

## PARTNER'S GUIDE TO Bringing Conferencing to the Masses



The convergence of software and cloud technologies is upending the technology experience in the conference room. Intel's ability to attract participation from major technology platforms makes its emerging Unite a platform to watch. **By Scott Bekker**

**About two years ago**, revenues for enterprise videoconferencing systems and telepresence systems were in a free fall. There wasn't a recession or another major macroeconomic factor to blame.

Instead, as IDC analyst Petr Jirovsky put it at the time, "IDC believes that among the challenges customers are currently trying to work through are a market transition and determining exactly what, when and how to provision their video deployment as more software-centric and cloud-based service offerings become part of the enterprise video market landscape."

The trend affected more than just the videoconferencing and telepresence market. Software and cloud-based advances across the industry are

transforming the corporate conference room and changing the way customers are looking at those types of purchases.

Customers expect more robust functionality in meeting room systems for less money than they did just a few years ago—a familiar story in tech, but one that has been especially visible in conferencing.

In the interim, the videoconferencing and telepresence market has rebounded a bit, but other areas surrounding collaboration are taking off and spawning compelling alternatives in this fertile territory. Microsoft partners have seen some of the action. In addition to Microsoft's flagship Skype for Business communication and collaboration platform, there's been a new offering on the high end with the \$9,000 to \$22,000 Surface Hub meeting boards and on the scale side with the Meeting Broadcast feature in Office 365 that allows for low-overhead conferences of up to 10,000 attendees. Much as Microsoft has the ability to command attention from multiple vendors given its central position in the technology industry, Intel can do the same. A year ago, the

company waded into the conference room market with a major platform release called Intel Unite, and industry partners have been throwing their support behind the effort with product releases of their own ever since. That industry support and momentum around Intel Unite makes it a platform for partners to watch as they consider ways to address their customers' conference room and remote conferencing needs.

### THE INTEL UNITE PLATFORM

The Intel Unite platform made its debut at Computex in June 2015.

"Intel is now offering a product enabling a cost-effective and easy way for employees to collaborate and spend more time getting work done and less time fumbling with wires and equipment," Tom Garrison, vice president in the Client Computing Group and general manager of the Business Client Platforms Division at Intel, said in an introductory blog post.

The platform leverages wireless networking in a conference room and a low-cost, mini-PC acting as a hub in the conference room to make collaborative conferencing sessions quick to set up, more seamless in speaker transitions and more secure.

Specific challenges the systems are designed to address are slow-starting meetings as presenters physically connect devices to conference room displays, difficulties in passing control of a meeting from one PC to another as presenters disconnect and reconnect cables, and the security-compromise potential of remote participants logging into meetings on unmanaged connections.

In the conference room is the hub device, which is a mini-PC running Intel Core vPro processors. All participants run Intel Unite software on their devices, which allows them to connect to the conference, receive content and take control of the presentation or make collaborative annotations should the meeting's main presenter allow it.

A few of the more interesting features of the solution are the presenter's ability to select from a list of running applications and share only content from that application, preventing issues common to screen-sharing scenarios, such as e-mail toast notifications popping up during a public session and revealing potentially confidential or inappropriate information in a subject line. The platform is also designed for peer-to-peer sharing that lets the leader hand control off to as many as four presenters, who can share their screens wirelessly.

On the security front, the Unite platform generates a rotating PIN code that participants must use to join the meeting. Also, all meetings use 256-bit Secure Sockets Layer data encryption on all meeting-related data to prevent unauthorized viewing by non-participants.

Initially, Intel Unite supported Windows and Mac clients, but support has already expanded to more client platforms.

Meanwhile, the vPro requirements and capabilities for the hub device mean the system is manageable for configuration, patching and security updating through vPro management tools. While the benefit is not necessarily pronounced in an organization with a single conference room and single vPro hub, the total cost of ownership benefits of those capabilities rises with the size of the organization and the number of conference hubs that can be remotely managed.

### AN ECOSYSTEM EMERGES

Immediately upon launch and steadily since then, multiple vendors have joined in on the platform. One of the main ways is through the mini-PC hubs that control the whole solution. In order to guarantee performance, Intel has a controlled list of supported devices that are configured for the Intel Unite solution.

Among those are Intel's own Intel NUC devices. The NUC is a 4-inch-by-4-inch, fully functioning PC device with a VESA mount designed to allow its placement to be hidden in many situations, including a conference-room setting. The latest model optimized for Unite has a 5th Generation Core i5 vPro processor and high-definition graphics capabilities supporting triple display, dual 4K display or single 5K display.

But many of the major PC OEMs have already come aboard with devices that support the Unite platform. The list of solu-



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tions supporting the Intel Unite includes the Asus ASUSPRO E810, the Dell 9020 Micro PC Desktop and the Dell 7040 Micro PC Desktop. HP, which supports the platform with the HP EliteDesk 800 G2 and the HP EliteDesk G1, has bundled a solution since the Unite launch as the HP Collaboration PC, which includes the EliteDesk device in a Unite-based configuration.

Similarly, Fujitsu rolled out the ESPRIMO Q 920 Meeting Room Edition (MRE), which combined its mini-PC with Intel Unite for a full conference-room solution. Among the ESPRIMO Q 920 MRE's features that Fujitsu contends fit the Unite use case are quiet operation and a very basic layout to minimize component failures, in addition to its space-saving form factor.

In a demonstration of the developing interest in the platform, Lenovo used its Accelerate Partner Forum in Orlando, Fla., in May to launch the Lenovo Smart Meeting Room Solution. That consisted of two different Lenovo devices each paired with Intel Unite. The ThinkCentre M900 Tiny and M93p Tiny anchor Intel Unite solutions and start at \$619. Much like the Intel NUC, the ThinkCentres support up to four presentations at a time on a meeting room display and are optimized for connecting wirelessly to displays, projectors and interactive whiteboards, along with the participants' PCs.

The ecosystem is growing beyond the micro and mini-PCs that act as hubs. Over the last few months three vendors released product packages that broadened the Intel Unite capabilities from the baseline collaboration to include videoconferencing:

- In November, Altia Systems released PanaCast Experience for Intel Unite, a panoramic-4K video collaboration solution. The PanaCast 2 is a plug-and-play USB video camera with a 180-degree-wide and 54-degree-tall field view designed to allow remote participants to see an entire conference room. In addition to the 4K camera, the solution includes a video server, a stream controller app for the Intel Unite mini-PC hub and client software for Mac and PC that allows remote participants to pan, tilt and zoom within the video stream.

- Logitech this spring began shipping a Logitech ConferenceCam Kit, which bundles a Logitech ConferenceCam with an Intel NUC and the Intel Unite application at a starting price of \$1,599. The HD 1080 video camera also includes a wireless keyboard that, when combined with the Intel NUC, allows meeting organizers to start a videoconferencing call without needing to bring their own PC into the conference room.

Logitech sees Intel Unite as an opportunity to broaden the market for its own conference camera by working with Intel to minimize configuration questions. "We have found that a significant number of Logitech ConferenceCams are attached to dedicated computers in meeting rooms, but purchasing,

configuring and deploying a dedicated video conference system in meeting spaces can be expensive, and it's hard for our customers to know what is compatible," Scott Wharton, general manager of the Logitech video collaboration group, said in announcing the solution in March. "Logitech and Intel have taken the guesswork out of the equation."

Logitech's ConferenceCam is optimized for the BlueJeans and Zoom video Solutions online video-conferencing solutions.

- Meanwhile, Intel was making inroads with one of those cloud companies, as well. At the InfoComm show in Las Vegas in June, Zoom rolled out a plug-in for Intel Unite. "This partnership will take the Intel Unite solution collaboration capabilities beyond the single conference room across other conference rooms, desktops and mobile devices," said Zoom Founder and CEO Eric S. Yuan. "We see this as the beginning of an ongoing collaboration to create the best solutions for both Intel and Zoom customers."

At the same time, Intel itself keeps plugging away at broadening the platforms that it supports internally. This summer, Intel added iOS support to allow the Intel Unite software to run on the Apple iPad. Intel executives also said that support for Google Chromebook users was on the roadmap.

Intel certainly has challenges in reaching for broad adoption of its conferencing technology. The company is entering a crowded field, with players encroaching on one another's turf from various technological backgrounds—telephony providers, networking hardware companies, networking software companies, software companies and cloud providers. And while Intel hopes to see the Intel Unite software become a standard part of new PCs, Macs and other platform devices, resistance to bloatware is always a factor.

Nonetheless, Intel also comes from a base of strength in the market, leveraging its many existing strategic partnerships with PC OEMs and nearly every company that uses chips in devices to build out an ecosystem behind its Unite vision. What's more, many areas of the Intel approach overlap, rather than compete, with other conferencing strategies—as evidenced by the Zoom partnership and Intel's overtures to support Skype for Business, Microsoft Lync and Cisco Telepresence approaches with the Intel Unite platform.

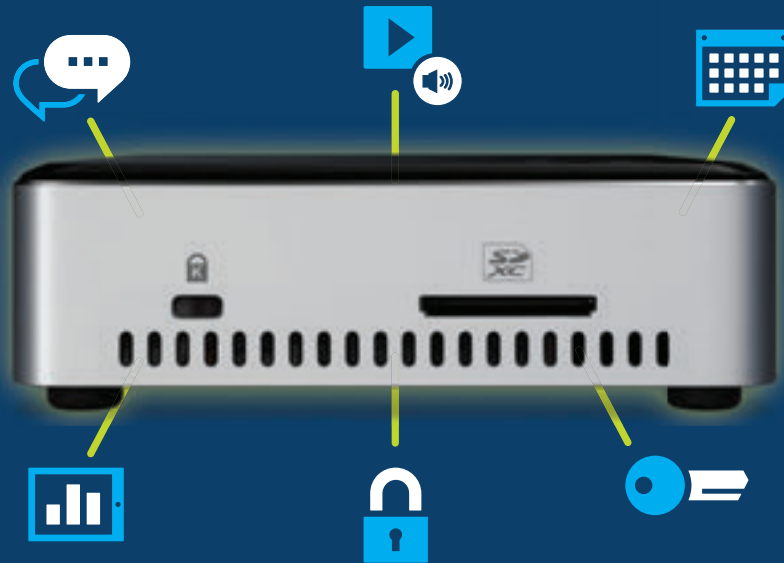
Intel's demonstrated and ongoing ability to attract strategic vendors to its new platform make it well worth a look as a potential addition to the portfolio of any partner looking to bring sophisticated conferencing solutions to customers small and large. •

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*Scott Bekker is editor in chief of Redmond Channel Partner magazine.*

# IS YOUR MEETING ROOM TECHNOLOGY **GOOD ENOUGH?**

Meetings start faster with secure, wireless screen sharing.  
Connect and collaborate with Intel® Unite™ software.



#### Skype® for Business

A simple plug-in provides integration between the Intel® Unite™ application and Skype for Business.



#### Video Playback with Audio

Share video and audio with in-room participants.



#### Scheduled Meetings

Don't know the room PIN? Now join with a click!



#### iPad® View app

View shared content from your iPad device.



#### Meeting Lock

Prevent others from joining and viewing content via the Intel Unite application.



#### Secure Guest Access

Enable in-room guests with no corporate network access to join, view and share.

**Intel Inside®. Productive meetings outside.**  
**Don't be good enough. **Be great.****

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