



# Avaya UCC Speech Access Improves Productivity and Top Line Results for J. H. Cohn

Rapidly becoming a regional powerhouse, J. H. Cohn has built one of the largest accounting and consulting businesses in the U.S. on a solid base of client service.

This fast-growing firm relies on Avaya Unified Communication Center Speech Access (UCC Speech Access) to help its partners and professionals provide the highest level of customer service and responsiveness—and make the best use of their valuable time, wherever they may be while working with clients.

**Industry:**  
Financial Services

**Application:**  
Avaya Unified  
Communication Center  
Speech Access

## About J.H. Cohn

With executive offices in New York City and Roseland, New Jersey, and additional offices throughout the Northeast and in California, the 84-year-old J. H. Cohn firm has grown into the 13th-largest accounting and consulting firm in the U.S. In the past year, mergers have added several new locations and dozens of professionals to the staff of J. H. Cohn, which provides accounting, audit, tax and consulting services to mid-market businesses nationwide.

## Productivity Challenges for a Mobile Workforce

To deliver the level of client service J. H. Cohn is known for, the company's partners and professionals spend much of their time at client locations.

"Large sections of our firm are very mobile—they're out at client sites," says Brad White, Director of Administration for J. H. Cohn. "We joke that if they're in the office, they're not making money for the firm. They are always at client sites servicing clients, or traveling to and from clients—and that's throughout the country."

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— Brad White, director of administration, J. H. Cohn





On the road, these highly paid knowledge workers face a dual challenge: they must remain readily available to clients and peers, and they need to make the most productive use of the hours they spend away from the office.

Unless they handle inquiries while on the road, White explains, mobile workers returning to the office can face an e-mail box filled with dozens of unanswered messages. A tool that enables workers to easily handle those messages while traveling can provide tremendous benefits.

"We do have people who are technologically savvy," White adds, "and it's been our firm's commitment to provide our professional staff with all the tools that enable them to give the best client service."

And improved client service is just part of the gain for J. H. Cohn. UCC Speech Access has paid off quickly by freeing up billable hours and speeding responsiveness and decision making on behalf of clients.



Among the gains:

- On the road to visit clients, partners and accountants use UCC Speech Access to respond to client messages during otherwise-wasted "windshield" time.
- The time saved can then be used to serve clients, creating a source of added billable professional service hours worth \$6 million or more each year.
- J. H. Cohn's traveling professionals use UCC Speech Access to respond quickly to clients and associates. They're on the move, and they keep business moving too.

### **Avaya UCC Speech Access Emerges as the Clear Choice**

Responding to the challenges of a mobile workforce, J. H. Cohn took a close look at the available solutions supporting employee mobility. Working with ConsultEdge and Communication Resources, Inc., Avaya BusinessPartners, White and his team examined the technologies available to support mobile workers.

"It was time to review our phone system and compare what was available in the market, what was new and what would help us," says White. "We looked at all sorts of different brands and features. Unified messaging technology was becoming established and we had already determined that we were going to purchase the technology.

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— Brad White, J. H. Cohn



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— Brad White, J.H. Cohn

**Benefits of Avaya UCC Speech Access – The J. H. Cohn Experience:**

- 1) Partners and managers can use field time more productively
- 2) Associates can stay in contact with clients and be even more responsive
- 3) Users can get timely updates, such as when preparing for meetings
- 4) Easy to use, the system wins quick acceptance from users
- 5) Advanced tools like UCC Speech Access help J. H. Cohn attract top talent

"But another capability that jumped out early was the speech access component. Speech Access, used with unified messaging, turned out to be great for people who were out on the road."

Using simple and intuitive speech commands, UCC Speech Access gave J. H. Cohn associates the ability to make phone calls and conference calls by speaking the names of those they wish to contact. They could also retrieve and respond to voice and email messages, access and update their Outlook calendars and check corporate database information, all using speech commands, from any telephone.

"First we wanted to make sure it worked," says White, "and it did. The demonstrations were amazing. It was a matter of providing our people with the technology that would make it as easy as possible to work when outside the office."

**UCC Speech Access – It Just Works!**

Already using the Avaya DEFINITY® Servers and MERLIN® Magix Systems at several major locations, White and his team started rolling out the Avaya UCC Speech Access solution in September 2002.

"It went very well," says White. "It worked from the start. There were a couple of hiccups along the way, but those were corrected quickly. We had a very good team from Avaya partnering with us to install it, and whenever there was a problem they worked on it until it was fixed."

During the rollout, partners and managers (J.H. Cohn's top-billing professionals) attended group briefings on the new productivity tool. Audit manager Steven Alexander soon became an enthusiast.

"If something makes my life easier, I absolutely will start using it," Alexander says. "I was probably among the first to set it up here, just because I thought it was cool."

"Basically, I think the best thing to do is just demonstrate it to people," says White. "This is so advanced, there's an inclination for people to think it's not going to work as well as they say. In fact, it works better."

The Avaya UCC Speech Access solution extends desktop capabilities for J. H. Cohn managers to use wherever work takes them. They can manage messages, make and control calls and conferences and access and manage contacts and other information, including their calendars, all to improve their personal productivity—and their firm's profits.

- **Access Messages Anytime, Anywhere** "At tax season I would probably say I have half a day out of the office every day, on average," says Alexander. "I use the time in the car during the day to return calls, so that there's no downtime."

With UCC Speech Access, J. H. Cohn users can navigate through their voice and e-mail messages and respond as needed. E-mail is read as text-to-speech. They can reply to and forward messages of any kind, as easily as they could in the office.

"I like to use that time efficiently, so it's great to have this tool," Alexander adds. "I don't have to worry about fumbling through something. I put my headset on, and I'm good to go by just speaking. When I call and I say "check messages," I can roll right through my messages, whether it's voice mail or email, so I can get them both."



Not only does it [UCC Speech Access] free time up, but more than that, it allows for more timely response to clients, which is an important aspect of our business.



— Steven Alexander, Audit Manager, J. H. Cohn

- **Make Hands-free Phone and Conference Calls** Avaya UCC Speech Access lets users easily make calls or set up conferences using voice commands. While listening to a message, for instance, they can say "reply" and initiate a call to the message sender.  
  
"I was on my way into New York City," Alexander recalls. "I had a 12:15 lunch appointment. As you would expect in mid-town traffic on a rainy day, I was major-league delayed. I didn't have the person's phone number with me. I called Speech Access rather than calling my secretary, told it to make a call, spoke the contact name, and it dialed the number. I caught the person, apologized and said I'd be late. We met at the restaurant 45 minutes later, rather than him sitting there waiting for me."
- **Manage Contacts and Appointments** With Avaya UCC Speech Access, J. H. Cohn professionals can use simple spoken commands to review their calendar, schedule new appointments, review contact information or call a contact.
- **Enhance Personal Efficiency** Out on the road, J. H. Cohn users can choose to have calls coming into their offices transferred automatically to their cell phones, no matter where they are on the road. When the cell phone rings, they can answer, or allow the caller to leave a message on their office voice mail system. Storing all voice messages in a single system simplifies life for the traveling worker.

"It helps me run my life more efficiently," says Alexander, "because when I am out of the office, I make the decision to pick up a call if I have the time, or just let it go into my voice mail to address later."

And clients? "When I told them that I wasn't even in the state, but I was able to answer their calls," Alexander says, "that's what they loved."

## Gains in Productivity and Responsiveness

Avaya UCC Speech Access is providing tangible benefits for J. H. Cohn and its clients. By freeing up billable hours, enhancing access and service to customers and streamlining the day's work for the company's hard-working CPAs, J. H. Cohn's mobility applications from Avaya are paying their way—and setting the pace in the accounting industry.

In enhanced productivity, Brad White estimates that partners using UCC Speech Access while on the road save an average of one hour a day by checking and responding to voice and email messages during what would otherwise be non-productive "windshield" time. They can then use this additional hour elsewhere in the day for productive, billable client work. That adds up to some \$6 million or more in potential billable time made available each year. And White anticipates that those gains could more than double as J. H. Cohn extends the application to additional users.

\* Connection to cellular telephones is subject to local cellular service availability.



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— Brad White, J. H. Cohn

He says the value grows from "the ability of UCC Speech Access to make time available to work on client-related matters, because you can clear out your unread emails and voice mails on the way in, while you're out of the office."

"Not only does it free time up," Alexander says, "but more than that, it allows for more timely response to clients, which is an important aspect of our business." Partners can retrieve messages—whether from clients or within the firm—and answer them instantly, from anywhere. Issues raised in an email message can be settled by attaching and forwarding a voice message, without ever touching a computer.

"When I check my messages and get the email that a client sent me, I can call him back within a couple of hours, versus a couple of days," says Alexander. "I can assure him I got his e-mail and I'll get the answer to him."

In addition, users like White find the system makes their work life less hectic. "It's a nice thing," he says. "Last week on vacation I was checking in. I had voice and e-mail messages, but I was able to deal with them, so when I got back from vacation I was caught up. Emergencies were handled on the spot. It is a great way to manage the time."

Another benefit: As J. H. Cohn merges with other firms, the incoming associates are delighted to be gaining some of the most advanced communications tools in the industry.

"They're really jazzed about it," White says. "They love it—that's one of the things that's an attraction to them. New managers see our communication capabilities and they can't believe what we have. We're leagues ahead of other firms."

And UCC Speech Access enthusiast Steven Alexander? "For anybody that's not in the office," he says, "I think it is a great, efficient way to run your business."

<p><b>About Avaya</b></p> <p>Avaya enables businesses to achieve superior results by designing, building and managing their communications networks. Over one million businesses worldwide, including more than 90 percent of the FORTUNE 500®, rely on Avaya solutions and services to enhance value, improve productivity and gain competitive advantage.</p>	<p>Focused on enterprises large to small, Avaya is a world leader in secure and reliable IP telephony systems, communications software applications and full life-cycle services. Driving the convergence of voice and data communications with business applications – and distinguished by comprehensive worldwide services – Avaya helps customers leverage existing and new networks to unlock value and enhance business performance.</p>		
<p><b>IP Telephony</b></p>	<p><b>Contact Centers</b></p>		<p><b>Unified Communication</b></p>

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