calltower

A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY

eBook

THE UC JOURNEY

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of Unified Communications (UC) continues to accelerate as businesses of all sizes and in all industries recognize the value of bringing together VoIP telephony, instant messaging, video conferencing, mobility, presence, and collaboration capabilities into a seamless business environment.

However, creating a UC strategy and turning it into an actionable plan can be a daunting challenge. You are likely to encounter questions surrounding features deployment options, and how to address the many business decisions that will impact the workforce. Having a comprehensive strategy is a portion of the formula for a successful UC journey. But sometimes the greatest challenge is taking the first step.

UC JOURNEY PHASES

PHASE 1

DISCOVERY

PHASE 2

REQUIREMENTS

PHASE 3

DECISION

PHASE 4

IMPLEMENTATION

PHASE 5

ADOPTION

Having a comprehensive strategy is a portion of the formula for a successful UC journey. But sometimes the greatest challenge is taking the first step.

TAKE THE FIRST STEP

DISCOVERY

Phase 1

IT and Business leaders should be united and working in a close, collaborative environment during the UC Journey discovery phase. This team will have to navigate a considerable number of complimentary and competing requirements, features, and deployment options to arrive at the ideal UC solution for the users. We have compiled a strategy for navigating the Discovery process.

YOUR PEOPLE

Your workforce is your number one asset. Securing business communication technologies that encourage pro-active collaboration is a competitive necessity. Let's take a thorough look at what your workforce looks like.

1 WHERE IS YOUR WORKFORCE LOCATED?

With the evolution of collaboration and unified communications, organizations are rapidly changing to meet the demands of a larger business footprint. While some company's are located in one facility, others have international, regional, remote and home offices, as well as field employees; all with unique communication needs. When considering all of the factors surrounding where your people are located, you also need to align with business growth objectives.

2 WHAT ARE YOUR WORKFORCE COMMUNICATION NEEDS?

Your business has its own DNA, its own unique culture, and communications are a core element your business personality. The circumstances that surround your workforce communication needs are a direct reflection of what your business does. Keep in mind that different operating teams within your organization may require diverse and unified business communication tools. It is important to thoroughly investigate the communication needs of your organization. A unified communications program through a hosted provider can customize the needs of your growing and diverse workforce; while maintaining a solid collaborative solution that flows from department to department.

YOUR PROCESS

The investigation of your current communication process will produce a diagnosis for what is truly required to successfully take your business to the next level.

1 WHAT TOOLS ARE BEING USED TODAY?

As your business continues to grow, some of the communication tools being used today may, or may not, be the right choice for tomorrow. A hosted provider can guide you through cost savings, by sustaining some portions of your current technology as you drive your business toward a unified communications solution. As you look at tools to integrate into your communications solution, you will want to examine add-on features that accelerate growth and productivity. A hosted provider can look at your overall communications infrastructure and provide guidance on quality call center, call recording and CRM integration.

2 TAKING YOUR IT DEPARTMENT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

The priority to move past a costly outdated legacy communications platform is urgent due to resources, cost factors, competitive alignment, collaborative access and enabling teams to more efficiently work toward company goals. A hosted UC provider that delivers full support will save your IT Team valuable time and resources. A UC solution empowers IT departments to pro-actively work toward company goals rather than troubleshooting software updates and taking care of outdated devices. When looking at solutions you will want to engage in conversations about device compliance, device support, as well as overall support.

3 WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT NETWORK CAPABILITIES?

After a comprehensive investigation of what is needed for your business to move to a UC solution, it's time to examine your bandwidth. Ground work begins at understanding the capabilities of your current network. It is possible that you will need to upgrade your current capabilities to increase bandwidth.

FUTURE PROOFING

1 LEVERAGING THE UC CLOUD FOR FUTURE GROWTH

Moving to the UC cloud prepares your organization to be more efficient and competitive. You are future proofing your business in regards to mobility, bring your own device and workforce distribution. Your UC solution will deliver the same capabilities to mobile and remote employees that it does to teams that work within your buildings.

2 THE TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP (TCO)

It all boils down to the bottom line. The TCO is highly dependent on the type of solution your organization requires. There is a significant cost range differences between a cloud-native solution and an on-premise solution. There are also considerations that allow for a hybrid solution of cloud and on-premise.

DISCOVERY PHASE GUIDES

Step by Step Benefits of Moving to the Cloud Guide

VIEW GUIDE

PBX Replacement Guide

VIEW GUIDE

REQUIREMENTS

Phase 2

We have composed a system for navigating through the UC requirements and criteria for your business beginning with establishing your organizational UC goals, assessing your technical preparedness, evaluating deployment options, and quantifying the financial impact of your options.

1 UC GOALS WHAT ARE THE DESIRED OUTCOMES?

If you are trying to assess your system's and workplace readiness for a Unified Communication solution, there are a number of variables for you to consider. Establishing goals for what you want the solution to accomplish for your company will help you navigate these issues effectively. UC solution goals are focused around employee impact, IT resource impact, technology change adoption rate and hard dollar return on investment. Build buffers into all phases of your UC journey to account for the many delays you will encounter. Take into consideration the level of technology change that you are evaluating for your employees when forecasting adoption percentages and timespans.

2 WHAT SHOULD UC GOALS LOOK LIKE?

ADOPTION RATE BY UC APPLICATION

Deployment criteria identified with adoption begin with a thoughtful strategy to help eliminate adoption obstacles. Primary tools of communication should be adopted first, whether it be phone, email, or chat, followed by audio, web and video conferencing. Customer integrations such as contact center, CRM and call recording should be included in the final phase.

PRODUCTIVITY

Impact on workforce efficiency is tied to Adoption of new UC application by teams and departments. The measurable will include increased communication and collaboration between teams and departments.

IMPACT ON IT RESOURCES

A hosted provider will manage implementation, training, maintenance and support services with the guidance of IT teams. IT teams will be restructured as they move from software maintenance and troubleshooting issues to providing services that are geared toward company goals.

FINANCIAL MODEL & ROI

Estimates on productivity impact and IT resources with purchase/lease SaaS spend versus the current spend will provide quantifiable estimates which will establish an increase in revenue with a decrease in operational costs.

3 TECHNICALLY PREPARED

Successful deployment of a UC solution depends on careful evaluation of your technical preparedness. The infrastructure must be capable of delivering sufficient data and prioritizing data with the recognition that data consumption per user may significantly increase with the deployment of video calls and application sharing.

Before you embark on finding an appropriate UC solution, determine your core business and infrastructure needs. Focus on enhancing the productivity of individuals by implementing new UC capabilities will deliver a comprehensive business process optimization goal.

COMPLEXITY.

This covers questions such as how many users you are supporting, number of locations, domestic only versus international and whether functions like instant messaging will be separately deployed or integrated with IP telephony and other core functions. Another key component is are you upgrading existing equipment, considering a hybrid solution, or full replacement of system(s) in place today.

SCALABILITY.

Once your system is up and running, how much do you expect it to grow? What regions do you expect the highest level of growth and by when? How quickly do you need to scale up and do you ever need to scale down? Answers to these questions will begin to narrow down your solution focus.

ARCHITECTURE.

These issues will govern how effectively your network's components can be integrated and configured, and whether you will be starting fresh or integrating an existing system.

SECURITY AND COMPLIANCE.

Both on premise and hosted cloud UC models provide advanced security options. Consider the current and future security and compliance requirements. This may involve speaking with other business units to look into the future to see if new industries are being considered by sales such as state or federal government or new service offerings being considered that would require a higher level of security and additional compliance certifications.

DEVICE, MOBILITY AND EMERGING CONSUMER PLATFORM SUPPORT.

Consumer technology does not stand still, so your UC solution needs the ability to quickly embrace new devices and operating systems no matter what the future holds.

4 ON-PREMISE VS CLOUD SOLUTIONS

While the costs are much higher for on-premise systems, knowing that business infrastructure resides and is managed in-house may strategically align with company goals. However, the key drivers for on-premise are not typically financially driven. Environments that require a high-level of customization and integration with internal, proprietary systems are often a better fit for on-premise. Highly regulated industries may require specific security measures that are only available with a customer owned and operated system.

There are a multitude of drivers for a hosted/cloud solution. CAPEX savings are a highly publicized advantage of a hosted solution that is sold on a license or subscription basis. The host provides and maintains all hardware and software required for the UC solution and charges the customer a per license monthly fee. A cloud environment brings many benefits that allow you to achieve unprecedented business performance across the board if deployed for the proper reasons.

5 QUANTIFYING UC

To quantify a unified communications solution it must add value and strategic differentiation to your business. An organization should see an immediate reduction in telecommunications spend and increased workforce efficiency with the adoption of a UC solution. The life expectancy of technology is rapidly changing and the benefits of owning communications technologies versus subscribing to a solution are swinging toward subscription cloud-based model. A hosted solution enables a company to leverage ever changing technology, from anywhere at anytime, without the hassle of providing internal updates or troubleshooting IT issues. Hosted models often empower business with streamlined communication and collaboration while saving cost.

REQUIREMENTS PHASE GUIDES

3 Considerations When Buying UC Products

VIEW GUIDE

On Premise vs Cloud Hosted UC Solution Comparison Guide

VIEW GUIDE

ROI CALCULATOR

DECISION

Phase 3

The importance of properly vetting vendors is critical. The vendor you choose will become a long-term business partner, adviser and advocate.

CUSTOMIZATIONS

The customizations you choose to implement now and in the future are important to ensuring company goals are met. Your vendor should be able to accommodate short-term customization goals as well as pro-actively address long-term needs.

MOBILITY

Mobility is key in today's business communications. With more professionals choosing a mobile phone as their primary business communication device. Applications need to be user friendly and easily accessible.

SCALABLE

A true cloud communications solution will grow seamlessly with your business. Adding a new user or a location should be as simple as adding an additional licensing and provisioning.

DEPLOYMENT OPTIONS

This is an extremely important as it could impact your organization, and your bottom line, significantly. As you dive into looking at vendors, take a close look at the deployment success track record for your model. Vendors will be able to provide detailed information regarding deployments for your reference.

SOLUTION ARCHITECTURE

The ability to support different deployment options and/or a hybrid is critical to the initial and/or future implementation phases, the vendor will need to demonstrate success supporting the various environments. In addition, ensure the vendor has additional UC applications and capabilities, and can deliver a seamless user experience that will work across all environments.

VALUE PROPOSITION

It is important to evaluate a vendor's total solution, associated services and partnerships to determine the right choice for your organization. Ultimately, the true test of UC's value proposition is to measure its effect on how it improves the business processes.

FEATURES AND APPLICATIONS

A top priority in selecting a UC vendor will be functionality. Your choice provider should offer a flexible model that is easy to add features, applications and new users. Ensure that the vendor can deliver an enterprise-grade telephony experience and security for cloud applications and add on features like contact center and CRM integration.

USER EXPERIENCE

UC will transform the way your workforce communicates and collaborates. Adoption of the new solutions are essential to hitting business productivity goals. The desktop and mobile tools must be intuitive and easy to use so adoption can ensue quickly.

SECURITY

Vendors offer many different levels of UC security solutions. To properly secure network and devices some vendors provide their own others use third party resources. It is important to ask the vendor if the network that the hardware and software lives on secure.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Emergency services are often an oversight until an emergency situation. Ensuring your vendor provides Local, long distance, on-net and toll-free, directory assistance, caller ID, directory listing and 911/E911 service simply ensures your workforce is safe.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY

If these headlines have taught organizations anything, it is the importance of having a solid business continuity plan in place. Your business communications platform is the lifeline of the organization, and you can't take the risk of downtime. Vendors should have a solid plan that outlines how communication is accessible in the event of an emergency or disaster.

INTERNATIONAL

If you are expanding your business across the globe, it's important that you look for a solution that provides a localized calling experience for users located outside of the U.S. Verifying this with your vendors is key.

DECISION PHASE GUIDES

Microsoft, Cisco and Broadsoft UC Comparison Guide

VIEW GUIDE

13 Key Criteria for Vendor Selection Guide

VIEW GUIDE

Microsoft Voice Solutions eBook

VIEW GUIDE

IMPLEMENTATION

Phase 4

As you begin any implementation process it is essential to have a solid implementation plan with your hosted provider. Adding IP voice to your UCaaS solution has a different technology focus. Organizations can face any number of complications during the implementation process. Embarking in a UC implementation without a process in place is too risky. We have identified 9 vital criteria to ensure you have a successful UCaaS implementation.

1 EXPERIENCED IMPLEMENTATION EXPERTS

There are a lot of moving pieces when it comes to implementing a robust unified communications solution. Your business requirements are unique and your hosted provider needs to have the experience to properly guide your charge into a successful UC implementation.

2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Your chosen hosted solution provider should have a designated Implementation team led by a project manager who is responsible for your entire implementation project as well as on-boarding. The project manager will establish clear expectations, ensure success through execution and be in charge of the customer relationship and experience. The project manager will also coordinate all activity and efforts of the Implementation Team and any additional resources.

The project manager should be held accountable and ensure continued momentum with any additional resources needed to complete your successful UCaaS implementation.

3 BRIEFING

Implementation preparation starts with discovery. The hosted provider should work with your team to obtain a thorough study of your current environment. During the briefing, a business use will be established for your new solution, and features and functionality will be investigated in your current environment. Customer requirements and expectations will be outlined and the overall project will have a general idea of when your implementation should be complete.

4 PROJECT PLAN

A working implementation plan should contain the complete strategy framework for the project phases, which should include, preparation, planning, refining design, implement, operate and optimize. The framework will establish clarity and expectations for the implementation project and process. The product definition, should be crafted by the hosted provider to be used as a reference point throughout the life of the project. It will provide detailed clarity for the overall purpose of the project by defining objectives, success criteria, major milestones, deliverables and project conditions (Assumptions, Issues, Risks, Constraints).

The Project definition will vary by product, solution, and your unique business environment and including specific needs.

5 KICK-OFF CALL AND SCOPING

The kick-off call establishes the handoff between the sales team to the implementation team. The hosted provider sales team and solution engineers make introductions to the implementation team.
The implementation team will identify and define roles on their team. Your team will identify team members that will work with the implementation team will be established as primary contacts for keeping the project plan on target. The key team members from your team will be principal technical and provision associates, as well as a financial contact.

The implementation team will review the current environment, share the implementation vision and clarity objectives. An in-depth review of the scope of project document will be appraised. The team will also review the project plan, timeline and milestones, dependencies and resources needed. During this call, customer requirements will be established, as well as a schedule and meeting guideline. Training needs and various options will be discussed and determined. The implementations manager will provide you with escalation options if you do not feel that your project is on target.

6 REFINE AND DESIGN

As the project initiates, the weekly meetings will review updates, verify any changes, and make requests identified during the kick off call. During these meetings, the project plan will be updated to reflect any and all progress and additional requirements.

7 IMPLEMENT

During the next phase of the implementation, your project will continue to be monitored and tracked and the project plan will be updated. The weekly calls will ensue that all parties are confident with the direction of the implementation. The solution will be deployed according to the company plan, configured to meet the needs of your company and the procurement of any hardware required will be setup. A test group at your business will be granted access of the enabled solution and training will begin. The test group will evaluate the solution.

8 GO-LIVE

Once the solutions have been tested and evaluated for functionality, final training and rollout will be initiated. Performance of the solution and any enhancements will be closely monitored and fine tuning will be made.

9 MIGRATION TO SUPPORT

The transition from the Implementation team to the Support team is done in a similar manner as the transition from Sales to Implementation. The onset of the meeting will begin with a comprehensive question and answer session. The implementation Manager will review the project, the customer will provide feedback to ensure that all parties feel that expectations were met and that implementation is a success.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE GUIDES

Implementation Project Plan Infographic Video

WATCH VIDEO

7 UCaaS Integrations for Success

VIEW GUIDE

ADOPTION

Phase 5

If you are looking to transition to a UCaaS system, you're going to want to effectively navigate the twists and turns on the road ahead. We've compiled a list of common pitfalls to avoid for organizations looking to make the switch:

1 ACCEPTING UNDERDEVELOPED AND UNGOVERNED SLAS

UCaaS will span across all operating functions of an organization and can involve multiple service provider affiliations. For these reasons, it's difficult to develop a comprehensive service-level agreement (SLA) for UC solutions. SLAs can also lack the governance to encourage adherence to agreed service levels and performance objectives. In order to actually receive the services agreed upon, you will need to guarantee your SLA covers all UCaaS functionality and services and ensure you have the power to enforce the SLA properly.

2 OVERESTIMATING EXISTING PLATFORMS AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Without significant network improvements, UC can lead to poor voice quality and network performance. Some organizations' infrastructures, especially those with legacy or non IP-PBX platforms, are not equipped to effectively deal with these voice and video applications. Additionally, adjusting these existing infrastructures to support UC may also impact data traffic, which may impede mission critical applications with longer downloads and slower response times. You will need to ensure that your infrastructure is capable and ready to handle the new stresses of a UC system.

Your existing support teams are likely unprepared for managing, troubleshooting and diagnosing varied issues with regards to emerging UC services. Troubleshooting alone involves a complex merger of vendor-derived, end-user, protocol- and packet-based data sources for real-time understanding and diagnosis of issues. Make sure your teams are comprehensively prepared for far-reaching and complex systems and technical issues before they are expected to provide support.

3 CHOOSING THE WRONG UC PROVIDER FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

Most providers (especially the larger multi-regional or global providers) tend to focus only on one or two categories of UC standards and do not consider all managed service options. UC providers struggle to serve all aspects of UCaaS equally and will focus on categories that have proved effective in their space. This lack of comprehensive focus is attributed to the fact that UCaaS' definition is often ambiguous and poorly represented in UC markets. There are no industry-wide standardized measurements for evaluating a UC offering's delivery and performance capabilities. As a consumer, you will need to identify which needs are most critical to your organization and find a UC provider that directly address all of your needs.

4 INEFFECTIVE TRAINING AND PRACTICE

Unified Communications consist of several major parts, and each of these parts require training and practice in your organization's environment. This starts with members of the IT department and Internal UC Administrators, who will start training on the overall solution, expectations of the solution and then the intricacies to manage the UC solution. End users may have different levels of training needs. If a UC solution includes integrations, like CRM, Contact Center or UC Recording, then each user will need to be trained on the UC solution as well as any other tools from the solution that they will utilize. Unfortunately, training for all these elements is usually conducted in one day (without workshops or follow-up) and this approach notably ineffective.

Effective training should separate the various elements so that users first understand the solution in its entirety and how it will improve communications and collaboration. Each user should be hands on, learning the ins and outs of their UC solution. It is also important to make information about the solution easily accessible. Access to quick start guides are essential. It is also important to provide follow-up training. Proper teaching leverages oral instruction, question and answer, practice and reinforcement. This is a critical component of a UC transition; if the initial user expectations are not met, the organization will not enjoy the expected ROI. When discussing your new system internally and during training, focus on those features that are most desired or needed by users, will generate the fastest adoption rate, and will deliver the greatest productivity improvements.

5 FAILING TO ASSIGN UC EVANGELISTS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

During and after UCaaS implementation, a number of evangelists should be selected and assigned within the organization. The evangelists should promote the new tools delivered by your new UCaaS solution. They would manage ongoing training as required by the various departments and embody your organization's UC vision with their promotion and use of the UC features and functions. The position is best served by a mid-level manager with the support of their entire team rather than a CEO or other executive.

Avoiding these pitfalls and following the recommended steps will help you get the most out of your new UC system. You'll be maximizing your ROI and increasing collaboration and effectiveness across your entire organization. UCaaS, properly utilized, is the future of communication technology and you need to utilize it to stay ahead of the curve.

ADOPTION PHASE GUIDES

5 Pitfalls of Adopting UCaaS
You'll want to Avoid!

VIEW GUIDE

CONCLUSION

Unified Communications adoption amongst organizations of all sizes, within all industries, continues to accelerate at an unprecedented rate. More and more organizations continue to recognize the impact and business value of bringing together VoIP (Voice over Internet protocol) telephony, instant messaging, video conferencing, mobility, presence, and collaboration capabilities into a seamless business environment.

The Journey is unique for every business; however, it does have common core, primary stages that are mutual regardless of size, locations, or workforce. Our goal at CallTower is to outline these commonalities in a method that supports business leaders when transitioning to a unified communications and collaboration solution. CallTower provides the service, manages the network upgrades and integrates the UC technology and applications into your business. With a robust global network offering redundant connections through leading providers, CallTower can connect to almost any place at any time.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CALLTOWER

VISIT OUR SITE

For more information, please contact us today at UCJourney@calltower.com