



The Benefits of Unified Communications for Business



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An Essential Business Telecommunications Solution for the 21st Century

Unified communications as a service (UCaaS)

Unified communications as a service (UCaaS), sometimes known as integrated enterprise communications, is a system that replaces traditional telecommunications technology with a cloud-based system. It hosts landlines, cell phones, call centers and collaboration technology on a platform that can be accessed by any device or user associated with the system. It stores data in redundant data centers, rather than on equipment housed on business premises, so data can be transferred to new devices or even to a new intra-office phone system if hardware needs to be upgraded, replaced or augmented.

There are benefits to UCaaS for businesses of all sizes, including cost reduction, enhancement of existing systems, ensuring business continuity and empowering a remote workforce. Now that cloud-based systems have become commonplace and more users demand multi-device and multi-platform integration, unified communications as a service is an essential business telecommunications solution for the 21st century.

Features of unified communications

In addition to cloud-based business communications, UCaaS systems are distinguished by the following features.

- Pre-configured devices
- Web interface with a single portal to manage operations
- User permission options to allow employees to make pre-authorized changes
- Voicemail-to-e-mail functionality
- Call forwarding to any device
- Separate business and personal usage on the same device
- Compatibility with 4G, LTE or Wi-Fi
- Downtime avoidance and data recovery for business continuity

Benefits for all business sizes

Enterprise-class unified communications can be adopted by businesses of any size. Both small and large businesses benefit from the versatility, seamless multi-device/multi-platform functionality and centralized platform. Additional universal benefits include reduced IT costs, lower cost of ownership and smaller phone and data bills.

The owner of a small heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) business, for example, benefits from having office calls automatically directed to his cell phone while he is in the field. Alternatively, these calls can be forwarded to a professional answering service with a live receptionist who will take messages, enabling the HVAC owner to work outside the office and maintain customer service at the same time. This feature is also valuable to those who operate businesses solely from mobile phones and do not have an office space.

On the other end of the spectrum, a manufacturing enterprise might depend on their large remote salesforce having access to sales and communication apps. Apps that, for instance, transmit texts sent from customers to a salesperson's work phone number to their mobile device. This business would benefit from the user permission options that allow for management of employee devices (including app permissions, device settings and network access) from the main office.

Adopting, then scaling, a unified communications solution may present challenges depending on business size. Any challenges, however, mainly represent a one-time or upfront effort, after which a unified communications system works and grows with the business. With UCaaS, setup and integration with existing technology happens as part of the service, after which ongoing support is also included.

Pre-configured devices are talk-ready much sooner than traditional phone hardware, which must be

configured by the user or support personnel. A web portal interface enables simple setup and ongoing management from a single device (or any device in the network). Mobile devices under UCaaS can work with existing data connections, so users can make business calls from any mobile device on any network - another benefit for businesses with remote employees or workers who need more mobility.

Reducing TCO

When considering the total cost of ownership (TCO), businesses must combine direct costs, such as the price of hardware and software, labor, maintenance, facilities and administration, with indirect costs, such as end user efficiency and downtime.^[1]

For a traditional business telecommunications system, the TCO includes the purchase price of the phones, the cost of the phone plan, the cost of additional data, the costs of setup and maintenance, the salaries of IT personnel and the cost of additional IT support. But it also includes "hidden" costs like the revenue lost during unplanned downtime and the time and expense of employee training.^[1]

Businesses with unified communications have reduced monthly and yearly operational costs and lower telecommunications TCOs. They avoid hardware and software obsolescence, maintenance fees and the need for in-house IT resources - again, the need for ongoing IT support is one of the biggest contributors to TCO. Unified communications reduce the need for IT personnel and bundle support into the cost of the service with no maintenance fees. Another cost reducing benefit of moving business telecommunications to the cloud is automatic system upgrades. Regular updates occur at scheduled intervals, without any system downtime, so businesses can be spared both the IT costs involved in updating software and equipment and the downtime associated with upgrades.

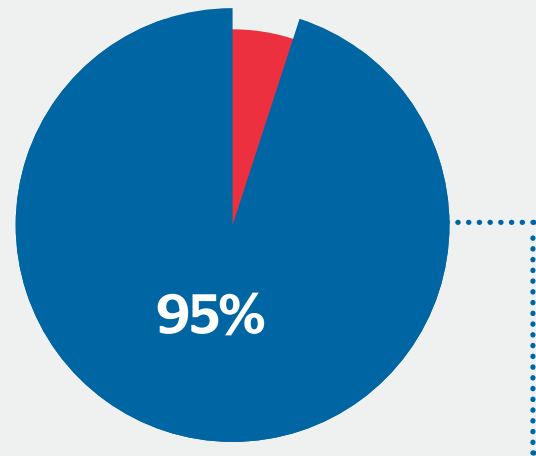
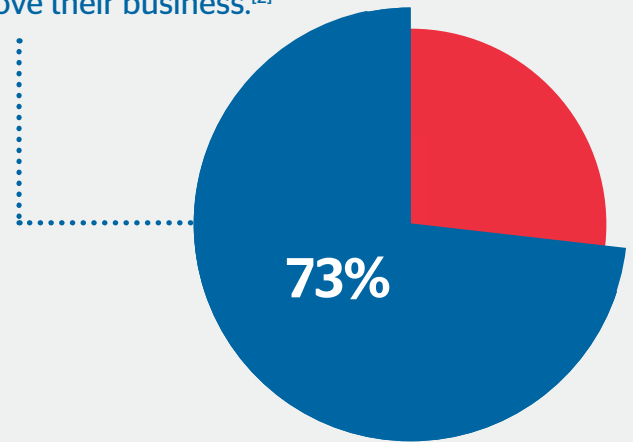
Integration into additional systems

Unified communications can enhance, connect with and reconcile existing “smart” technology systems, which are a growing component of many businesses. The use of smart technology and the “internet of things” (IoT) is on the rise: 73% of organizations are currently using IoT data to improve their business, and 95% of executives plan to launch an IoT initiative within three years.^[2]

Unified communications can work with these applications to inform smarter, real-time decisions and increase enterprise productivity. For example, sales professionals in the field can reach contacts directly from their customer relationship management (CRM) system, which automatically logs and produces analytics on customer interactions. And a UCaaS platform can integrate with enterprise resource planning (ERP) software to pull up incoming callers’ order history for easy reference during conversations.

By putting smart technology systems and traditional telecommunications under a single umbrella, businesses can organize, administer and track usage of any or all of these technologies - or prepare to adopt them in the future.

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Business continuity

Power outages, inclement weather and other unforeseeable and uncontrollable events are an unfortunate reality. These events are a source of delays and halts in operations for many, with long-term effects on businesses.

Downtime is expensive: for every minute of data center downtime, the typical business averages \$7,900 in losses. And the average large corporation experiences 87 hours of downtime a year - resulting in significant annual losses due to outages and downtime alone.^[3] Outages aren't always caused by headline-making storms or infrastructure failures, either. Systems go down for numerous technical reasons, often due to issues within a business.

In the age of connectivity, however, an emergency doesn't have to mean lost productivity. Unified communications preserve users, settings and configurations. Because a cloud-based system stores data remotely, operations can be resumed on new equipment or in a new location to achieve business continuity.



Remote workforce

In 2016, Syntonic conducted a survey of employees and employers about the use of personal devices for work. It found that nearly half (45%) of U.S. employees are required to use personal Smartphones for work. And 77% of employers surveyed expect personal device usage for work purposes to increase in the near future.^[4]

Yet despite these findings, 50% of employees who use personal devices for work outside the office postpone work related activities due to data usage concerns.^[4] Additionally, many businesses with BYOD (“bring your own device”) policies face uncertainty due to changing labor laws governing employee compensation for device usage.^[5] With unified communications, employees and business owners can be just as productive outside the office as they are in it. It empowers employees to work remotely and use personal devices, while letting employers feel secure about employee device usage. Calls to an office phone number can be routed to a mobile device. And caller ID for outbound calls from mobile devices can be set to display the office phone number. If workers can connect reliably on any device, remote work can benefit an entire company. And when businesses implement cloud-based communications systems across employee devices, they can enact and uphold sensible policies even amid shifting regulations and attitudes.

Conclusion

UCaaS grants businesses of every size the flexibility that comes with hosting data in the cloud. As a distributed workforce and the use of personal devices call for a seamless integration between platforms, UCaaS is a solution that permits modern working styles and reduces costs as businesses grow.

U.S. Cellular® offers a broad suite of communication technology solutions - all backed on a network that works in the Middle of Anywhere.

To learn more on how UCaaS can benefit your business go to uscellular.com/business or call us on **1-866-616-5587** today for a free informational consultation.

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