POWERING THE WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE

Unified communications is a game-changer for the modern workforce

8x8 Communications Cloud

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Introduction

Companies everywhere need their workforce to perform smarter, faster and more efficiently. Global teams, deeply intertwined supply chains, rapidly evolving technology and increasing mobility have radically transformed the modern workplace and served up growing communication challenges. Today, most businesses are struggling to enable truly seamless communication and collaboration across platforms, systems and devices.

Enter unified communications (UC).

UC solutions provide a single, unified platform that integrates real-time communications services, such as phone calls, instant messaging and video conferencing, with non-real time communications services such as voicemail, email, SMS and fax. UC solutions are designed to eliminate the barriers that have historically separated voice calls, email, instant messaging and conferencing in all forms.

Some companies opt to deploy UC solutions on-premises, but the cloud-based model is gaining popularity. Cloud-based UC solutions are ideal for businesses that have limited IT staff, a distributed workforce and/or a desire for pay-as-you-go flexibility.

By enabling diverse communication media to be carried over a common IP network, UC solutions make it possible to manage a full suite of capabilities from a single point—and use them with common devices.

But what's the best way to maximize UC capabilities for your specific workplace? Spiceworks surveyed IT decision makers to get their insights on identifying and deploying collaboration and communication solutions across their organizations. This white paper explores the survey results, including key concerns, pain points, and roadmaps around driving UC strategies.

The Need for Easy-to-Use Solutions

Businesses everywhere are discovering the appeal of a communications solution that extends the functionality of their business phone system beyond a dial tone. In the new global workplace that's driven by collaboration, employees rely on a variety of solutions to communicate. Our survey respondents indicated they use multiple voice solutions in the workplace, including mobile phones (67%), on-premises PBX phone systems (65%) and hosted/Internet-based phone systems (50%).

In most organizations, users rely on these voice solutions and other channels—email, instant messaging and so on—to communicate with internal and external audiences. Traditionally, these various forms of communication work independently of each other, sometimes forcing employees to try multiple methods before successfully reaching someone.

An effective UC deployment brings together these various forms of communication. UC solutions harness the power of software to streamline communications and collaboration tasks with anytime, anywhere access, using tools that integrate seamlessly and are easy to use. Business users can quickly find the right person and easily communicate from within everyday applications and business processes.

In a robust UC environment, the workforce is empowered to accelerate business processes, work more efficiently and improve service delivery. Business-critical information reaches recipients faster and through the most preferred channel. UC can become a competitive advantage for businesses that need a single system to manage multiple tools and platforms, making their employees more productive.

Top 3 Voice Solutions in the Workplace

Empowering the Mobile Workforce

It's no secret that the mobile workforce is on the rise. The global mobile workforce is expected to climb to 1.75 billion workers by 2020, accounting for 42% of the total global workforce.[1] For today's employees, the idea of a workplace doesn't necessarily translate to an office space. It might be an airplane seat, a coffee shop, a hotel room or a trade show booth. The modern employee regularly collaborates with internal and external stakeholders via desktop phones, mobile devices, PCs, laptops, video conferencing tools and more.

As more employees leave the corporate office to manage their workload on the road, it's critical that their applications and devices provide access to all of the data, resources and communications features they would experience at their desk.

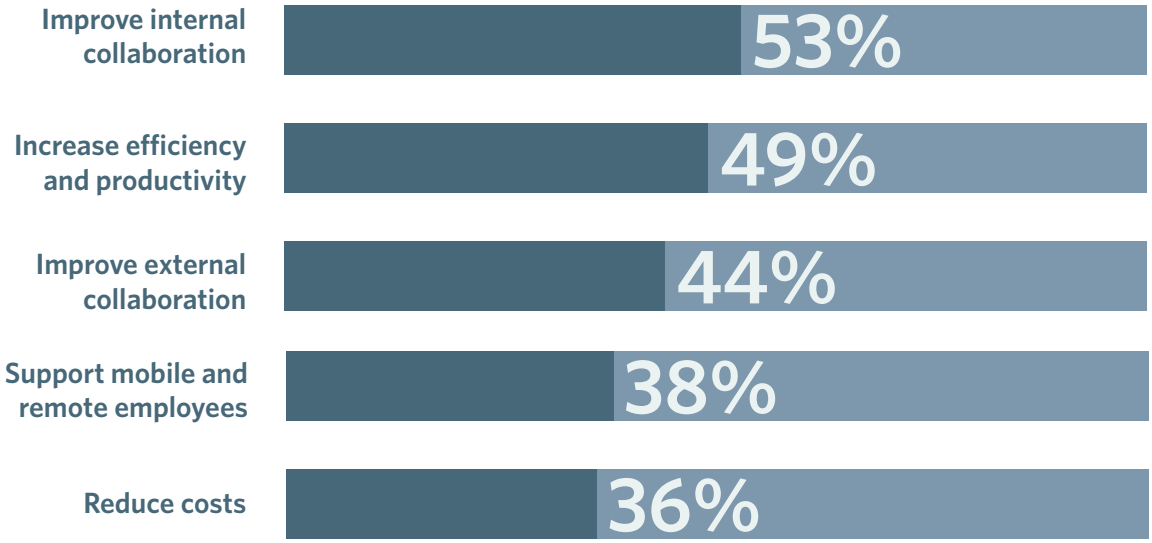
UC gives mobile workers the ability to make and answer their calls on the office phone system from virtually anywhere. To external callers, the mobile worker in a UC environment is just as easy to reach as someone by a desk phone in an office cubicle. In a UC setting, your employees can customize when, where and how they can be reached. For your customers and partners, UC makes it easier for them to interact and collaborate with your employees using their preferred communication methods.

In a technology-driven work environment, not just mobile workers, but everyone is stifled by inconveniences like file incompatibility or missing an important voicemail message. Business users that collaborate with dispersed teams often encounter hiccups in getting a meeting started because a remote team member can't seem to get the video conferencing program to work. In all instances, productivity takes a beating as the technical glitches add up.

With a UC infrastructure in place, your organization can help ensure hassle-free collaborative experiences. For instance, voice calls to desk phones can be routed to the user's cellphone when required. Or e-mail can be sent to the user's smartphone. In simple terms, UC helps businesses get more work done effectively with less resources and time.

Among the Spiceworks survey respondents, IT pros cited improved internal collaboration (53%), increased productivity (49%) and better external collaboration (44%) as their top three incentives for implementing a comprehensive UC solution.

Top Considerations for Communication Usage



Making Simplicity a Reality

In every technology-driven workplace, simplicity is key. Organizations constantly seek streamlined processes and improved efficiency across all departments. A comprehensive UC deployment is one of the most critical steps a company can take toward truly achieving fluid and seamless communication.

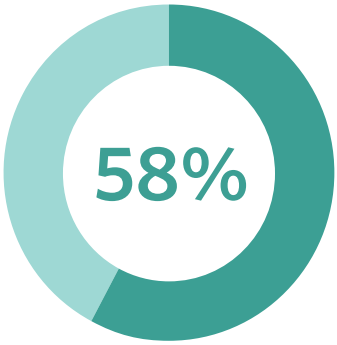
Simple and seamless UC experiences also stand out because they make life easier. This is particularly valuable to IT pros that often have their heads and hands in every aspect of the job: strategic, operational and administrative.

Most IT professionals find themselves tasked with handling multiple tasks around the clock, figuring out how to get things done with limited resources. A study found that IT directors and administrators have the most demanding jobs in the industry.[2] They need to be smart, flexible and always available—much like the technology they work to support.

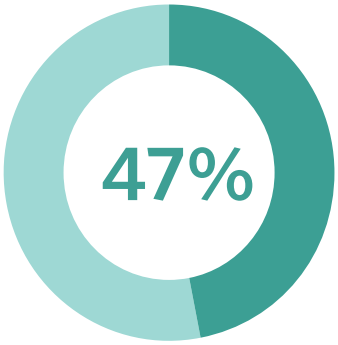
According to the Spiceworks survey, IT pros overwhelmingly seek simplicity in the various areas that they oversee and execute—deployment, management and troubleshooting. More than 1 in 4 of the surveyed IT pros expressed a strong interest in deploying an all-in-one hosted UC solution from a single vendor, keeping the company's productivity high, while lowering the total cost of ownership.

> "It seems like every other week someone in my company is attending a different online meeting and it requires a different piece of software that I've never heard of."
>
> — IT pro, describing challenges with communication solutions

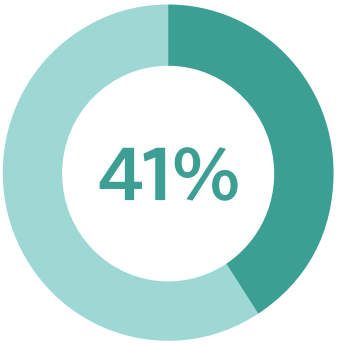
What IT Pros Want in a UC Solution



Simplified management



Simplified support and troubleshooting



Simplified setup

Looking for More

While IT pros everywhere seek a consistent, unified interface and communications experience across multiple devices, most of them are dissatisfied with their current infrastructure. Only 28% of the survey respondents indicated that they are completely or very satisfied with their organization's existing communications solutions.

Some of the key drivers of this growing dissatisfaction include the assorted learning curves associated with each solution, significant time required to train users, limited troubleshooting support and the complexity arising from using multiple platforms.

Top Communication/Collaboration Challenges

33%
Time required to train end-users

27%
Limited knowledge, support and troubleshooting

23%
Confusion with using multiple platforms

22%
Affordability of paying for multiple solutions

22%
Poor audio quality

In the always-on IT landscape, where businesses are tasked with ensuring continuous operations and data availability, minimizing the risk of downtime—and ensuring business continuity—are other key priorities for IT pros. For global corporations with data centers located thousands of miles apart, many IT pros also look for vendors that provide secure and reliable hosted communications.

What would make life dramatically easier for an IT pro is to have all of the key communications and collaboration services unified under one umbrella, delivered seamlessly and securely to all of the company's employees on whatever device they choose to use. This would result in tremendous productivity gains for the business user and in reduced deployment and management headaches for the IT pro.

While the cost of changing communications providers can be a deterrent, more than 1 in 4 of the survey respondents said they were likely to evaluate new UC solution providers for their organization in the next year. The top 5 features that IT pros say are criticalin their UC solutions are: extension dialing (69%), audio conferencing (64%), IP desk phones (62%), IT telephony (55%) and remote management (54%). Though less critical, call recording, instant messaging and video conferencing were also rated as "nice to have" features.

> "My users aren't technology experts. They are often confounded by relatively simple problems with online solutions."
>
> — IT pro, describing challenges with communications solutions

8x8: Trusted Everywhere

More and more businesses everywhere are turning to 8x8 communications services to connect, communicate, collaborate and compete. 8x8 delivers the world's first Communications Cloud that combines UC, team collaboration, contact center capabilities, and analytics in a single, open, real-time platform. 8x8 eliminates information silos to expose vital, real-time intelligence across all clouds, applications and devices to improve individual and team productivity, business performance and customer experience.

The 8x8 Communications Cloud helps teams collaborate effectively, providing them with a single interface for all of their communications needs—meetings, faxes, phone calls, chat and customer interactions. With the 8x8 Communications Cloud, companies can benefit from award-winning business phone services, virtual meetings, video conferencing and all the key features their employees demand, like presence awareness, mobile apps and visual voicemail. And with its built-in disaster recovery capabilities, 8x8 also helps ensure high availability, business continuity and service reliability at the heart of your business operations.

For IT pros looking to change their communications and collaboration provider—or to deploy a comprehensive UC environment—8x8 hosts and maintains all the communications services it provides, slashing maintenance costs to the bone and reducing IT administration hassles.

The 8x8 Communications Cloud delivers unmatched value for companies around the world by reducing complexity and cost, improving individual and team productivity and performance, and enhancing overall customer experience.

With 8x8, all your communications capabilities are simple to manage and fast to deploy. By migrating to 8x8 unified communications, IT pros can focus their time and resources on their core business.

8x8 knows that every company wrestles with its unique set of challenges—from expanding its operations and going global to seeking better collaboration, greater reliability and more robust security. No matter what the concern, 8x8 has a UC solution that can rise to meet the challenge.

8x8 gets employees, customers and applications talking to make people more connected and productive, no matter where they are in the world.

To learn how 8x8 can empower your business with a game-changing UC solution, visit www.8x8.com.

About the Survey

8x8 commissioned Spiceworks to conduct a survey in February 2017. The survey addressed IT decision-makers in the US to uncover insights and understand the decision-making process around communication and collaboration solutions for their organizations. Results of the survey included responses from 175 participants from IT departments across industries including manufacturing, non profits, healthcare, government, retail, construction, financial services and education.

SOURCES:

[1] Strategy Analytics, *Global Mobile Workforce Forecast 2015-2020*, 2015.
[2] Emerson Network Power, *Most Always-On IT Jobs Survey*, 2012.

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