



Business Communication Technologies in the Era of Working From Home

OneConnect



7 Southside Drive, Suite 210,
Clifton Park, NY 12065
(518) 371-2295

www.oneconnectinc.com

One in four Americans will be working from home in 2021,¹ according to a report published by Upwork. This same report projects 36.2 million Americans will be remote by 2025 – an 87% overall increase from the number of work-from-home employees prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With roughly 68% of remote workers² reporting they feel successful while working from home, there is still plenty of room for improvement. This new era of working from home requires businesses to implement communication technologies that support remote productivity and effective collaboration.

In this whitepaper, we detail the key business communication technologies that promote success for today's remote workers.

VOIP: WHY MAKE THE MIGRATION?

The VoIP (voice over internet protocol) market is expected to reach \$102,480,000³ by 2026. The continuous proliferation of VoIP isn't unmerited – for businesses shifting to permanent remote and hybrid work arrangements, migrating to cloud-based voice service is essential.

Many organizations were confronted with the need to move away from landlines early in 2020. Those that hadn't already made the move to the cloud were left playing catch-up as they struggled to equip work-from-home employees with a means to communicate effectively via voice.

Businesses still clinging to landlines run the risk of falling behind their competitors. VoIP enables success for both on-premise and remote employees in a number of ways:

Cost Savings

VoIP doesn't require a large upfront investment in infrastructure, making a migration from legacy systems simple and cost effective. Businesses can save an average of 75% on operational costs and 30% on phone bills,⁴ making VoIP appealing to companies that have historically overpaid for voice service.

Mobility

Remote workers need the ability to access business phone functionality from their devices at home – a feature provided by VoIP systems. In fact, 74% of VoIP users use a mobile app to make business calls. This gives employees a more professional appearance as they're calling from a business line rather than a personal number.

Scalability

VoIP systems are scalable: businesses can add or remove users as needed. You'll be able to manage any increases in call volume, while only paying for what you're actually using at any given time.

Legacy phone systems are well on their way to obsolete, and VoIP implementation ensures your business communications are future-proof – but it's not the only option. Unified communications (UC) and unified communications as a service (UCaaS) are also smart choices for growth-minded businesses in 2021.

GOING ONE STEP FURTHER WITH UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS (UC) AND UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS AS A SERVICE (UCAAS)

The advantages of cloud-based communications became clear throughout 2020, as conducting business virtually became the norm. To remain relevant in a changing business environment, many companies have gone a step beyond VoIP to implement UC or UCaaS.

Businesses that already had UC or UCaaS systems in place were ahead of the game at the onset of the pandemic. For those that have chosen to adopt since then, they've experienced a more seamless transition to permanent remote-work models.

UC and UCaaS offer businesses the same advantages afforded by VoIP, in addition to several others:

Communications Integrated Into a Unified Platform

As the name implies, UC and UCaaS enable multiple communications channels to be used via a single, streamlined platform, including voice, conferencing, chat, and messaging.

This improves the user experience for employees and increases productivity, as workers can communicate with colleagues and customers in the way that suits each individual contact – all in one place.

Enhanced Customer Service

Modern customers don't just pick up the phone and call a company to seek support. In fact, 52% of millennials⁵ prefer to receive help over chat than through voice. UC and UCaaS enable you to provide service in whatever way your customers prefer. These platforms also integrate with your existing CRM system, creating an experience for customers where all previous contact has been logged; so they never have to repeat something they've already told another representative.

Improved Collaboration

Features like find me/follow me, presence, and cloud file sharing enable your employees to collaborate with one another – from anywhere. Remote employees can stay informed of the status of their colleagues so that they don't waste time hunting down someone who's currently unavailable. Key files and presentations can be securely shared through your UC system without workers having to keep track of old, buried email threads.

As collaboration needs evolve, providers are developing more advanced collaboration technologies. These offer the added benefit of efficiency for remote workers that struggle with learning and utilizing many disparate applications to get their jobs done from home.

VIDEO CONFERENCING AND THE ELEVATION OF COLLABORATION TECHNOLOGIES

UCaaS enhances collaboration capabilities for businesses grappling with a permanent shift to remote work. There are additional benefits to platforms that don't just include UCaaS but also have internal video conferencing technology and robust chat and SMS functionality. Cloud communications providers are responding to this need by offering solutions like Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) that enable workers to collaborate

without having to toggle between disparate apps like Zoom and Slack on their personal devices.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, MS Teams has experienced 894% growth.⁶ While this figure is staggering, it's not surprising. Businesses needed to adopt tools that enabled remote work success, and MS Teams offers a specific set of features that support a seamless, efficient work-from-home experience.

This next generation of business communication technology will be at the heart of the remote workforce's future. Maximizing productivity in remote and hybrid work environments is essential. Platforms like MS Teams allow employees to:

- Share files within chat – and initiate a video call within the same window should that file need to be discussed.
- Streamline the virtual meeting process by allowing notes, relevant files, and recordings to be stored and accessed in one place.
- Minimize the number of emails sent and received by handling important discussions real-time in chat, thus increasing efficiency.
- Remain connected from anywhere with all necessary collaboration functionality.

CONTACT CENTER TECHNOLOGY

Businesses that invest in improving the customer experience see an average revenue increase of 10-15%.⁵ This was the genesis of the omnichannel contact center experience which allows customers to receive service via the channel they prefer, whether that's voice, chat, SMS, or social media.

Omnichannel has become an expectation for customers who desire more personalized, cohesive interactions.

2021 brings contact center trends that go beyond omnichannel and capitalize on advancements in communications technology:

The Embeddable Experience

Customers are using mobile devices and smartphones to seek support. There's a rising trend in embeddable experiences that blend digital and voice channels for a more unified experience, whether a customer contacts your business via voice, text, or through an application. Contact centers are investing in technologies that allow for use of advanced authentication like biometrics and face ID, which are already integrated into many users' smartphones.

The Mobile-Centric Contact Center

Along with the rise in remote workers comes a rise in remote customers. Mobile applications need to be optimized to enhance the omnichannel experience – customers should be able to contact support on their mobile devices via chat, text, or voice seamlessly and efficiently.

Automation

Advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) can be applied to improving contact center operations and the customer experience. AI-powered customer assistants supplement overwhelmed remote contact center teams, providing answers to questions for basic information without a client having to hold to speak to a human representative. Virtual assistants free up human agents to handle more complex questions and interactions.

INVEST IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR REMOTE WORK SUCCESS

Staying ahead of your competitors in 2021 means investing in business communications technologies like VoIP, UCaaS, conferencing, and contact center automation. Work-from-home employees need to be able to collaborate effectively with each other and provide seamless customer service as if they were still based in the office.

The time to invest in technologies that support remote workers is now. When you're ready to enhance productivity, employee satisfaction, and the customer experience, we're here to help. Contact us today to get started.

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