The 2022 Evolution of Unified Communications & Collaboration

Cloud Conventions eBook

© Copyright 2022 Convey Services LLC • All Rights Reserved

In this eBook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Overview
- A Shift in Collaboration
- Collaborators vs. Attendees
- How Things are Done
- The UCCaaS Tech Stack
- Video Collaboration Tools
- Digital Engagement Technology
- Takeaways

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carolyn Bradfield, CEO Convey Services directs the strategy for its three divisions, Cloud Conventions, Convey Channel and InterAct LifeLine. A veteran of the conferencing and collaboration industry, Carolyn has founded and run organizations that have transformed the way that business clients connect to their remote teams, manage clients, and use online tools to collaborate and connect virtually.

The Cloud Conventions division was formed two years ago to utilize the sophisticated content management system developed for Convey Channel and Convey Insurance. It was augmented to create a digital strategy for events, offer year-round engagement, and provide self-managed platforms for the small to medium sized business or customized, integrated platforms for the enterprise.

Overview

Today, Unified Communications is associated with the adoption of "**the Cloud**" making it possible for even the smallest business to have a service-based solution vs. a hardware system to manage communication in one or multiple locations. However, the desire to "unify" communications roots back to the 80's with the effort to make voice mail messages easier to retrieve and delivered without having to go to multiple systems to get them.

Over time, bandwidth increased, hardware and software evolved, and corporate communication shifted from asynchronous to real-time. The introduction of the smart phone and the proliferation of WiFi access increased synchronous communication options and the Cloud created a new category of service, Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS).

Although web conferencing had been around since the 90's, the need to communicate accelerated during the Pandemic and people jumped on Zoom, BlueJeans or Teams to talk about everyday business needs as internal teams and customers left their offices and re-established in a work from home world. Video and web conferencing became an essential component of any UCaaS offerings.

Is it Communication or Collaboration?
When people send emails, discuss product launches or plan a client presentation they are communicating. However, collaboration happens when people work interactively to achieve a common goal. Although UCaaS solutions have tools that facilitate communication, those tools may not necessarily promote collaboration.

What is UCaaS?
UCaaS is one centralized platform that has a set of essential business communications tools consisting of voice, email, video conferencing, chat or instant messages.

The Evolution to UCCaaS
Unified Communications & Collaboration as a Service (UCCaaS**)** takes the communication elements of UCaaS and adds tools for groups to work more closely together, share ideas, facilitate conversations and collaborate to reach a common goal. "Unified" expands beyond a single system to encompass an integrated tech stack that seamlessly connects integrating communication and collaboration tools together for a unified experience.

A Shift to Collaboration

We all have been on more web calls and webinars than we can count, but are we really collaborating? Because a large segment of the workforce will choose to work virtually, simply adding video or webinar services to a UCaaS solution is not enough to facilitate the collaboration people need to feel a sense of purpose and part of a business community.

People
Working from home has led to social isolation and feelings of being disconnected. This creates the need for employees and customers to be more participatory and find new ways to form relationships and social connections. They don't want to be just talked to and check out with **"Zoom fatigue**"; they want to be integral to the conversation.

Process
Adding video to UCaaS has been a great step forward for people to be able to see each other and the environments that they now work in. However, true collaboration is more multi-dimensional because people need alternate ways to share ideas, absorb information and create new channels for doing business.

Technology
Today, Unified Communication & Collaboration needs to expand to include other forms of digital engagement. The video call should use tools to engage such as collaboration boards or breakout sessions. There should be forums where people can jump in and share ideas and keep track of conversation threads.

Successful collaboration can be rewarded by incorporating fun strategies through gamification. Collaboration should be supported by content from sources that do the research to find out what the influencers, market watchers and industry insiders are saying or thinking.

- The time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities has increased by 50% or more in recent years.
- Over 40% of American workers were working from home full-time as of June 2020.
- On average, CEOs expect 36% of their employees to be working remotely in January 2022, up from 13% pre-pandemic.
- Multiple companies have implemented permanent work-from-home policies for large portions of their workforce.
- At least 100 digital remote collaboration products were launched or enhanced in the first eight months of 2020.

Source: Deloitte.com

People

Collaborators vs. Attendees

"To fully enable the hybrid workforce, it's important to establish a robust digital workplace. Done right, it can increase employees' ability to collaborate across physical and digital places, link to the organization's mission, better connect employees to the people with whom they work, support professional growth and development, augment employees' ability to do work, and enhance their well-being and sense of belonging."

Wall Street Journal, CIO Journal, Content by Deloitte

As Deloitte shared in their article for the Wall Street Journal, a digital workplace "*increases employee's ability to collaborate across physical and digital places*." Before we dive into how a UCCaaS strategy makes this possible, it's important to focus on what creates collaborators vs. individuals that are simply passive attendees.

Creating Collaborators

1. People need to feel relevant and connected to a mission, higher purposes or a cause that benefits the organization.
2. Everyone needs to understand the part they play in achieving the goal and how they function as a member of a team.
3. People need to be heard by sharing their ideas, listening to others and tapping into the collective wisdom of the group.
4. Collaborators need learning environments that are different and go beyond staring at a webinar screen.
5. People need to see progress, know how others are contributing and have everything organized.
6. Collaboration depends on developing relationships over time through the digital world that keeps them connected to each other.

Process

How Things Get Done

A collaboration team must first define its processes before it determines how to use UCCaaS technology to support its collaboration goals, facilitate team communication and offer the right collaboration tools as part of the "Tech Stack" Here are some key areas that teams need to address as they define their process.

Mission & Goals

- Increase customer satisfaction
- Decrease Attrition Rate

Team Roles & Responsibilities

- Organize Weekly Webinars
- Gather Customer Input
- Moderate Discussion Forum
- Suggest Process Change
- Create Action Plan

Set Ground Rules

- Support all ideas as they develop
- Complete assignments and meet deadlines
- Come Prepared to weekly meetings

Create Organization Strategy

- Assign project manager
- Recap meetings in writing
- Online Google Docs
- Project Mgmt Tools

Technology Strategy

- BlueJeans for weekly webinars
- Digital platform for forums
- Digital Platform to hold research
- Jamboard for idea sharing
- Digital Platform for messaging

Success Metrics

- Customer Survey Results
- 10%+ Decline in Attrition

Technology

The UCCaaS Tech Stack

Unified Communications platforms generally include the tools needed to pass along information and keep individuals updated. The voice, video, email and chat technology allow for updates, meetings, and spontaneous messaging, but true collaboration requires additional technologies for idea sharing, project organization and research.

A UCCaaS tech stack combines unified communications services with collaboration and engagement technology and layers on organizational and project management tools. The tech stack should provide a unified experience to the end user, so they view it as a single vs. disparate system.

- Create a single sign on experience from one centralized platform and preserve the login session between technologies.
- Have a single source of truth for establishment of user data to update all platforms in the tech stack.
- Provide an organization and linking strategy to move individuals from one platform to the other for specific functionality.

"Digital transformation is the process of exploiting digital technologies and supporting capabilities to create a robust new digital business model." – Gartner

Communication + Collaboration + Project Management

Technology

Video Collaboration Tools

Video meetings can inspire collaboration, or they can bore team members. Expanding how the technology is used creates opportunity for collaboration and stimulates participation.

Here are three ideas to increase collaboration in video meetings:

Collaboration Boards

Collaboration boards are similar to a whiteboard, but allow participants to post text, pictures, sticky notes and ideas as the video call progresses. Try Jamboard, a free service from Google, turn on sharing and let the ideas flow.

Breakout Rooms

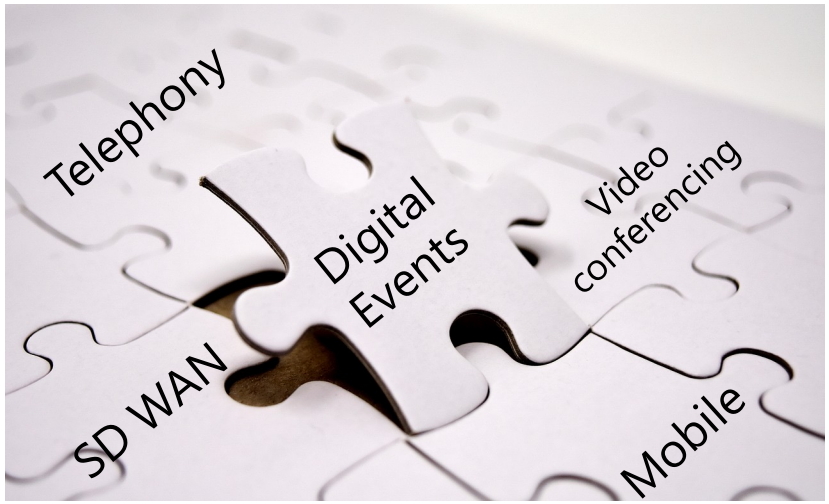
Join the video call, then divide the team into smaller groups to work through problem solving or idea generation. Set a timer and automatically bring the group back together to share results.

Polling

You might think you know where people have landed on an idea, but conducting a poll gives you the real story. Prepare the questions in advance, deliver the poll, and share the results. Answers are anonymous so you get a true picture of the ideas that are tending and those that fall flat.

Technology

Digital Event Engagement Solutions



The Missing Element In Unified Collaboration, Is A Digital Event & Engagement Solution

SaaS platforms have transformed how businesses operate with everything from Salesforce.com to manage prospects to MailChimp for email marketing. These platforms are purchased on a subscription basis, are self-managed and perform their business operations year-round.

Digital event and engagement platforms serve clients year-round, are easy to manage, and operate as a subscription program with different packages to fit every budget. Platforms that remain live continuously promote engagement, allow for micro-events, and keep content available on demand.

Event Collaboration & Engagement solutions provide organization and continuity and are more important than just connectivity. They manage content and shared resources, monitor individual access and messaging, as well as direct multiple market verticals, geographies, business units or languages all at the same time.

For the enterprise and SMB space, digital event platforms are a 365-resource center with managed information flow, strong control of brand identity, management of training and educational resources, along with the ability to stage events with exhibitors and sponsors from within and outside of the corporate environment. Even more importantly, an enterprise virtual event solution provide secure access and extensive reporting on attendance, viewership, and engagement.

Technology

Digital Engagement Technology

Add digital engagement services to strengthen traditional UCaaS to keep the discussion going between meetings and stimulate collaboration. Here are a few of the technologies that a digital engagement platform can bring to the table.

Discussion Forums

Keep a discussion board active and deliver email to its participants when new conversations or responses to existing ones are added.

Content & Research

Keeping track of industry trends and competitive intelligence helps give insight to any project. Digital engagement platforms allow participants to add and organize content they curate and make it easy for the team to locate and review.

Gamification

Who said collaboration had to be boring? Create contests or other gamification strategies to reward success or simply help the collaboration team members celebrate once milestones are reached.

Takeaways

Use collaboration tools to turn passive attendees into active participants

Focus on processes that use automation to create efficiency and success.

Combine UCaaS tools with digital engagement and project management for the perfect tech stack.

Expand your use of video meeting tools to inspire collaboration.

Explore digital engagement technology to keep the conversation going between meetings.

Cloud Conventions

Unlike other platforms that are designed primarily for simple webinars or streamed single events, Cloud Conventions offers extended digital engagement to create a content-rich, interactive environment for participants to interact, share ideas, attend sessions and interact on projects.

Visit Cloud Conventions