

Welcome to the
World of UCaaS



Communication is vital to any business. Without it, information, ideas and workflows can't be shared from person to person or more broadly across a business. Without communication, there is no direction, no leadership.

People rely on different communication methods to accomplish their goals. Common problems in business communication include: fewer communications options than are available to retail consumers, a lack of "trackability" of communications, and the lack of an integrated communications application or platform. The world is moving at a faster pace than ever before. As a result, business people expect access to suppliers, information and answers instantly. The best communications solution in this environment is one that integrates all forms of digital communication, so that one can choose how best to communicate, in that moment, while retaining record of that communication to inform others in the organization. Unified Communications as a Service ('UCaaS') is the communications technology solution that delivers on all these needs. UCaaS is affordable and available via an operational expense model that includes management, maintenance and support from a proven provider. Key benefits of UCaaS that accrue to most cloud-based solutions are that it is a natural piece of any Disaster Recovery/Business Continuity Plan, and that it is natively future-proof. As the host platform is updated, so too are the platforms of customer organizations-with UCaaS, you're always on the most current version of the software.

What is UCaaS?

UCaaS is the future of business communications. Unified Communications as a Service is a cloud methodology that transforms the way organizations communicate and combines all methods of digital communication into a common platform. By combining communications services including Voice over IP ('VoIP'), video, chat, text messaging and collaboration tools with CRM and ERP applications, the chaos of the current communications environment becomes centralized, trackable, and supportive of business. By giving organizations the option to communicate through all channels, users experience unprecedented convenience and productivity. UCaaS providers are leveraging Application Programming Interfaces ('API') to further enhance the experience by integrating with other business applications. These can

be powerful tools for users to communicate professionally using the same methods they might personally. When convenience is combined with cost savings, built-in disaster recovery/business continuity and central management, from anywhere at any time, in one communications platform, the value of UCaaS to business is clear.

UCaaS Broken down

Voice

Whether in person or via a telephone call, voice is the base unit of communication, and the core of UCaaS platforms. UCaaS is not about trying to displace voice communications, but instead combining it with other, modern forms of communication into a single platform. In a traditional business environment, an employee is given a work space and a handset. At the end of the day, the employee goes home - if any business communications were to take place after hours it would be done from a different line presence (home phone, mobile phone, etc.). Gone are those days. Now, an end user that wants to stay connected and have a business presence (meaning display their work caller ID information and receive calls seamlessly from their work number on any device) at anytime from anywhere, can easily do just that. Most UCaaS providers support a mobile application for smartphones that allows users an integrated experience with their business phone system from anywhere. The need for separate mobile phones for business and personal use disappears as a employee's native business line can be made to interact seamlessly with their existing personal smartphone, while maintaining proper separation of services and security. By opening the application, you can find a directory of contacts, business and personal, and a dialer that allows for calls to be made while out-pulsing the business line's caller ID information, masking the private cell phone number. When the recipient of the phone call receives the call, they are presented with the business' caller ID information. Smartphone applications extend well beyond these features, as described in detail below. From an organization's perspective the potential cost savings from moving an on-premise PBX system to the cloud can be significant, and even more so if the organization is moving to a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) model for its smartphone users. Moving to the cloud requires little to no upfront investment in hardware,

typically, the only hardware required would be desktop handsets. Other costs are absorbed into a fixed monthly price including usage fees (local and long distance), maintenance, support and upgrades.

Video

Video is perhaps the most personal method of electronic communication. Consumers have become accustomed to video calling in their personal lives; applications such as Skype and Facetime have been around for quite a while, keeping families and friends close, no matter the circumstances. The consumer world typically adopts these innovations well before the business world, but the business world has a way of catching up and making practical use of these functionalities. Business is as much about relationships as it is about almost anything else. Video fosters those relationships in a way that voice calls, text and email cannot. When working collaboratively on a project, conducting negotiations or working through business decisions, being able to see the person you are speaking to adds depth to the experience and the relationship. In the past this would require travel, coordination of schedule and significant costs. Now, in the same way you make a phone call, you can make a video call and be connected to a single party or multiple parties instantly. The costs saved from unnecessary travel expense can be reinvested into your business leading to future growth. This is especially important for offices with higher numbers of remote workers- video adds a feeling of community to the employment experience that isn't available via other communications methods.

Chat

Business chat features enable an end user to instant message ('IM') on a one-to-one or even a one-to-many basis in a group chat scenario. IM is rampant most all organizations... just not necessarily as a function of the actual business operation. Businesses are finding that many employees prefer IM to other methods of communication where time is of the essence- for a single question, it is hard to beat the response time of "instant" messaging. It is a preferred communication method of the Millennial demographic, and is urgent, without being invasive. Users find it particularly helpful when

one or both parties are also already on a phone call, and need a piece of information quickly (often to answer a question). UCaaS provides IM options both from a computer screen and from a mobile application. If the conversation evolves to where speaking would be most effective, then the user can press a button within the chat window and be connected via a phone call or even a video call. The user can choose the communication medium that is best at that given moment. The ability to quickly drag and drop files or images through a chat window also adds efficiency. Instead of exiting a chat window to enter an email application or browser to share information, a user can do it all from within the chat window, enhancing productivity significantly over the course of a work day.

Text

Text messaging is another form of communication that became hugely popular in the consumer space before gaining traction with businesses. SMS or Simple Messaging Service is a way to send brief, text only, messages from mobile device to mobile device. MMS or Multimedia Messaging Service adds to SMS by giving a user the ability to also send images, video and audio files as well. According to eztexting.com 92% of the US population owns a mobile phone that can receive SMS text messages. Consumers are more likely to open their text messages before opening any other sort of communication, with recent studies showing that 90% of all text messages are read within 3 minutes of receipt. The business world has caught on to this phenomenon. Now an organization can text enable their business phone numbers to send and receive text messages (via the previously mentioned desktop or smartphone applications), potentially increasing responsiveness, communicating with many consumers via their most favored method, or at minimum ensuring that a message gets received. Text messaging right from the keyboard can increase productivity and yield greater results than often missed or ignored emails. Now, a business user can hand out a business card, with a single business telephone number and be available via text, desk phone, and mobile phone- while retaining a record of all contacts. Employees will never need to provide a personal cell phone number, which can be especially helpful to the organization after employee turnover.

Collaboration Tools

UCaaS is made up of several different communications components, including Collaboration Tools. Collaboration Tools are cloud-based programs that provide web conferencing services, often including multi-party video calls, screen sharing, file sharing, whiteboarding and webinar functions. Organizations leverage these capabilities for both internal and external use. These tools are especially helpful for collaboration with remote workers and project management with both internal teams and clients. The ability to provide a conference bridge for a conference call and seamlessly upgrade (real-time) to multi-party video sessions, desktop screenshare, whiteboard, and file sharing dramatically increases the professionalism and effectiveness of digital communication. A central platform that can manage and access all these features is not only convenient but can be a game-changer for organizations, especially those with broad geographic dispersion or high levels of customer contact. Most UCaaS providers offer Collaboration Tools as part of their suite of services and will demonstrate their capabilities upon request.

Integrations

UCaaS offers a lot of benefits that traditional communications systems simply can't. One of the most significant benefits is integration to other web, or on-premise, services using an API (Application Programming Interface). APIs allow different systems to communicate with each other. A prime example of how a UCaaS solution can utilize APIs to make an end user more productive is to integrate the phone system to a cloud-based CRM. For example, whenever the user receives a phone call, a screen pop can appear, opening the account record from the CRM software (Salesforce.com or Microsoft Dynamics, for example). The API accomplishes this by searching the CRM's database to see if the received caller-id information is already stored to a customer's record within the CRM. If it is, upon answering and/or ending the call, the customer's page within the CRM can be automatically displayed, and the call record can be automatically logged within the CRM. If the caller's caller-id information is in the database under multiple entries, the user can choose which party was calling from the list of entries, then have the same workflows take place. Even in the case where no entry was found, a new customer account record

can be opened from the CRM and have the caller's information pre-populated into the available fields. This is just one example of how UCaaS can integrate systems. New integrations are being developed continuously, and will lead to ever-closer function of communications and business software applications.

Conclusion

It's helpful to understand what UCaaS is and what it can do for organizations, both small and large. It's scalable and offers the same benefits to organizations of any size. The common benefits that are evident when analyzing a UCaaS solution are convenience, availability, increased productivity and security. From the ease of deployment and operation for an IT staff, to the operational expense model for finance departments, to the ease of use and increased productivity for staff, upgrading to UCaaS is sure to advance the goals of any organization.

Contact Access One today to learn more about our UCaaS services for small and medium-sized businesses.