



UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS DEPLOYMENT

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE TO IT



BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Creating a more collaborative environment for your organisation is not without its challenges. As you move towards the objective of technology as a business enabler, it is worth bearing in mind that legacy technologies and process can be inhibitors.

A seamless, collaborative environment will yield significant benefits for your organisation, in terms of workforce productivity, employee engagement, accelerated decision making and cost savings. However, before these benefits can be realised, there may be some hurdles to overcome:

- Collaboration is not something that should be limited to internal stakeholders. If you want to make the most of UC, adopt a more inclusive approach and extend the principles of collaboration up and down the supply chain to customers and suppliers.
- If your UC systems don't offer what the users want, (both in terms of usability and functionality) they will go "off-grid" and use more convenient, often less secure alternatives.
- Most organisations will be using multiple tools to facilitate collaboration. The IT estate is likely to have evolved organically over time to meet individual needs as they arose. The result might be a variety of solutions that do not work well together.
- A lack of integration places the emphasis on the user as the curator of information. With the best will in the world, users are unlikely to upload and update assets within multiple systems; leading to issues with version control and accessibility.
- Most collaboration solutions are optimised for desktop use. This simply doesn't reflect the way modern employees work. The average employee uses 3 separate devices every day, with an increasing amount of time spent on smartphones and tablets.

SOLUTION DEFINITION

The successful deployment of any new technology is contingent upon it meeting the objectives laid down before the project began. Project planning is not about building a “machine” and seeing what comes out the other end. It is about understanding what you want the end-product to look like and creating something that will deliver what you need.

Setting objectives for a unified communications deployment may start with one big, simple idea: the desire to collaborate better, with more people, from anywhere and on any device. As you might expect, it is the subtle nuances of the system that present a challenge – the devil, as they say, is in the detail.

Here are some key factors you should consider whilst scoping your new collaboration solution:

- 1.** To make the most out of your investment in collaboration technologies, you need to create an environment that delivers an easy-to-use, high-quality experience on any device.
- 2.** Users are not the only stakeholder. Don't forget the IT department; they will be tasked with maintaining service levels going forward and will be integral to any successful deployment.
- 3.** Let the present influence the future. Analyse systems usage and user behaviour to optimise workflows and create a system that meets the needs of today's agile worker.
- 4.** Rethink what a productive “meeting” looks like.
- 5.** Engage with a cross section of stakeholders when scoping the new solution.
- 6.** Collate the assets and resources a typical project team needs to access and factor them into the new workflows.
- 7.** Offer a choice of real-time and any-time technologies to allow users to collaborate in the way that works best for them.
- 8.** Consider scalability and flexibility as essentials. Adding new team members to an existing project should be seamless and individual users should be able to participate in multiple projects, simultaneously.
- 9.** Legacy systems integration will play an important role in the short-term, as it is unlikely that a hard break from the old ways will work for everyone.
- 10.** Make sure your roadmap sticks to two key principles: add value and keep it simple.

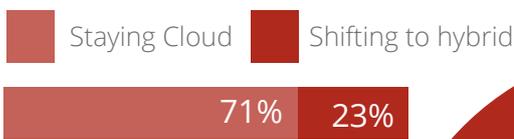
UC DEPLOYMENT

Wherever you are on your digital transformation journey, there is a UC solution to suit your organisation. Cloud continues to gain traction across all aspects of IT and communications technology, but has seen more modest growth in UC than in areas such as storage, disaster recovery and general computing.

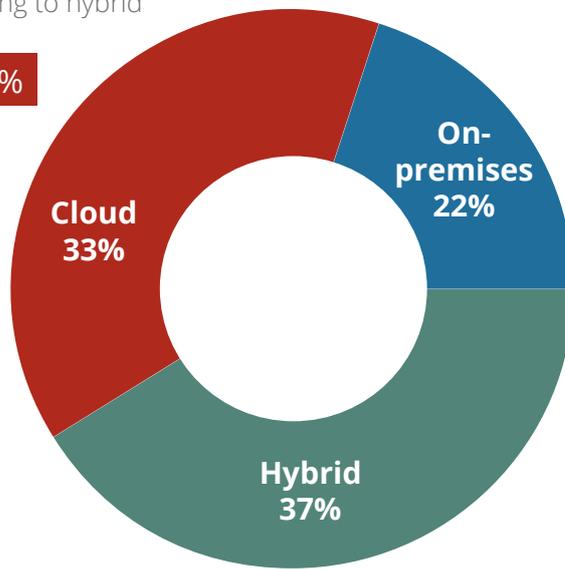
According to 2016 Forrester Research, UC deployments show a fairly even distribution between Cloud, hybrid and premise-based systems (see Fig.1). Although this share of the UC market will change over time, indications are that we will see less convergence than expected. More than half of all premise-based UC deployments look set to stay on-premises and the majority (76%) of hybrid deployments will stay hybrid.

Current UC Deployment

Future deployment plans



23% of current Cloud deployments will shift to hybrid configurations.



Future deployment plans

Shifting to:



35% of current on-premises deployments will shift to Cloud or hybrid configurations

Future deployment plans



17% of current hybrid deployments will shift to the Cloud

HINTS and TIPS

Network performance is a significant consideration for a UC deployment. Don't just assume your network will be able to cope with high-bandwidth applications such as streaming video, or that your wireless network will cope with an increase in voice traffic. A bad experience will negatively impact on user adoption and satisfaction.

Connectivity is an important part of your UC experience. Don't simple assume your current bandwidth and speed will cope with the increase in voice and video traffic. Poor quality of service, latency (jitter) and echo can all negatively impact on the UC experience.

IT departments have become increasingly service-oriented. As they reassess the importance of maintaining on-premises solutions, they balance the outsourcing of commoditised services to allow them to focus on strategic, transformation projects.

The decision to outsource is not necessarily a straightforward one. The choice of hybrid, Cloud or on-premises deployment will be determined by which model adds greatest value to the organisation.

There may be times when maintaining an on-premises solution is mandated because of security, availability or compliance obligations. However, in most cases, on-site solutions rarely offer cost or efficiency advantages.

UC forms an essential part of business transformation; offering improvements in collaboration, customer experience and productivity. The range of Cloud-based UC-as-a-Service propositions available today mean that on-premises solutions are no longer the default choice.

LESS RISK, MORE FLEXIBILITY

Placing your UC in the Cloud as part of a managed service offering doesn't just allow you to displace risk, it can also provide the flexibility, availability and security your organisation demands.

Adopting UCaaS insulates your organisation from vendor-related risk. Your service provider assumes all the risk associated with technology changes and guarantees a minimum service level and systems availability under their SLA.

Installation and migration of services is made easier when adopting UCaaS as your service provider will already have a robust Cloud environment in place. Deploying new teams and instances is made simple, accelerating the time to value of your investment.

Modern UCaaS propositions offer organisations an ideal blend of predictability, availability and security:

- Organisations can run their own instances, maintaining network security and integrity
- Ease of integration with directory services, business apps and traditional IP-PBX and video conferencing services
- Lower total cost of ownership as high-speed, high-bandwidth networking solutions have become commoditised
- Fixed service level agreements guaranteeing service availability
- Business continuity improved with the elimination of a single point of communications failure

CHOOSING A SERVICE PROVIDER

The UC and collaboration market has become a difficult place to navigate. Whilst enterprise platforms appear to be dominated by a small number of global vendors, it is the integration of a wide range of value-add components that can make the difference between good and great.

Where do you start? What should you look for in a unified communications service provider? Here are ten things to think about when assessing your options.

1. Proven Methodology. Your communications technology plays a vital role in your organisation's success. Make sure your service provider has a robust set of processes in place to guarantee your new solution is aligned to your business objectives and delivers long-term value.

Any systems design should be influenced heavily by the users. Your service provider should engage with a variety of stakeholders throughout the design, deployment and testing phases to facilitate user acceptance.

2. Integration Expertise. As-a-Service propositions, although software-based, will need to integrate seamlessly with legacy hardware and software solutions. Providing collaboration on office-based technology is just as important as empowering the new generation of mobile workers.

Avoid the creation of technology silos. If integration isn't seamless, you will find it difficult to realise the full potential of your new UC solution and the user experience will suffer. Your UC solution will need to work with your directory systems, email client, office apps and your CRM and ERP systems.

3. Legacy Aware. Rarely will a UC deployment be going into a brand new environment. Most organisations will have a legacy of technology and investment that still hold a value. Look for a service provider that will allow you to migrate legacy components to the new platform.

You may want to retain current vendor licenses. You may also want to hold on to desktop handsets if you have already purchased them. Your service provider should be flexible and help you extract addition value from your legacy investment.

4. Cloud Infrastructure. One of the key advantages of a Cloud-based system is the ability to scale and flex rapidly to meet the changing needs of your organisation. If your work groups typically feature geographically diverse users and change membership over time, your provider needs to match this flexibility with their service offering.

5. Vendor Relationships. Look for a partner that maintains strong relationships with hardware and software vendors. The greater the mindshare the provider has, the more important you will be to the vendor.

A valued service provider can leverage second-tier support from the original vendor, along with best-practice and experience of complex systems integration.



6. Robust Security. It is likely that your collaboration session will include proprietary or sensitive information, including confidential or customer data. Your service provider should include enterprise-grade security by default. Solutions should feature policy-based, authenticated user access, data encryption and easy-to-understand user management.

7. Management Information. Data analysis and reporting plays an important role in systems optimisation and ensures you are getting the most out of your new solution.

8. Device Independence. To provide maximum value, your UC solutions needs to be device and platform independent. Users should benefit from the same high-quality collaboration experience regardless of where they are and what device they are using.

9. Future Proof. As your business needs change and solutions evolve over time, you want to avoid being locked-in to a specific set of technologies. What works for you today, won't necessarily be suitable in a year's time.

Your UCaaS provider should maintain a clear roadmap, one that is flexible enough to adapt to innovation and continue to provide long-term value to the organisation. Evolution is generally better than revolution. Find a service provider that will flex with you throughout your digital transformation journey.

10. Single SLA. Getting the most from your investment in UC, both in terms of systems performance and user experience, is dependent upon a range of factors. Connectivity, device management, platform resilience, security and availability will all have an impact.

Also, look beyond the SLA. Do they achieve it or do they historically miss it and pay out service credits? Paying lip service to an SLA and not delivering against it will deliver a poor experience to your users.



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