

Independent Lab Review

MIERCONSULTING

Key Results and Conclusions

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition 3000 significantly reduces the technical know-how needed to set-up an IP-communications system, the results of hands-on testing show
- Deployment takes just an hour or less, thanks to good defaults and excellent integrated Help
- An "all-in-one-box" solution with simple, integrated management

Product Reviewed:

Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition 3000

MierConsulting analysts conducted an independent hands-on review of the usability aspects of Cisco's newest IP-communications system, oriented towards mid- size businesses of 75 to 300 users. In addition to integrated voicemail, mobility, gateway and auto-attendant, the product features an all new user interface, which Cisco designed and developed especially to reduce the time, complexity and skill level required to initially deploy and then manage the system.

Soul of simplicity. The complexity of optimizing voice encoding, VoIP call quality and bandwidth over remote-site IP connections is reduced to several slide bars in this screen from the new administrative interface.

The screenshot displays the Cisco Unified CM Business Edition 3000 Administrative Interface. The main content area is titled 'Edit Site - Remote Site 1' and is divided into two sections: 'Calls Between Sites' and 'Calls Within Sites'. Each section contains a 'Quality / Quantity Tradeoff' slider. The 'Calls Between Sites' section also includes a 'Bandwidth Between Sites' dropdown menu set to 'T1 (1.5 Mbits)' and a 'Bandwidth Allocation for Audio' slider set to 75%. The 'Calls Within Sites' section shows an 'Approximate Call Capacity To Other Sites' of 36. The interface includes a navigation menu on the left and 'Save' and 'Reset' buttons at the bottom.

MierConsulting developed a test methodology comprising a battery of typical IP-communications system set-up and administrative tasks. This was presented to Cisco, which made its new system available to us for the review. A near-final release of v8.6.0 was reviewed over several days in February 2011.

Key findings:

✓ **Straightforward to deploy and manage.**

Our testing concluded that ongoing administration – including moves, adds and changes – can be handled by a computer-literate office worker who is familiar with the local phone system, but otherwise needs no special training or certification. To fully handle deployment and configuration would entail minimal training – a day or two.

We base this estimate on metrics including: technical background needed; difficulty level; training time for the particular system; education level and commensurate salaries. All of these directly translate to improved Partner margins as well as reduced end-users' Total Cost of Ownership (TCO).

✓ **Simple spreadsheet import of set-up data.**

Any system aspect or component can be configured manually via the administrator's Web interface, or bulk data such as phone and user details can be readily imported from an Excel spreadsheet file that Cisco provides.

The administrator fills in the details, puts the spreadsheet file on a USB flash drive, plugs it into the server's USB port and clicks one button on the interface. Alternately, this Excel file can be readily imported directly from the installer's laptop.

✓ **Can be deployed in an hour or less.**

We conclude that an initial configuration and deployment of this system will typically take an hour or less, for someone having done it

before – and assuming the details for users and phones have already been compiled in the configuration spreadsheet. This also assumes that T1 connection details have been collected. We note that setting up any telephony or UC system would entail a similar definition of users.

✓ **Consistent and intuitive screen controls.**

Our testers confirmed that screen controls are simple. Any PC user would already be familiar with the screen mechanisms and layout, facilitating easy navigation and intuitive operation. For instance:

- An expandable left-side directory makes navigation simple (see screen on front page of this report).
- Syntax error messages are displayed as soon as data fields are entered;
- Data fields with errors are displayed with a yellow background, and change to a white background when their syntax error has been corrected.
- Common buttons, such as Save, Cancel, Close and Help are right where you'd expect them on the screen.

✓ **Truly an "all-in-one-box" solution.**

We confirmed that the Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition 3000 entails just a single, purpose-built appliance, the new MCS 7890. Not even additional, separate gateways are needed: A T1/E1 gateway with two clearly labeled ports is built in.

What's more, expensive add-on sub-systems and software options aren't needed. We checked under the hood and found built-in: auto-attendant, voicemail, conferencing, system monitoring, mobility, Web interface for user access to their phone settings, multi-site and teleworker support, back-up/restore, Call Detail Records – and a single, straightforward interface for administering it all.

✓ Useful, efficient end-user Web interface.

We found this to be a very efficient and easy-to-use interface, where a user logs into the system – with userID and password – and can then readily change most key user preferences. These include: 'Reach-Me-Anywhere' phone number, 'Forward Calls To,' Web dialer, speed dial-settings, and reset password and PIN. The Web dialer provides slick access to a directory of all the users and extensions on the system. This Web access can be easily and conveniently enabled or disabled by the administrator on a Usage-Profile basis.

✓ Good set of default Usage Profiles.

A set of five Usage Profiles – pre-defined feature templates for similar groups of users – are already configured, with reasonable default settings for these groups' phone features. Plus, the administrator can readily cut, paste and modify these to create new Usage Profiles.

✓ Localization and multi-language support.

The initial configuration screen lets the administrator select language and country. Language variants and country packs are either already on the system, or readily downloadable from Cisco and imported. Besides U.S./English, we performed adaptations of the package for India/English and China/Mandarin (beta). It is simple and straightforward.

The system ships with US/English and India/English support. Cisco is finalizing downloadable country packs: for Canada, UK, Australia, China, Russia, Spain, Italy and France. This extensive language and country support collectively addresses some 60-plus percent of the world's population.

✓ Other notable usability enhancements

- **No CLI.** There's no Command Line Interface (CLI) involved, in either set-up or ongoing administration of this system.

- **Screen-centric on-line Help.** Users of this system will find on-line Help that's truly, well, helpful. The insightful Help focuses on the particular screen you're working on, and addresses all the parameters and settings of that screen.

- **Fast and easy soft phone integration.** Soft phones are treated as just another phone. We confirmed that users of the Cisco IP Communicator (CIPC) soft phone can be added to the system as easily as any IP hard phone.

✓ Quick and efficient task completion.

Besides initial configuration and deployment, we also performed various other administrative and configuration tasks as part of the test plan, noting the times involved. Below are results for some typical tasks.

Task	Time
Set-up a new user with a new phone	<3 min
Swap diff phones among two users	<3 min
User logs in, adds a speed-dial entry	<2 min
User logs in, changes password	<2 min
Back-up of a 100-user system	9 min

Conclusions

MierConsulting fully deployed and exercised the new Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition 3000, an advanced IP-communications system for mid-size businesses.

We confirmed that this "all-in one-box" solution includes integrated voicemail, mobility, gateway, auto-attendant and many other features and functions.

Most notably, the product incorporates an entirely new user-interface design, which truly achieves the goal of simplified and efficient deployment and management. In our assessment, ongoing administration can be handled by a computer-literate office worker with no special training or certification.

About the vendor and product ...

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Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition 3000

- A true "all-in-one-box" IP-communications system supporting 75 to 300 users. A single server – the MCS 7890, shown at left – comes with an integrated T1/E1 gateway.
- Voicemail, mobility, auto-attendant, and many other features are integral and pre-installed.
- All new set-up and admin interfaces feature:
 - Quick configuration and deployment, typically in an hour or less.
 - Excellent on-screen Help, sound default settings for key configuration values.
 - Straightforward navigation, consistent and intuitive screen controls.

About **MIERCONSULTING** ...

MierConsulting, LLC, a privately owned company based in northeast Pennsylvania, is dedicated to the analysis and comparative assessment of advanced communications technologies and IP-network applications. The company has for years conducted comprehensive, public and confidential comparative quality and performance testing – of hardware, software and services – for its enterprise, vendor and service-provider clients.

Having tracked, used and comparatively reviewed all manner of network products for years, including IP-based telephony systems, MierConsulting (www.mierconsulting.com) has come to be regarded as the independent authority and final word on developing methodologies and conducting comparative assessments of network products and services.

CEO Ed Mier (emier@mierconsulting.com) and VP Engineering Dave Mier (dmier@mierconsulting.com) deliver decades of experience, having designed and implemented global and local networks for organizations around the world. Additionally, Mier pioneered the side-by-side testing and comparison of hundreds of network products – from contact centers to IP PBXs. They have co-authored over 200 comprehensive articles on all aspects of network technology for *Business Communications Review (BCR)*, *Network World*, *VON Magazine*, and a dozen other leading publications, and have been reprinted in many foreign languages.