A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO YOUR COLLABORATION JOURNEY

Connect and collaborate anytime, anywhere
with a cloud-based communications solution

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Digital business strategies are creating upheaval in practically every industry. Data is everywhere, in larger quantities than ever. That data can point to new opportunities or it can signal dangers to be avoided. With the advent of cloud technology, data is rapidly moving from traditional on-premises solutions to cloud-based solutions, powering virtual services where users can easily access and share information, regardless of location.

This e-book explores how cloud-based collaboration in the digital business era is transforming communications and empowering employees to work in new and compelling ways. With modern capabilities, workers can communicate seamlessly — whether in the corporate office, a remote location or on the road. Cloud-based collaboration enables employees to reach new levels of productivity and their companies to reach greater levels of success.

The cloud-based collaboration technologies covered in this e-book include voice over IP (VoIP), unified communications and virtual call center. We'll examine the various options for implementing unified communications and offer suggestions on how to sucessfully make the switch. With high levels of functionality and reliability, cloud-based unified communications is an outstanding workforce collaboration enabler.

To gain these benefits, you'll need a partner with exceptional service and expertise. This e-book will help you learn what to look for in a provider of cloud-based collaboration services as you strive to help your employees be more efficient and your business more competitive.

Let's get started.

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Chapter 1: What is unified communications?

As businesses digitize, collaboration between employees is a key success factor. To gain a sense of how collaboration can drive business productivity in the digital era, we invite you to meet Helen, the head of customer service for a maker of automated factory equipment. While Helen is working hard to give her company an edge, she can't do it alone. Collaboration tools enable her to leverage the knowledge and skills of her co-workers, expanding the possibilities of how she works together with colleagues.

While visiting a customer's factory, Helen spots a performance issue that might soon result in a warranty claim. As head of customer service, she uses the presence capabilities of unified communications to check the factory supervisor Steve's availability. Once his availability is confirmed, Helen instant messages Steve to explain her concern and presents a diagram via virtual workspace, a space where teams can chat, meet and share content, to illustrate her problem. To drive home her point, she launches a video conference with Steve so he can see for himself how the performance issue is affecting the operation of the assembly line, enabling him to instantly begin fixing the problem.

To do her job, Helen must collaborate. And she must travel. She works from three separate corporate offices and meets with 20 different customers every month. She needs to stay in close contact with experts at her own company who work in widely dispersed locations, as well as to stay in touch with customer service reps in the call center, with whom she might need to talk, email or message at any time. When not on the road, Helen is most likely to be found in her home office.

In today's business world, Helen's situation is far from unique. Organizations have grown more reliant on the technologies they use to collaborate than ever before. The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly accelerated network modernization to accommodate remote workforce capabilities, IT performance and resources in the cloud.

Organizations have grown more reliant on the technologies they use to collaborate than ever before.

97% of employees now consider cloud resources essential to their jobs.[1]

83% of businesses expect to work remotely at least half of the time.[2]

66% of IT leaders cited the rise in remote work as one of the top challenges created by the pandemic.[3]

57% of companies are migrating more workloads to the cloud.[4]

To flourish in this dynamic work environment, always-connected employees across a wide range of industries require mobility and collaboration via email, messaging, voice and video conferencing. IT leaders can enable this mobile and collaborative workstyle by building an IT infrastructure that provides highly reliable connectivity and location independence. The ability of key workers like Helen to solve problems in real time increases productivity, cost avoidance and customer satisfaction. Helen's ability to easily and conveniently communicate with customers and co-workers anywhere, anytime speaks volumes about the commitment of Helen's company to excel in customer service.

Fortunately for Helen and many like her, there's unified communications, a cloud-based solution with telephony and additional collaboration capabilities that include calling, messaging, meetings, virtual workspaces and more in a single application that delivers a unified experience for today's mobile, on-the-go workforce.

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Unified communications is the tool that enables it all. It provides a rich array of mobility and collaboration capabilities and brings them together in one interface across multiple devices and locations.

Cloud-based telephony
The cloud-based telephony capabilities of unified communications eliminates the need to purchase or upgrade on-premises equipment like a private branch exchange (PBX[†]). As a cloud-based service, ongoing management, maintenance and upgrades are performed in the cloud, allowing IT resources to focus on other strategic business initiatives. For organizations with multiple locations, moving to the cloud overcomes the complexities of managing disparate PBX models.
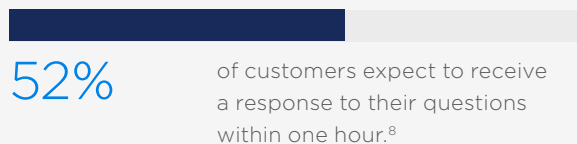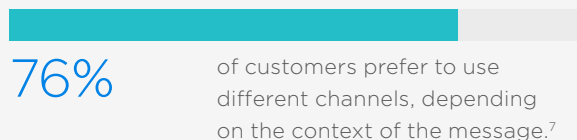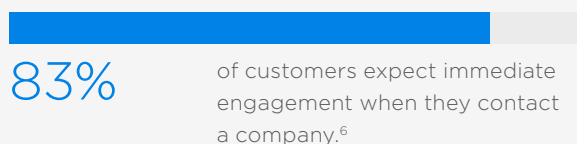
Cloud-based collaboration
With unified communications, modern collaboration capabilities, such as instant messaging, video conferencing and desktop sharing, enhance how employees interact with one another. According to Omdia, now, more than ever, employees need tools that allow them to communicate more effectively to remain productive.[5] The consistent user experience provided by unified communications enables employees to easily exchange ideas and information regardless of location or device. As a cloud-based collaboration solution, unified communications eliminates barriers between mobile and desktop environments, keeping teams connected and ready to collaborate from anywhere.

Another element of unified communications is "presence." Presence is the ability of the unified communications system to identify a user and his or her status so individuals can make a more informed decision about the most effective way to contact a person at a given time. Presence enhances employee collaboration by showing which employees are available via their current status e.g. presenting, in a meeting, out of office or available.

Unified communications also helps organizations expand customer service capabilities through cloud-based call center solutions. Such solutions are often an add-on offering to a unified communications service. Cloud-based call center solutions accommodate call center locations with the option to extend the service to remote and mobile call center employees.

Today's customers want fast, personalized experiences over the device and channel of their choosing:

83% of customers expect immediate engagement when they contact a company.[6]

76% of customers prefer to use different channels, depending on the context of the message.[7]

52% of customers expect to receive a response to their questions within one hour.[8]

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Chapter 2: The benefits of unified communications

The various integrated communications methods supported by unified communications makes it an optimal collaboration enabler. Let's take a closer look.

As discussed in the first chapter, Helen is able to leverage unified communications technology to quickly reach colleagues through the medium of her choice, including voice, messaging and video conferencing to resolve pertinent production issues on the factory floor. Luckily for Helen, the technology decision makers at her company had the foresight to implement a unified communications solution to boost staff efficiency. In order to understand the benefits of cloud-based unified communications technology, it's important to examine two aspects of unified communications: simplification and collaboration.

Simplification
Unified communications is easy to use and manage with a consistent interface that works across all sites. When deployed as a cloud-based service, unified communications eliminates the complex responsibilities that come with managing and maintaining on-premises equipment. Because IT teams are no longer tasked with managing on-premises equipment, they can focus instead on other business-critical initiatives.

Support from a unified communications provider that offers both the service and the network is both simpler and more comprehensive. If issues arise with a network-based service provider, clients benefit from fast and convenient support — with only one number to call for support.

Cloud-based unified communications also simplifies budgeting with a predictable monthly subscription fee that covers maintenance, system upgrades and repairs.

Collaboration
IT leaders recognize the necessity of collaboration for today's employees. According to Foundry, 54% of IT and business leaders say they are investing in enhanced collaboration and meeting tools.[9] Along with machine learning, the future of enterprise collaboration brings together easily accessible and usable tools to better guide employees and teams to the most optimal method of accomplishing their tasks.

A cloud-based unified communications service enables a collaborative workforce by delivering tools that help people work together more efficiently. Unified communications meets the needs of organizations by connecting multiple communications channels into a single, easy-to-use and secure service.

Reliability
High uptime is dependent on the quality and capacity of the physical network. Typically, uptime relies on the quality of the connection, the unified communications platform, hardware and bandwidth.

The superior capabilities of unified communications are particularly beneficial for call centers. A cloud-based call center can provide unified communications functionality to enhance internal communications and customer service. An integrated unified communications call center enables agents to chat with colleagues to quickly address customer inquiries. Cloud-based call centers may also include productivity-based call routing, allowing calls to be redirected to a backup agent in the event that the primary agent is unavailable.

Summary

Without question, the simplification and collaboration benefits of cloud-based unified communications are significant. By offering the rich functionality of unified communications through the cloud, deployment and management is greatly simplified. The on-premises PBX is eliminated, so there is never any hassle deploying, maintaining or upgrading it. And a cloud-based service simplifies budgeting by providing a predictable monthly cost.

Unified communications is easier for employees to use than traditional communications methods because it gives them access to tools like voice, chat and video conferencing — all within a single interface. For workers like Helen, whose job functions are dependent on communicating with employees and stakeholders, the ability to reach them through a single system is a tremendous timesaver. Helen can easily connect with agents in the customer support center to learn the most pressing needs of key customers. Similarly, unified communications with its presence capabilities allows agents to see who's available and then reach them in a way that makes the most sense. For instance, a simple question about a product or service could be answered with an instant message to a marketing expert, while desktop sharing with a sales manager to review documents may be necessary to get a sale moving along.

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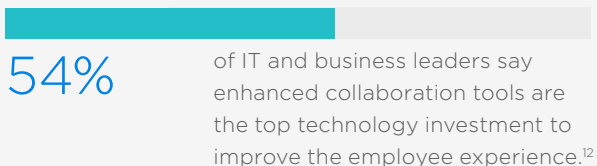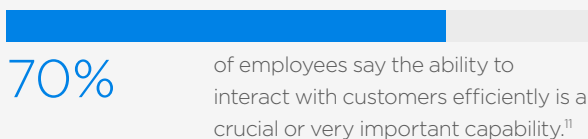
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Chapter 3: How is unified communications delivered?

Nearly all IT leaders would like to boost their organization's competitiveness through higher workforce productivity. Many recognize the benefits of unified communications, but are unsure where to begin. There are several things IT leaders need to keep in mind as they plan a move to unified communications.

For starters, it's important to consider how the unified communications system will be used. As we saw in earlier chapters, Helen needed to reach her colleague Steve instantly to resolve a critical work matter. Helen is not alone. In today's digital age, workers require technology that helps to break down the silos between business units, staff and geographies in order to become more engaged. According to a 2020 Gallup survey, business leaders who deliver a better collaboration experience have a competitive edge. For instance, businesses with high-employee engagement report 10% higher customer loyalty and 23% higher profitability.[10]

Employees expect to connect easily with one another, but there is clear room for improvement:

70% of employees say the ability to interact with customers efficiently is a crucial or very important capability.[11]

54% of IT and business leaders say enhanced collaboration tools are the top technology investment to improve the employee experience.[12]

40% of employees say they want better technology, like faster internet and video conferencing.[13]

To support enhanced employee engagement and higher productivity, organizations need to deploy systems that afford sufficient bandwidth and high uptime.

As IT leaders contemplate migration to the cloud, they should take into account the state of their current system. Some providers may have already deployed on-premises solutions with unified communications functionality. On-premises solutions and the corresponding equipment are more likely to become outdated. Often, IT teams end up spending excessive time managing and maintaining these systems. Providers with aging premises-based voice systems should consider migrating to network-based unified communication services — a better and longer-term fit for organizations looking to adapt to the demands of today's digital workforce.

Different UC approaches

As IT decision makers consider unified communication deployment, they must decide the preferred method to implement the solution:

1. **Network-based provider**

   Some network-based providers can simplify deployment by providing both the voice and communications service, as well as the network on which it runs. If issues arise with either the service or network, there is only one provider to contact. Depending on the vendor, equipment, such as endpoint devices, may be included in the service. A fully managed, end-to-end solution delivers the most reliable, secure and high-performing service available.

   Benefits of a network-based unified communications service that is delivered over a private network include the following:

   - An easy-to-use, fully managed solution that's delivered and supported — from design and installation through support — by one provider.
   - A private, secure network that is separate from the public internet.
   - A highly scalable solution since users and network capacity can be easily increased.
   - Geo-diverse data centers that support business continuity.
   - A service-level agreement (SLA), endpoints/customer-premises equipment and inside wiring.

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2. **Over-the-top (OTT) unified communications**
   Generally speaking, when using OTT providers, clients often leverage their existing internet connection and may need to manage both their unified communications solution and network separately.

   Although OTT services are scalable, clients may need to work with a third-party internet service provider (ISP) or local-access provider to meet network bandwidth requirements. This tends to increase complexity and may result in decreased quality, reliability and security. In addition, an OTT provider's SLA usually only covers their service platform, as network performance and uptime is the responsibility of the ISP or local-access provider.

Summary

As you begin to map out your collaboration journey and start vetting providers, it's important to consider the pros and cons of each vendor's unified communications solution, delivery method and level of support. Does the provider include an industry-leading SLA, hardware and network management? It's important that each provider is thoroughly evaluated so communication and collaboration are seamless and employees can stay productive.

Chapter 4: Why Spectrum Enterprise for unified communications and collaboration?

While it is possible to put together a unified communications solution by combining the offerings of several different parties — particularly for an OTT implementation — it simplifies matters to have a single point of contact. Because the performance of a unified communications solution depends on the underlying capabilities of the network, having separate suppliers of both can lead to a delay, should problems arise. Spectrum Enterprise Unified Communications solutions are offered as fully managed or co-managed services, which are delivered over a private, fiber network.

Spectrum Enterprise UC services include:

- A geo-diverse network with multiple data centers, which ensures reliability and business continuity to keep your service up and running.
- A dedicated account team, including a project manager, design and project engineers, to manage everything from design to implementation and support
- A private fiber network for reliable, high-performance communications.

Spectrum Enterprise Unified Communications solutions also offer add-on call center capabilities, allowing agents to easily communicate with one another to rapidly resolve pertinent customer issues. As a managed cloud-based service, agents can easily take their calls at their desktop or remotely.

A fully managed, end-to-end solution delivers the most reliable, secure and high-performing service available.

A partner that stands with you

Spectrum Enterprise Unified Communications is offered as a managed service, which gives your organization the confidence of knowing that your solution is always up-to-date.

Support is included via local-field personnel and 24/7/365 technical support available. This way, clients are not burdened by day-to-day communications system management.

Spectrum Enterprise also provides ongoing training throughout the client's contract, ensuring clients get the most out of the solution.

The combination of skilled professionals and logistics capabilities enables Spectrum Enterprise to offer an SLA assurance that promises high uptime and fast problem resolution all the way to each Spectrum Enterprise-provided endpoint device. It's the kind of support you'd expect from a partner that stands with you.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

There is no denying the importance of collaboration in the era of digital business. Businesses of all types use cloud-based collaboration technologies to enhance and modernize their communications. Given the variety of unified communications systems available, it's important to understand each type and its underlying network.

Here is a checklist to keep in mind when choosing a unified communications provider:

1. Match solution capabilities to your needs
   Every organization can benefit from increased collaboration, but each has unique needs. Organizations should plan their journey by understanding the expectations of users and implementing a unified communications solution that delivers the capabilities your organization needs to thrive.

2. Involve IT administrators and end-users
   Start by asking employees what collaboration tools they need to be more effective in their roles. Tools like instant messaging, virtual workspaces, video conferencing and mobile phone integration allow employees to collaborate and communicate from anywhere. For IT administrators, it's important that the communications service is easy for all employees to use. This allows IT teams to focus on core business activities without worrying about daily communications system management.

3. Focus on quality
   Partner with a provider that includes guaranteed performance all the way to the endpoint device over a reliable, high-performance network. The ideal unified communications provider is focused on quality of service, ease of use and simple management.

4. Find the right partner
   Given the critical role of collaboration in today's digital enterprise, you need a unified communications partner that works with you. Look for a technology partner that includes service all the way to the endpoint device, complete with local and technical support. Find the right partner to begin with and you won't have to waste time and energy looking for alternatives later.

Given the variety of unified communications systems available, it's important to understand each type and its underlying network.

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The last word

Collaboration has never been more important than it is today. Whether in the office, on the factory floor, on the road or at home, workers like Helen must collaborate with their co-workers to take full advantage of the skills and knowledge of the entire workforce. For these workers and their organizations, unified communications is an indispensable collaboration enabler that brings together calling, messaging, meetings, virtual workspaces and more in a single application that delivers a unified experience for today's mobile, on-the-go workforce.

Spectrum Enterprise brings all these collaborative capabilities together with the virtues of a cloud-based service that eliminates the need for costly and complex on-premises equipment and provides a single monthly bill.

Spectrum Enterprise Unified Communications solutions are delivered by a single network service provider across a private fiber network. It's a powerful combination that gives organizations the quality, reliability and security their always-connected workforce requires.

Learn more
enterprise.spectrum.com/collaborate

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†PBX: A private branch exchange is a premises-based telephone system within an organization that offers multiple inbound and outbound lines, call routing, voicemail and call management features. This privately owned hardware appliance switches and routes calls between in-office users and the public telephone network.

About Spectrum Enterprise
Spectrum Enterprise, a part of Charter Communications, Inc., is a national provider of scalable, fiber technology solutions serving many of America's largest businesses and communications service providers. The broad Spectrum Enterprise portfolio includes networking and managed services solutions: Internet access, Ethernet access and networks, Voice and TV solutions. The Spectrum Enterprise team of experts works closely with clients to achieve greater business success by providing solutions designed to meet their evolving needs. For more information, visit enterprise.spectrum.com.

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