

Unified Communications: An **All-In-One** Solution



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These solutions bring all your communication components together—and bring out the best in your company's performance potential.

What Exactly Is Unified Communications?

According to projections in [May 2018 market research by Reportlinker](#), the global unified communications market is on track to achieve a 16.8 percent CAGR through 2024, when its value is expected to reach \$143.49 billion. To understand what's driving that growth, you need to understand unified communications—not from a technology perspective, but in terms of how it can contribute to your company's growth.

In fact, one of its key advantages, particularly for small and midsize businesses, is that adoption doesn't require you to master another technology. Just the opposite: by implementing a unified communications solution, you reduce the need for internal telecom technology expertise. That frees those resources to contribute to top- and bottom-line activities rather than hardware and system maintenance and upgrades. You gain increased



communication, collaboration, and real-time decision-making capabilities without having to invest more time in and attention to your communications platform.

These advantages, until just a few years ago available only as a high-level tool for enterprise firms, are now accessible to companies of any size. Today's unified communications solutions enable the people at your company to use voice, video conferencing, instant messaging, desktop sharing, and more—simultaneously. The Reportlinker analysis, for example, points out that by integrating Business VoiceEdge with Microsoft Office 365, Comcast makes it possible for Office 365 users to initiate or receive calls from Outlook.



These integrations streamline communications, eliminate fumbling shifts from one platform or app to another, and can be used from any location, on-site or remote, via each user's choice of mobile device or desktop. Unified communications transforms those devices into a simulated communications platform, and harnessing the power of that platform, transforms companies by streamlining interactions and improving business efficiencies.

Within the industry, this is known as a shift to a contextual solution. "What we mean by that is, communication is now a part of not only telephone, but texts, instant messaging, and collaboration, and it is bringing it all interconnected with third-party applications that allow individuals to work in the systems they rely on most," says Eric Hyman, director of product marketing for Comcast Business. That means a mobile employee's cell phone doubles as a desktop. Remote employees in virtual offices remain integrated within the enterprise. And companies that rely on third-party applications—whether Salesforce.com, Google Chrome, or Office 365—can communicate within those applications. The result is an ascent from simple voice transmission vehicles to full-scale communications that offer total interoperability with the other components of your business life.

Shedding Light on the Cloud

These game-changing advances are being powered by the evolving capabilities in the cloud. If you still think of it chiefly as a platform for storing and transmitting data, you're behind the curve. The cloud has grown up into a place to store, share, and act on knowledge and business intelligence.

Traditionally, communication relied on having physical equipment on the premises.

"Now, all the intelligence of your communications platforms has moved to the cloud," says Clark Peterson, chairman of the [Cloud Communications Alliance](#).



"That means you no longer need to be fixed to a location. It enables all of your employees to be virtual and to be able to be on all kinds of different devices but still look like they're all under one umbrella for communication."

"You can have a voice over internet protocol (VoIP) handset, and all the intelligence comes from platforms in the cloud. You can even forego the handset on your desk, and have just your mobile phone but still have all the functionality of a traditional PBX."

But the functionality extends beyond those legacy parameters to include voice, video, document and desktop sharing, instant messaging, and other collaborative tools, all housed in the cloud. Each component is available to initiate new communication or combine within an existing exchange, and each user's profile in the cloud serves as "command central" over it all.

"If I go to my mobile app, I'm able to see all of my contacts, who's available, and choose how I want to communicate with them," Peterson says. It's possible to begin with a voice call and then switch seamlessly to videoconferencing, for example, or to introduce a collaborative document into a video conference call that's in progress.

"All of those are available through a single app on a mobile or landline

device or on a PC,” he says. “That means you no longer need to be fixed to a location. It enables all of your employees to be virtual and to be able to be on all kinds of different devices but still look like they’re all under one umbrella for communication.”

As this approach comes into more widespread use, we’ll see the birth of Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS). “The belief is that you’ll be communicating out of an existing environment that you’re already in—Salesforce, Office 365, a website, an app, a social media platform—and at an API level, you’ll communicate to the other person in a platform that they’re in,” Peterson says. “CPaaS will facilitate real-time, contextual information passed back and forth that enables a whole other level of decision making. It actually transfers information along with your communication to make it much more intelligent.”

The cloud base also gives unified communications an implementation

The Impact of Broadband Speed

“I don’t have the bandwidth” has become a catchphrase we use when we have too much on our plates and can’t take on any additional obligations.

But when you talk about literal bandwidth, the point isn’t whether you have too little time. It’s whether you’re losing too much time to slow downloads that bring your meetings or work to a halt while you wait for the file you need.

Does your company have the bandwidth it takes to run business in real time, all the time? This chart illustrates how much time—and, by extension, money—slow bandwidth can cost you.

File Size and Type	T1 Download Speed (1.5 Mbps)	DSL Download Speed (6 Mbps)	Comcast Current Top Speed (250 Mbps)	Comcast DOCSIS 3.1 Speed (1 Gbps)
4500 MB Video	6 hours	2 hours	4 minutes	34 seconds
1600 MB SD Video	2 hours	34 minutes	1 minute	12 seconds
500 MB SD Webinar Video	42 minutes	11 minutes	25 seconds	4 seconds
300 MB Map File	25 minutes	6 minutes	15 seconds	2 seconds
20 MB Photo Gallery	2 minutes	25 seconds	1 second	.15 second



advantage over traditional key systems or other phone hardware setups. It eliminates the need to physically set up a new line for each new employee or each new office location. At the same time, it relieves you of responsibility for maintaining and upgrading that equipment or managing the software on which it runs. All of that is taken care of for you as part of the provider's service package. And in a business environment in which mobility is increasingly an imperative, it frees your employees to

work remotely or travel where they're needed without falling off the communications grid.

The High Cost of Low Tech

Of course, your company already has access to and makes use of texting, instant messaging, document sharing, and virtual collaboration tools. How does the experience differ when you use those as standalone elements rather than within an integrated, unified framework?

Most of us have already experienced the disadvantages and frustrations that lack of unification can cause. There's the client call that drops from your cell phone as you try to switch to the new sales sheet you just received in an email. There's the web conference that loses audio when you upload the PowerPoint presentation you intended to share. There's the struggle to attach a spreadsheet to a text message. Unified communications platforms integrate all these functions to eliminate those disruptions and deliver a more seamless experience.

While voice is still the priority in business, unified communications gives

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the traditional call increased capabilities. And the gold standard in unified communications simplifies the process right from the time the call is initiated. “I can simply share a link and have my participants click that link to join a conference call,” Hyman says. “Or I can remove the friction around collaboration so that when I’m sharing a document, I don’t have to ask all ten participants on the call if they can see it, because the application lets me know.”

That simplification and reduced friction speeds adoption and use, he adds. With so many tools available today, it’s often necessary for a team newcomer to have to download a tool or learn to use it before collaboration can begin. A better, simpler user experience makes it easier for employees to participate fully in projects, for customers to connect with the right team members to get the information they need, and for vendors to provide information and support in sales and marketing. Every stakeholder

is empowered to access information more quickly, offer input with fewer delays and greater accuracy, and so get more on-target results.

The ease-of-use factor extends to education, as well. “Good unified communications service providers have built an intuitive web-based tool,” Hyman says. “And those who have done it extremely well have also provided a continuous loop back to education. I

Legacy Expenses

When assessing the cost of adopting unified communications, be sure to also take into account the cost of continuing to use your legacy system. For example:

- **Peak payouts.** With a legacy system, you must pay for the number of licenses and the cost of trunking necessary to meet your needs during the company’s peak season. Unified communication and collaboration platforms are, by contrast, services that can be as flexible as you and your business require, regardless of cyclicity.
- **The waiting game.** When new features or functionality become available for legacy systems, you need to have them installed. Your hardware may require re-configuration. Simply enabling the new feature has a cost measured in dollars and hours. Conversely, new features introduced by a cloud-based unified communications provider become available to end users immediately.



can watch a video online because I've forgotten how to do a certain thing on the portal. Or there's an open bridge to a webinar given by a customer care organization so that I'm not floundering as administrator in understanding how to manage my system."

That takes the mystery out of optimizing telecom operations. It also allows you, as the business owner, to redeploy the technology-focused members of your staff. You no longer need them to manage maintenance. Instead, they can focus on revenue-generating solutions, from optimizing your website to developing APIs to third-party applications that increase your operating efficiency.

Comcast Business VoiceEdge: UC in a Box

Cloud-based and mobile rather than built-on hardware located at your business, Comcast Business VoiceEdge™ routes communications.

It provides one-click integration with business productivity tools such as Microsoft Skype for Business, Office 365, Google Chrome, and Salesforce. Installation is completed easily via download for desktops or to mobile devices via Comcast's Google Play or App Store mobile apps that deliver full desktop capabilities on a cell phone.

Features include text with readable voicemail, email with interoperability with Office 365 or cell phone access to your telephone directory, and desktop call features delivered via a mobile app.

Unified Communications Components

A unified communications solution is not a single project. Rather, it's a collection of elements integrated under a single umbrella.

You're already familiar with some of those components, such as instant messaging, conferencing, desktop sharing, and audio, web, and video conferencing. But some of the added functionality may be outside your experience, such as:

- Mobile integration, which makes it possible for calls made to office lines to ring on a mobile device—a simplified and more streamlined take on call forwarding.

■ Readable voicemail, which allows you to listen silently to messages left in your voice-mail box—a means of protecting your privacy in public places and multitasking unobtrusively when audio playback is inadvisable.

■ Call control and multimodal communications, which enable you to begin a conversation via one method (for example, voice) and shift to another (such as by converting to a videoconference), without having to disconnect and restart the call.

■ Presence, a technology tool that allows you to control where you appear to be located. For example, clients or vendors may contact you at your office phone number and reach you on your mobile device without realizing that you're not at your desk.

■ Unified messaging, which integrates your voicemail, email, SMS, video, fax, and other messages within a single interface and allows you to access them from your preferred device.

■ Mobility and a virtual office environment, which are key in today's business environment. They not only allow your existing workforce to be productive from any location. They also free you to hire the best people no matter where they are.

Unified communications solutions also integrate a software component

Unified Communications Resources

These online tools and references can help you gain a better understanding of unified communications capabilities and learn to assess the solutions that are best for your company:

■ INFORMATION AGE

[The Next Era of Unified Communications](#)

■ PCMAG.COM

[Industry Insight: The Future of Unified Communications](#)

■ GIGAOM.COM

[Where We're Going with Unified Communications](#)

■ COMCAST BUSINESS

[What Exactly Is Unified Communications?](#)

[Business VoiceEdge™: Unified Communications Built for the Cloud](#)

[Business VoiceEdge™: Cloud-Hosted Phone System](#)

[Business VoiceEdge™: Features and Add-Ons](#)

designed to support business process integration targets.

Integrating and unifying all the components and formats of contemporary communications promotes collaboration, engagement, and decision-making capacity. And those, in turn, support your ability to lead a more intelligent and competitive business.

