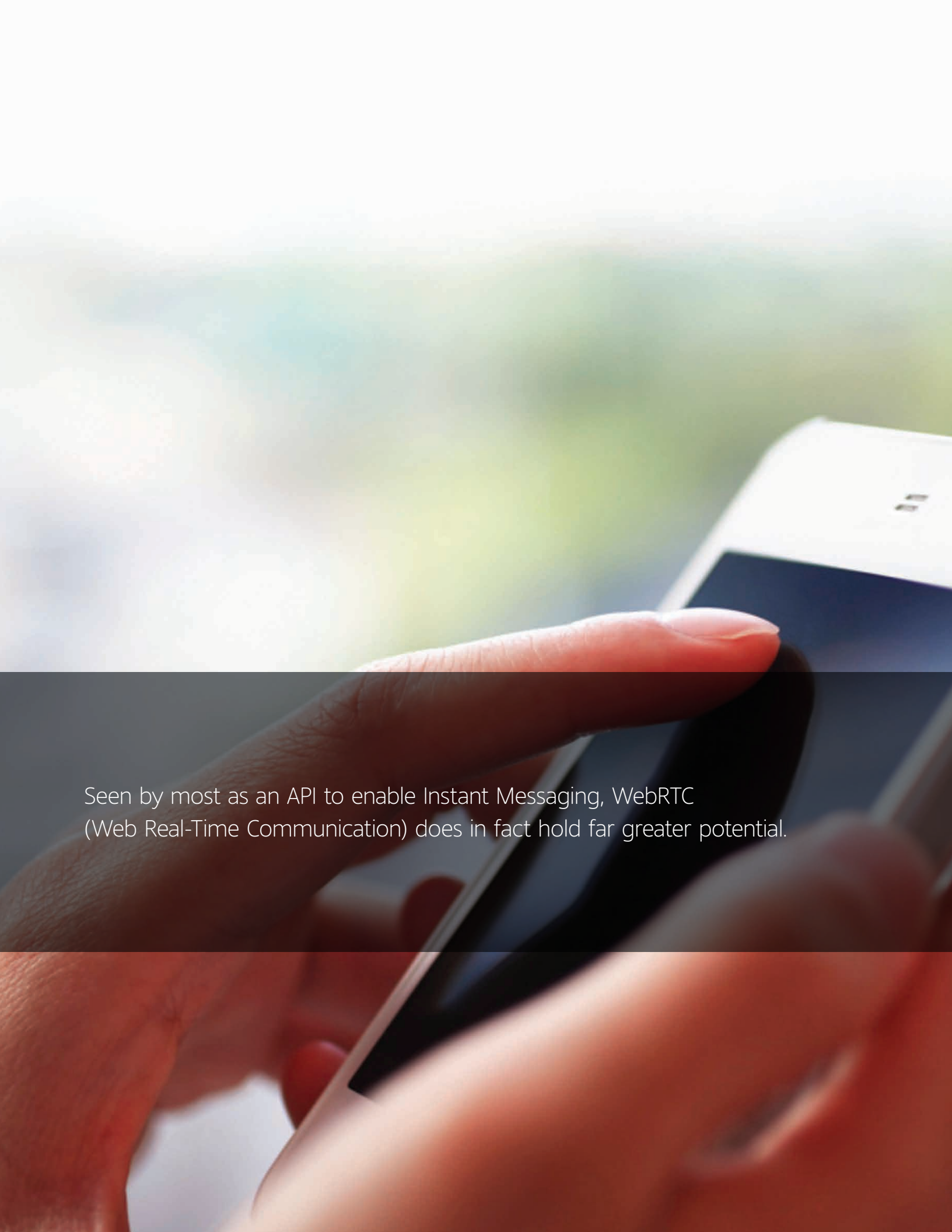
Web RTC
The Next Generation of Communications

A seismic shift is underway that has the potential to change the way communications infrastructures are developed across the public and private sector.



Seen by most as an API to enable Instant Messaging, WebRTC (Web Real-Time Communication) does in fact hold far greater potential.

In this brave new world of communications, enterprise organisations must focus technology around changes within the user community and deliver technology that adapts to employees rather than vice versa.

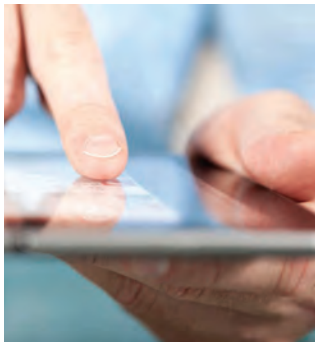
Seen by most as an API to enable Instant Messaging, WebRTC (Web Real-Time Communication) does in fact hold far greater potential. If applied correctly, it can be the forerunner of a new approach enabling ways of working that deliver real financial benefits; but only if it is embraced and applied correctly. But why hasn't there been a mass adoption of web-based telephony over the years and how do we ensure that the potential of technology is applied and realised for real business value, rather than left to a technically skilled minority?

What is WebRTC?

As a direct consequence of BYOD and 'tablet-based computing', WebRTC can give enterprise organisations the opportunity to have their employees work from a single communications device and open up new ways of thinking about how much one can do from a web browser. Armed with the security benefits of using TLS (Transport Layer Security), WebRTC will negate the naysayers that repel BYOD on a security standpoint. Through the use of a web encrypted tunnel, WebRTC can even offer a more secure environment than the PSN. The technology can convert every device with a web browser, into a sophisticated communications device, giving users the same functionality that is delivered through their smartphones; ubiquity of communication on any device.

With a click of a mouse, enabled employees can initiate video conference calls, without relying on specialist devices to connect them with a colleague or member of the public, making digital methods of communication the natural choice ahead of traditional ones, in line with the government's 'Digital by Default' agenda. Once on a call, WebRTC, with those API tie-ins, can allow for the recording of all conversations, both audio and text. The user will be granted instant access to the recording and notes from the transaction, without having to waste time during the call. The productivity gains that the public sector can tap into here are exponential. Armed with call information on-demand, civil servants will be freed from the shackles of endless documentation and CRM requirements. Rather than trawling through multiple documents, an employee can bring up a contact that they have spoken to through a WebRTC-enabled device and have instant access to exactly what was said. The time this will save and the greater accuracy with which information can be passed on will be critical in allowing productivity levels to rocket.

Bringing all forms of digital communications under the banner of one, intuitive piece of technology, will not only save significant amounts of time for civil servants, it can also hold the key to financial savings. A good metric to measure this by would be to look at dealings with consultants. On average, a consultancy fee will range from £100-£250 per hour, making time savings crucial. If WebRTC can save just ten minutes from an hour long call, the solution will have paid for itself already. On top of this, capital expenditure can be cut by eliminating spend on the specialist devices needed to set up conference calls, which can often start from £400. By removing this cost, WebRTC can help employees make the relevant calls for a matter of pence and allow them to do so with one click of a mouse. The time and money saved by such a process will allow public sector organisations to focus on frontline services and provide the instant responses that citizens have come to expect.



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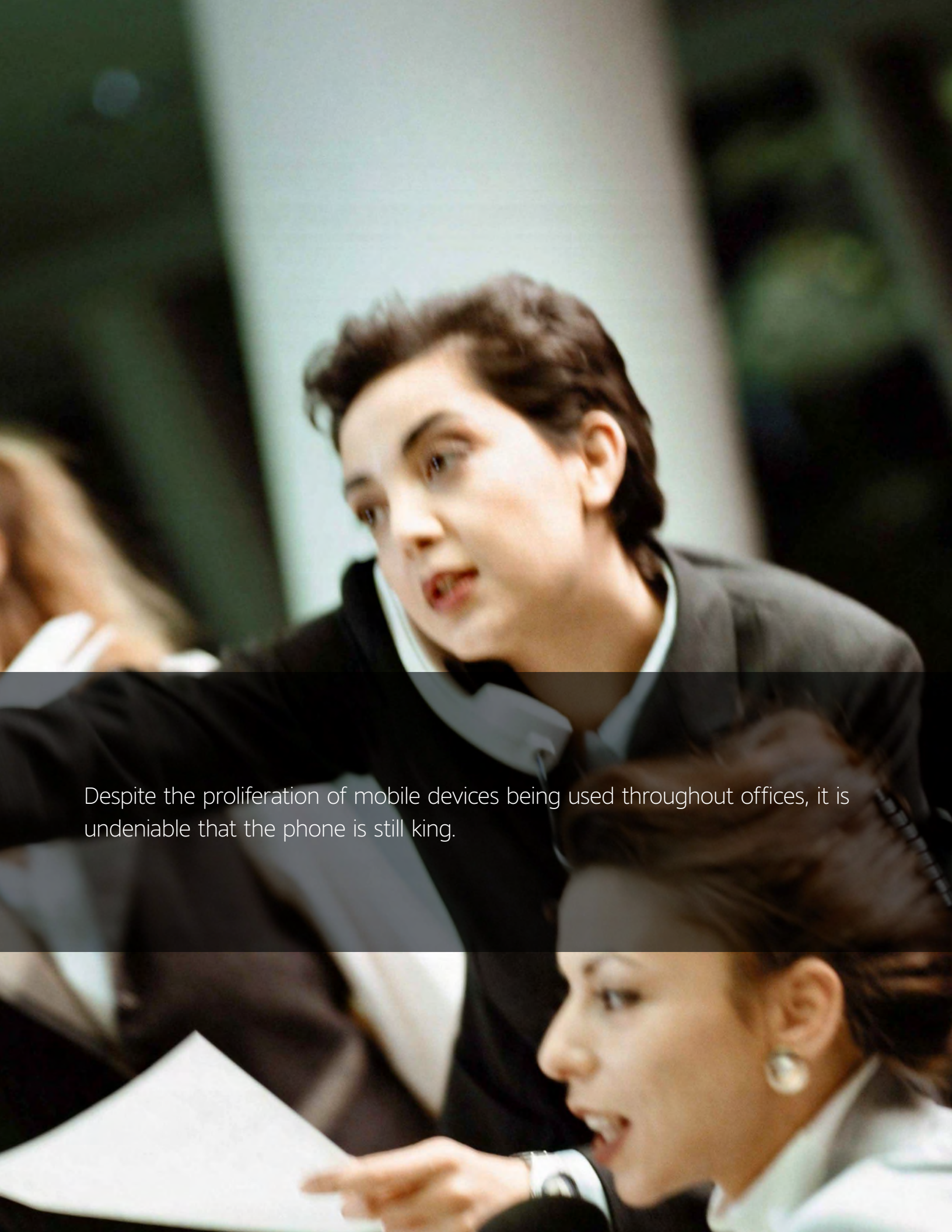

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Where do we stand?

As things stand, though it has been discussed for the last 12-16 months, WebRTC is still emerging. Over the course of the next 12 months technical difficulties will be ironed out and by the end of 2014 we will see serious use of the technology as users become the unavoidable driving force of adoption. This timeline should by no means be taken as the green light for organisations to put their feet up. The viral nature of WebRTC means that it is critical for organisations to act now and cross the major stepping stone of how WebRTC will be embraced by existing communications infrastructure. Currently, few are thinking of solutions to the problem.

So far we have seen major software vendors dabble in a precursor to WebRTC, but this is merely using the technology at its base level. At its most rudimental, WebRTC allows peer-to-peer messaging, but we have the opportunity to use it as a much more powerful tool. Used intelligently, WebRTC has the potential to eradicate the need for CRM systems, by keeping instant records of all communications at little extra expense. Once such savings can be demonstrated, CIOs will have to stand up and take notice.

Why are we holding on to the past?

Despite the proliferation of mobile devices being used throughout offices, it is undeniable that the phone is still king. Why, when the potential exists to tie communications to one device, have we not seen the desk phone begin to be phased out? The simple answer is that user interfaces have not been intuitively designed to meet the needs of the users and people prefer to stick with a technology that they know will work. Employees are generally bemused by the expense of new technology that isn't focused on their requirements and does not improve the job that they do. To take full advantage of WebRTC, the public sector must appreciate what it is that users mean by communications.

Until users see the clear advantage of using a laptop as their main communications device, it will not replace the phone. As things stand existing user interfaces are poor and do not come close to the experience a smartphone can provide. In fact the reverse has happened and employees are increasingly using smartphones as a replacement for their laptops, rather than vice versa.

Titans such as Microsoft have typified the lack of user-centric approach to technology, with unlimited budgets meaning that they make tech acquisitions without due concern. Facebook's inflated valuation of WhatsApp typifies this culture and it is crucial that the public sector does not fall into the same trap when deploying WebRTC. Making a technology purchase alone will not bring the real business benefits that WebRTC can deliver. For mass adoption to be achieved, any solution must be focused on the user. So, the question that begs to be answered is, 'How can we take WebRTC to the next level?'.

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Taking WebRTC to the next level

WebRTC must be embraced wholeheartedly for its benefit to be realised. For it to prove more than a mere technology replacement, the public sector cannot view WebRTC as a bolt-on solution. Just adopting the technology and trying to cobble it together with existing, old-world infrastructure, will yield minor improvements to business performance. When entering the brave new world of WebRTC, organisations must adapt their communications infrastructures appropriately to give it the most fertile conditions for growth. Think of it as your prize tomato plant; you wouldn't just throw it into the same old dry soil from last year's crop would you? You give it pride of place in the greenhouse, with the best compost to give it every chance to excel. In the same way, the public sector has to think now about how best it can nurture WebRTC. As ever, technology alone won't move mountains, its long-term success relies on how it is applied and catered for. It is the role of suppliers and government organisations, to develop clients and infrastructures that are centred on what the user needs. It is simpler than it sounds. Users want to save money, through an easy-to-use, reliable and functional service.

Allied with the functionality of WebRTC, is the need to create an intuitively designed user interface to deliver the adoption that will make a noticeable difference to the bottom line and position it as the focal point of all communications. Put simply, WebRTC has to replicate how people want to work while introducing new ways to work. Intuitive design here is critical; without the right environment, WebRTC will not deliver the new ways to communicate that the public sector needs to serve its citizens in a more responsive manner.

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About Unify

Unify is one of the world's leading communications software and services firms, providing integrated communications solutions for approximately 75 percent of the Fortune Global 500. Our solutions unify multiple networks, devices and applications into one easy-to-use platform that allows teams to engage in rich and meaningful conversations. The result is a transformation of how the enterprise communicates and collaborates that amplifies collective effort, energizes the business, and enhances business performance. Unify has a strong heritage of product reliability, innovation, open standards and security.

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