

# The When, Where and How of Cisco vs. Microsoft for UC

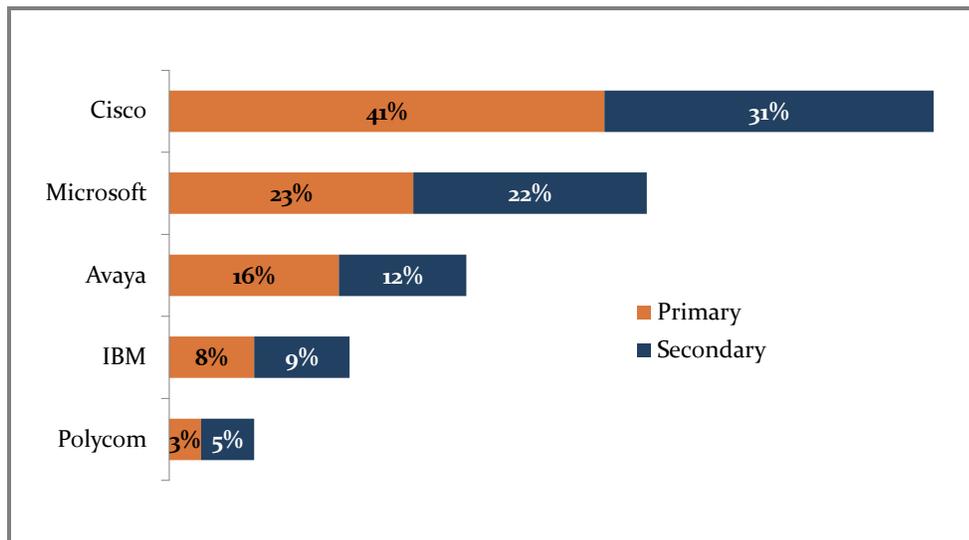
by Zeus Kerravala

June 2012

Unified communications (UC) has been a market in the making for the better part of a decade. Remote working, collaboration initiatives and cost cutting have all made UC a critical initiative over the past 12 months. However, choosing a solution provider is not easy, as no single vendor can provide all functionality. A 2012 ZK Research survey asked 843 North American purchasers and evaluators of UC solutions about their preferred primary and secondary vendors. Cisco and Microsoft came out first and second respectively, so it's important to understand which vendors are best suited to which functions.

**ZK Research**  
*A Division of Kerravala Consulting*

**Exhibit: Cisco and Microsoft Dominate the UC Landscape (n=843)**



zeus@zkresearch.com

Cell: 301-775-7447  
 Office: 978-252-5314

Source: ZK Research, 2012

*Influence and insight through social media*

Recent interviews by ZK Research with evaluators of UC solutions revealed that one of the biggest decision points for deployments is Cisco vs. Microsoft, and where to use each solution. Based on one-on-one interviews of people involved with actual deployments, here is where companies should leverage the respective strengths of each of these two 800-pound gorillas:

- Video:** There seems to be little doubt that Cisco is the vendor of choice. Between TelePresence, Tandberg, Callway, Show and Share and all of the other Cisco video solutions, the company is by far the most dominant vendor in the video space. Additionally, there's a common belief by people with a Cisco network that Cisco video on a Cisco network will give the best experience. I think you can provision quality video on any network with any end point, but I do believe it's easier with Cisco on Cisco.

- **Voice:** Despite the advancements Lync has had with voice, the majority of IT individuals I have talked to lean Cisco's way for a number of reasons. First, Cisco has a very broad range of phones; and regardless of how much this industry has changed, the phone itself still drives much of the decision. Also, Cisco has a long history in voice. As Cisco, ShoreTel, 3Com and other VoIP only vendors have found, voice is hard, and you can't just jump into it and be a smashing success. Microsoft will eventually get this right, but most large companies would prefer to use a solution that they know will work.
- **Email:** There isn't much of a decision here. Microsoft has almost a monopoly on email, and Cisco dropped WebEx mail last year. Once in a while I run into a Lotus or corporate Gmail customer, but Exchange is still the de facto standard.
- **Presence for Windows:** If the deploying organization is an all-Windows shop, it makes sense to use Lync for presence and chat. Microsoft has a strong history of its software working well together; so if you are running Office, Exchange and Windows, Lync is the best choice. It's worth noting that Cisco has shifted its presence focus exclusively to Jabber, and most users won't notice much difference between Jabber and Lync.
- **Presence for non-Windows devices:** Here is where Cisco Jabber has a distinct advantage over Lync. Jabber was designed to be multivendor from the outset, so it's very stable and feature-rich on non-Windows endpoints. Cisco recently announced that Jabber is free for all Cisco UC customers, and this should drive faster adoption across non-Windows devices.
- **Integration into third-party applications:** This is an area that one would think Microsoft should lead in, and they did — until Cisco switched its presence platform to Jabber. Feedback from customers is that Lync and Jabber both integrate

well into Office, SharePoint and other applications. Regarding Web applications, developer feedback is that the Jabber SDK is richer in features than the Lync SDK. Jabber allows for real-time voice and HD video to be integrated into a browser with a plug-in. The plug-in makes Jabber much easier to integrate into Web applications compared to Microsoft, which requires a full headless client installation.

- **Mobile support:** The edge here also goes to Cisco. The last release of Lync brought better integration with Windows Mobile, and Microsoft does intend to bring feature parity to Android, Apple and Blackberry. If you happen to be all Windows mobile, Lync is the right choice; but Jabber supports more devices with a more consistent user experience. So if supporting iPads, iPhones, BlackBerry and Android is key, use Cisco. Additionally, the Jabber client delivers IP voice, video and Web sharing to mobile devices, where Microsoft still does not. This is important for mobile knowledge workers that want to be as productive when away from their desk as when they are at their desk. These mobile communications features are also important for emerging mobile and video uses cases in industries like health care, financial services, manufacturing and retail, where lack of video and dial-back over PSTN/mobile voice network is not acceptable.

Microsoft has the edge in areas related to Windows computing, such as Exchange and Microsoft Office. Similarly, Cisco has the advantage in areas that are more communications related, such as the network, voice and video. The real battle between the two will be for presence; and this is key, because ownership is vital to building communications-enabled applications. Microsoft's strength is with Windows, but the world is rapidly moving to where multi-OS is the norm instead of the exception. This is not a fait accompli for Cisco yet, but they do have a significant multi-OS lead over Microsoft.

*This article is an updated version of a [blog post](#) that originally appeared on Network World on Feb 3, 2012.*