

Staying agile: how to deploy a communications network that supports collaboration

One of the most powerful aspects of an efficient business is how communications are managed. Unified Communications as a Service – or UCaaS – now offers network capability to meet the changing communications needs of post-pandemic enterprises.

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Businesses need to communicate with their staff and commercial partners. Migrating to a cloud-based unified communication platform can offer an integrated network that connects all aspects of an enterprise. And with more flexibility than legacy hardware-based systems, UCaaS delivers a network communications environment business can build upon.

Research from [*Unispace*](#) concludes that over half (67%) of UK and Irish office workers would prefer not to return to their offices post-COVID. With remote mass working likely to become the norm, a business priority is ensuring communications networks are robust, resilient and secure for all workers no matter their location.

As WAN and WLAN have come under increasing pressure to adapt to the new working practices that look set to become permanent, a new approach to communications is needed. Increasingly, businesses are evaluating SD-WAN and how changing their network can deliver cost savings and a more flexible network architecture that is ideal for supporting UCaaS.

As other business processes and services have moved to the cloud, so too can telephony in the first instance, and then all the other communications channels your business may have currently deployed. However, IDC found that 38% of respondents to their survey don't use the full capabilities of the deployed UCaaS platform. The main reason given is lack of training and support with the tools.

Speaking to Maddyne, Pascal Moindrot, COO of Kurmi Software, a French provider of provisioning and management applications for Unified Communications platforms, said understanding your precise communication needs will help any business successfully navigate the UCaaS marketplace.

"As solutions have evolved, the fragmentation in the market has actually led to a disunification of communications, meaning that the challenge for business is to re-unify and automate management and user administration," said Pascal. "Without a clear way to manage user access, provision them across different platforms and automate UC processes, an enormous strain is being put on IT teams needing to onboard or offboard users. When you are adding new users at scale, provisioning delays are expensive to the business."

Martin Bodley, director and global head of Bose Work for Bose Professional, commented: "An effective UCaaS setup provides employees the freedom of hybrid working, while also maintaining high levels of productivity unimpeded by physical distance.

"For an organisation to run smoothly, its workforce needs the right environment to collaborate with colleagues, whether that is in-person or remotely. An additional advantage for organisations is the pool of qualified workforce just increased without any effort on their part."

Making connections

According to *Gartner*, by 2025, 10% of large enterprise business users will rely on collaboration platforms for internal voice capabilities rather than an enterprise-grade PSTN-capable service, up from 4% in 2021. By the same year, midsize to large organisations using a multi-tenant cloud telephony solution over a premises-based or hosted telephony solution will rise to 28%.

Clearly, connecting voice, messaging, meetings, and collaboration tools into one integrated platform can bring potentially massive benefits to your organisation. As a result, the trend is towards more integrated communications tools that leverage the cloud and the flexibility this can deliver.

It's vital for the successful deployment of any UCaaS solution that your enterprise clearly defines your network's endpoints. For example, as the pandemic took hold, businesses had to suddenly support many more network endpoints as their workforces retreated to their homes. Moving forward, your company will have to manage a diverse endpoint strategy that will include how the threat perimeter is defined and then defended.

Lee Houston, voice and UC portfolio manager at Zen Internet, explained how UCaaS can be a fundamental component of every business that is managing massive structural changes thanks to the pandemic: "Rolling out UCaaS is most likely the only sustainable way to maintain a cohesive and collaborative workforce that is no longer situated within a single premise.

"Organisations are waking up to the possibility of what this means for recruitment - by having the right tools and functionality in place, you can attract the best talent available without having to worry about where they are based. Flexible working is quickly becoming a key priority for many,

and UCaaS will be a key enabler in supporting this.”

Integrated communications

IDC points to UCaaS as one vital component of the digital transformation all businesses are moving through: “Usage of UCaaS solutions continues to increase dramatically as businesses increasingly face a changing work environment. Close to two-thirds (62%) of all businesses are using UCaaS or plan to use UCaaS within the next two years, which is significantly higher than two years prior. This is reflective of businesses' growing appetite for as-a- service solutions deployed in the cloud and their growing appetite for communications and collaboration services specifically.”

Your starting point is to take an initial audit of your network architecture and how this network supports the current communications traffic. UCaaS is a communications ecosystem that can be defined explicitly for your business need. The phased approach to UCaaS deployment has been proven to deliver the efficiency of the communication gains businesses are looking to achieve without a massive disruption to communications channels.

Also, it is vital to consider the legal and regulatory environment UCaaS will be used within. Here, considering how *GDPR could impact* your company's UCaaS deployment must be considered. For example, call recordings and other data are stored in the cloud with a clearly defined policy supporting full GDPR compliance.

For any UCaaS platform to be successful, all users must have detailed training with the new tools they may encounter daily. UCaaS is not simply an IT exercise to reduce costs and improve communications efficiency. The users of these new systems must become stakeholders in their success. Critically, the security of the UCaaS network requires every user

to be aware of good security practices.

“A primary challenge, especially for large and geographically distributed organisations, is deriving the full potential value from the UCaaS solution,” said Paul Cunningham, CMO at Westcon-Comstor. “Just like the technologies that preceded UCaaS its common for a kind of 80:20 rule to prevail, whereby 80% of the users only really use about 20% of the features of the solution, such as voice calling and instant messaging. This requires careful planning and delivery of training, support, and advocacy programs to drive greater adoption of valuable tools as well as considering target adoption and productivity goals as part of the deployment.”

Zen Internet’s Lee Houston added: “We often come across tech departments exploring the options, but without having buy-in from across the organisation. As a result, they prioritise replacing their existing telephony with a like-for-like alternative, rather than looking towards the broader, future-looking benefits that UCaaS could offer.”

The agility your business will need to compete in your marketplaces means having a communications network that supports collaboration by delivering state-of-the-art tools everyone across your company wants to use. The as a service model has touched many aspects of business processes. UCaaS, when implemented with proper planning, could revolutionise how your business communicates.