

Unified Communications: Making **The Business Case**



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This investment upgrades your communications capacity. It also supports your strategy for managing long-term costs and growing your business.

Why switch to UC?

The past few years have seen an explosion in new platforms and apps touted as aids to communication. There are solutions for web and video conferencing, virtual meetings, project management, document sharing, group messaging, and more. Many of these solutions are available in free versions, which makes them easy to take out for a test drive and then swap out for another option that looks more intriguing.

The trouble is that in this case, “free” doesn’t mean no cost—and it certainly doesn’t mean no risk. We’ve all logged into web conferences that didn’t start on time because some participants hadn’t updated to the latest version of the software or because the moderator’s audio wasn’t working. Or we’ve scrambled to switch gears because we were waiting on Skype for



a client who assumed we'd connect on Zoom. Or we've seen business hours lost to employee debates about the relative merits of Zoho, Slack, and Airtable.

Before you know it, you need a dashboard to manage all your dashboards. And all that jockeying among platforms and apps costs time, efficiency, productivity, and therefore money. Once you factor in the time lost to lack of technical support and clashes in individual preferences, "free" can turn out to be more expensive than you realize—costly enough, in fact, to throw your company off its game at a time when market competition demands consistent high performance.



What you need is a way to integrate all the contemporary means of communication under one umbrella. You need voice communications, emails, texts, documents, audio and video files, conferencing, and all the rest to function seamlessly—and to do so equally well from desktop or mobile devices. You need full interoperability regardless

of the platforms, apps, and operating systems involved. You need the kind of holistic communication and collaboration system that keeps big businesses running at full speed.

The good news is that those systems are no longer configured exclusively for big business implementation. Cloud-based unified communications solutions have brought the full range of these capabilities and the full impact of their benefits to small and midsize companies. In fact, they're ideally suited to working in that environment because they actually reduce your need to either maintain internal telecom specialists or outsource your technology support. Your hardware and system maintenance and upgrades are included in the Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) package.

Taking a Deep Dive into UC Benefits



You've probably already heard how unified communications solutions can streamline communications and collaboration, support real-time decision-making, boost productivity, and enable true mobility in your workplace. But what does that mean in real terms? What outcomes can you expect when you make this investment?

One advantage that you'll see immediately is the way it plays to each employee's, customer's, and vendor's preferences without asking anyone else

to change their style. The industry refers to this as a contextual solution, which means it treats each component of communication—voice, email, instant messaging, and so forth—as part of a whole.

That means it puts an end to the phrase “let me call you back from my cell” because if the caller dials a landline and the recipient prefers mobile, the call goes straight to that device. If a vendor or customer wants to leave a voicemail but you'd rather see the message in text format, that conversion happens automatically—and you can send a text reply that your caller receives as a voice communication.

“You don't even have to know what I'm using, nor I what you're using,” says Chris Ross, executive director of UCaaS at Comcast Business Services “We're all dialing in or logging on from wherever or however we choose.” Because each individual can work in the most comfortable and familiar manner, the entire team can function more smoothly, productively, and profitably.

Comcast Business VoiceEdge Benefits

As a Business VoiceEdge customer, you benefit not only from unified communications capabilities, but also from having access to a [full complement of support resources](#), including:

- Interactive learning sessions
- Self-help videos
- User group community forum
- Problem-solving and troubleshooting tools
- Quick reference guides
- End user guides
- Technical administrator guides
- Companion app
- 24/7 toll-free, customer-care line

There's also the matter of mobility. Often, that's presented in terms of the ability to work from home or on the road or the freedom to hire remote workers when you need talent that isn't available locally. But Ross points out that this solution frees you from mobility constraints you may feel within your own workplace. Let's say you get a call from a vendor, and you need to run the information you're receiving by your finance department, check in with inventory, and review a couple of spreadsheets. With unified communications, you're empowered to do all that simultaneously from a single device.

"Another cool thing about unified communications in general is, it represents aggressive growth," he adds. "The number of communications possibilities is exponential, and this solution is designed to scale as new communications capabilities emerge. It gives you the ability to continually tune your business."



UC Costs

When you're assessing the total impact of an investment in unified communications, you need to consider the one-time, up-front costs versus the savings you can realize over time. The initial expense depends on a variety of factors, including the size of your business, your preference for cloud versus on-premise options, potential subscription costs, and which components and add-on services you choose in order to optimize the impact on your business.

Your business plans may also influence the cost of adopting unified communications versus maintaining your existing system. For

example, if you're using a PBX system now and contemplating regional expansion, local growth, or even just a move to new office space, you're already looking at upcoming installation expenses. How do those compare with the investment needed to upgrade to unified communications?



"In the past, 75-80 percent of mid-market customers had PBXs," says Eric Hyman, director of product marketing for Comcast Business. "There was a capital expense associated with that. Sometimes you paid for it outright.

Sometimes you financed it. Either way, you amortized that piece of hardware over eight years. You weren't necessarily growing or changing with the times."

And while upkeep on the old systems generally meant you needed to pay for an annual maintenance contract, cloud providers assume that responsibility and cost in the new solutions. "They need to maintain the cloud," Hyman says. "To stay competitive, service providers are constantly enhancing features and moving to an environment where you get collaboration, mobility, and other features. With UCaaS, you're relying on the cloud service provider to build that interoperability."

Building a UCaaS Budget

Any time you're budgeting for a new investment, you need to consider its full impact in terms of known expenses and prospective positive effect on revenue and cash flow. That's especially true this year in light of the 2018 tax reform.

Jared Siegel, a partner at Delap, says that as you review UC budget projections, questions to ask your accountant include:

- Are there tax advantages related to this investment?
- Are there aspects that are eligible for different tax treatment or bonus depreciation that would accelerate the return on the investment outlays?
- What are potential cash flow changes related to the tax reform act, and can those savings be redeployed as an investment in the business's communication infrastructure?

"The tax change has created additional cash flow for many businesses, which creates budget for investment," Siegel says. "So, getting clarity around 2018 tax projections will help you better understand your cash flow and cash available for investment."

Cost and Productivity Metrics

When you transition to UCaaS, you're relieving your staff of responsibility for running and handling day-to-day management of applications, systems, and upgrades. A third party that specializes in operation and management of your system takes over and ensures that you can focus on your business without being distracted by that system upkeep. That alone sets the stage for running the business more efficiently and pursuing revenue opportunities more effectively.

Efficiency gets an additional boost from having all your team members on the same communications page. Right now, your employees are probably relying on a patchwork quilt of standalone solutions such as Slack, Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and other free apps and platforms that get only part of the job done. With a unified communications solution, they don't look for ad hoc ways to fill holes in your communication capabilities—because there are no holes. And when employees join the company or relocate within it, they plug into the system instantly and completely, so there's no downtime while you wait for them to be onboarded.

All of this should generate a positive impact on both cost management and productivity. The March 2018 IHS Markit Unified Communications Strategies North American Enterprise Survey found that following adoption of unified communications:

- 71 percent of businesses report accelerated response time.
- 67 percent report improved employee productivity.
- 60 percent succeed in reducing operational costs.
- 59 percent report an advantage realized through increased employee flexibility.

He adds that the potential for long-term savings that recoup the initial investment reflects the practicality of what a unified communications solution replaces and what tasks it takes off your plate permanently. For example, you no longer have to manage or maintain the PBX or the server. You no longer need the space to house them. Your electricity bill should be reduced. And while the staffing element is more difficult to quantify, you may find that being on the cutting edge of communication and collaboration helps you to attract and retain forward-thinking employees.

"We're not adding any more to people's bills by giving them this," Ross says. "They're paying for a service already. They're getting the support infrastructure. They're getting the back end that's already there. We're just enabling these features on top of it for no additional cost. So, you're getting a much greater quality."

Potential Savings and Revenue Gains

As a business owner, you're always monitoring and looking for ways to optimize cash flow. A subscription model that covers third-party maintenance of your hardware and software can generate a long-term reduction in monthly expenses and the capital expenditures required to maintain your system. That frees cash flow for reinvestment in your core business.

It can also free employees who are now engaged in system maintenance to be redeployed to activities that support increased revenue growth. Communications can be converted so that instead of being a distraction from your core business, it becomes an upkeep-free resource for supporting you and your team in your key areas of focus.

You may find it helpful to assess the ROI on a unified communications investment by using break-even analysis or reimagining what an internal rate of return would be. "What do I have to spend? What's the up-front cost to acquire an annual recurring savings? That would be reimagining an internal rate of return," says Jared Siegel, a partner at Delap.

Unified Communications Business Resources

What does a shift to unified communications involve? These online tools and references can help you map out your company's transition to the best solutions for your business.

- UC Today offers this guidance on [Developing an Enterprise Unified Communications Strategy](#).
- In this white paper, technology consultant TFE reviews [The Surprise Benefits of Unified Communications in Your Business](#).
- Here, communication and technology consulting firm IPRO reviews [The Top 3 Benefits of Implementing Unified Communications in Your Organization](#).
- Comcast Business VoiceEdge can be tailored to deliver [industry-specific solutions](#). Check here for information geared to the needs of businesses in financial services, health care, hospitality, manufacturing, IT services, and retail.

If-then scenarios can also be useful analytical tools. What happens if you expand into a new territory or vertical market? What's the impact if you approve employees' requests to be allowed to telecommute half-time? "As a business explores its strategic plan, where it is now and where it wants to be, often getting clarity on how to do it requires reimagining technology and communications platforms," Siegel says. "As business becomes more virtual, the business technology and communications infrastructures need to reflect that."

Think, too, about how a communication upgrade might allow your business model to evolve and what impact that might have on the company's ability to pursue emerging opportunities or access more lucrative markets. "When we're able to attract new client opportunities from larger, more expensive markets, the cost of conducting business is less, and our ability to preserve margins is significantly better," Siegel says. "Technology and communication platforms that are virtual allow you to access markets that would otherwise be difficult and inefficient to access."



Once you've completed your calculations, you should have a sense of the extent to which this investment creates new efficiencies and avenues for expense reduction. If the investment provides a recurring annual benefit to the business, that should materialize eventually on the bottom line.

A well-deployed unified communications solution supports your ability to pursue these opportunities successfully. In that respect, it modernizes your business, strengthens your competitiveness, and helps you to build a company with optimal scalability, efficiency, productivity, and capacity to sustain performance and profitability.