

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS AND COLLABORATION: 5 STEPS SMBS CAN TAKE TO GAIN A SHARPER BUSINESS EDGE

The pace of work is getting faster than ever, putting pressure on small and medium businesses (SMBs) to find an edge in an increasingly complex, competitive and cost-conscious environment. If you are using mobile devices to extend the collaborative reach of your employees, you've taken a first step towards better agility and productivity. But tackling a competitive marketplace efficiently and cost-effectively takes more than simply deploying mobile devices.

To really sharpen your edge, you'll need phones and devices, email, voicemail, and conferencing tools that work together to provide seamless contact with customers, partners, suppliers, and co-workers from any location. Think of the time you could save if you could access, change and respond to messages, calendars, and applications from any device in real time.

When it comes to collaborative communication, even small steps can make a big difference in your bottom line and the productivity of your workforce.

With a unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) solution, you can integrate applications and business tools on all the devices your employees use today—and the devices and tools they'll need tomorrow. When it comes to collaborative communication, even small steps can make a big difference in your bottom line and the productivity of your workforce.

THE COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGES FACING SMBS

If you're already using mobile devices in your business, you're probably benefiting from their convenience. But you may also be experiencing challenges if your infrastructure isn't designed for a mixture of communication devices.

One struggle for many SMBs is that diverse technologies or a mix of devices from different vendors don't necessarily work well together. If your smartphone won't open an application that you use on your desktop, you could miss a sales opportunity, not get notice of an ad hoc meeting, or be unable to respond quickly to a customer.

In addition, a mix of devices often leads to multiple email addresses and phone numbers. If your office email and phone operate separately from your mobile devices, your customers and partners may need more than one email address or phone number to reach you. This is not only inconvenient for customers, but it means that your employees must check multiple email and voicemail systems to stay current. In the end, the more technologies you're forced to support, the more likely it is that your costs will keep rising. After all, you'll need to manage, maintain, and secure the separate devices, networks, and applications you use to conduct your business.

To improve communications—and get the most out of your mobile investment, you need a solution that lets you collaborate as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible with the tools you possess today and the ones you add down the road. Smart businesses are turning to UC&C to control costs, reduce complexity, increase productivity, and improve response times.

WHAT UC&C CAN DO FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Put simply, UC&C is the integration of business telephony, Internet access, and IT applications to simplify the way businesses communicate and collaborate with their employees and with each other. UC&C enables applications, networks, and devices to work together in a unified and seamless manner.

As you might imagine, when all of these technologies work in harmony, they deliver a different and more compelling set of benefits than you can gain from devices that operate independently from each other. For example, when the same emails appear on desktops, laptops, smartphones, and tablets, employees can manage email more effectively and respond to customers, suppliers, partners, and colleagues faster. Likewise, productivity and responsiveness soar when you can access identical voicemail systems from a cell phone and an office phone, view everyone's calendar from multiple devices, and see all of your applications, regardless of where you are or which device you are using.

Cost control: With UC&C in place, you can control the escalating costs of communications and conferencing, reduce your equipment needs, and cut travel and commuting expenses for your employees. You can assign the right type of device based on different job requirements, and you can leverage your existing equipment, because UC&C unifies tools that weren't necessarily designed to work together.

Increased productivity: Because your employees are able to send and receive more business-critical information on any device from virtually any location, they can be more productive and responsive while they're on the go. And they can make better business decisions faster, because UC&C reduces communication activities that create delays, such as inefficient calendaring on multiple technologies and inadequate conferencing options.

Better customer service: With UC&C, it is easier to access information about your customers from any location, which saves time and provides a more personalized experience for your customers. Likewise, UC&C makes it easier for your customers to get in touch with your employees, wherever they may be. With solutions like single number reach, there's no such thing as out of the office—the office is always there, always on.

Sharper competitive edge: As UC&C lowers your communication-related capital needs and helps you control expenses, increases the productivity of your employees, and deepens your relationships with customers, something else is going to happen: Your business is going to be more competitive. That's an advantage every business needs to survive and thrive.

The only way to succeed at UC&C is to create a working environment that fully integrates collaborative techniques into business culture as well as business structure.

FIVE STEPS TO HELP YOU CASH IN ON UC&C

UC&C can increase the impact you get from your communication devices, but it's going to take more than simply implementing the technology to get the effect you seek. The only way to succeed at UC&C is to create a working environment that fully integrates collaborative techniques into business culture as well as business structure. This usually involves distributing decision-making authority throughout your business and closely matching your technology choices to employee needs.

Once you have established a collaborative culture, you are ready to take steps to make UC&C pay off in your business. Following are five first steps to help you launch a successful UC&C solution.

Step One: Evaluate your current communications tools and costs

Making these assessments may not be as easy as it sounds. Dealing with multiple vendors, the continual addition of new devices, and turnover in the workforce can hinder your ability to identify costs. To get started, here are some key questions to answer:

- How much are you spending on email, telephony, Internet connectivity, and other mobile services?
- How many mobile devices and other communications devices—like phones and computers—do you have?
- Would you benefit from a provider who could track your devices for you?

Step Two: Examine your existing communications practices

- What percent of your workforce is mobile?
- Do you plan to increase the mobility of your workforce in the near future?

- Where do your employees do their work and what mobile devices do they use?
- What essential business tasks do your employees need to accomplish when they're away from the office?
- Are your mobile devices secure?

Step Three: Focus on your biggest areas of concern

- What communication areas do your employees struggle with?
- Are employees using your existing communications solutions? Is anything going unused or underutilized. If so, why?
- Do your employees need training or do they know how to use all the devices and applications that are available to them?

Step Four: Identify your preferred UC&C solution

The answers you gather in the previous steps will help you define your ideal UC&C solution and the benefits it would bring to your mobile workforce. You may also want to consider a secure, cloud-based UC&C solution that doesn't require large capital expenditures and provides usage-based pricing to ease budgeting. Such a solution would free your IT staff from managing on-premise equipment, so they can engage in revenue-producing strategic projects. And as your business grows, the cloud can easily and cost-effectively scale to meet your needs.

Step Five: Be open to outside ideas

Making the best use of UC&C in your business may require professional help. Your size and limited internal resources may curtail your ability to envision, design, or manage an appropriate UC&C solution. Many companies bring in outside talent to plan their UC&C approach—a strategy that is yielding good results for SMBs.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A UC&C PROVIDER

If you decide to engage an external UC&C provider, you will need to take a close look at your provider's offering to ensure it will be a worthwhile investment. Look for a provider who offers UC&C solutions that are secure, proven, comprehensive, and user-friendly. Be sure your provider's tools integrate easily with your existing technology and can take advantage of the cloud.

From the outset, your provider should show an interest in your business, its unique collaboration needs, and the devices you will use. The best providers will be able to explain how their UC&C solutions can help your business be more agile and responsive, control costs, reduce business risk, and protect against technology obsolescence.

UC&C managed services let you get back to running your own business rather than managing communication devices for your employees.

Any worthy provider should address the two-sided nature of UC&C, which helps improve productivity but also can introduce IT complexity. You should expect advice on how to handle this complexity in an efficient manner as well as 24x7 customer support and easy-to-access monitoring tools for checking how UC&C tools are performing in your work environment.

Because UC&C is a specialized and complex undertaking, a managed UC&C service can be especially practical for SMBs. The right UC&C solution will enable you to focus on your core business instead of getting involved in the intricacies of providing advanced communication tools and training to your employees. Ask your provider about its resources—does it have experts capable of designing, implementing, integrating, and managing entire UC&C infrastructures?

SUMMARY—SEIZING A BUSINESS EDGE WITH UC&C

People used to go to work. Today, work is an activity, not necessarily a place of business. A proliferation of sophisticated mobile devices has made this evolution possible for SMBs. But mobile devices alone aren't enough to support the communications needs of the expanded workplace. You need UC&C solutions that make the mobile devices practical by controlling costs, reducing complexity, improving customer service, and removing roadblocks to effective communication.

Integrating UC&C tools into your communications infrastructure, enables your business to be more competitive, productive, and efficient. UC&C managed services let you get back to running your own business rather than managing communication devices for your employees. And using UC&C cloud services frees your IT staff for other projects and gives you the agility to respond quickly to changing market conditions.

Ultimately, UC&C sharpens your edge by refining communication at all levels of your business. Customer satisfaction increases, business opportunities surface, and better decision-making prevails when you glean peak performance from your communications tools. UC&C does more than pay for itself; it helps pave the way to increased productivity and robust business growth.

GETTING STARTED

As a global leader in communications solutions, Verizon combines professional expertise and strategic alliances with one of the world's most secure and connected IP networks. We can look across all your communication tools and help you develop a strategy that helps control your costs, increase employee productivity, and make it easy for you to stay in touch with customers. With our UC&C solutions, you can do more, do it faster, and do it smarter.

For more information about our UC&C portfolio or to get started on the UC&C solution that's best for you, contact your account representative or visit us online at verizonbusiness.com/collaboration.

VERIZON UC&C SOLUTIONS

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Our UC&C professional services can help you build and implement a farsighted UC&C plan. We'll analyze your existing technologies, so you can improve employee productivity and control costs with streamlined processes and device combinations that avoid gaps and overlaps.

TELEPHONY SERVICES

We provide one of the most reliable networks in the industry along with a complete product portfolio, from attractively priced bundles for small businesses to advanced contact center services.

MOBILITY SERVICES

We enable mobile equipment to become business assets by helping you manage security and usage rules for mobile devices. To enhance responsiveness and keep roaming charges down, we can provide each of your employees with a single number which can be used to reach them on any of their devices.

VIDEO, WEB AND AUDIO CONFERENCING

Ironing out issues with employees, partners, and clients in different time zones can enhance your competitive edge while saving travel time and expense. We support agile decision-making by extending a comprehensive set of conferencing options to all your communication devices.

MANAGED SERVICES

We offer numerous programs for companies that need help managing and maintaining their UC&C environments. We can synchronize applications and updates across your organization, watch for potential vulnerabilities, and manage the key pieces of your UC&C infrastructure, including email and instant messaging applications, servers, and gateways to IP PBXs.

Verizon is a global leader in driving better business outcomes for mid-sized and large enterprises and government agencies. Verizon combines integrated communications and IT solutions, professional services expertise with high IQ global IP and mobility networks to enable businesses to securely access information, share content and communicate. Verizon is rapidly transforming to a cloud-based 'everything-as-a-service' delivery model that will put the power of enterprise-grade solutions within the reach of every business. verizonbusiness.com

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