

VoIPstudio White Paper

Simple steps to boost your business communications

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Introduction

Communicating effectively with customers, suppliers, partners and, of course, colleagues is essential for any business, but perhaps even more so for smaller businesses that lack the resources of and brand reputation of much larger organisations.

According to research¹, 46 per cent of consumers still use voice – either from fixed or mobile devices – as the main means of communication with their suppliers, so having a voice conversation really matters. But, equally, consumers and employees want to have the option of how they communicate and on what device, so an end-to-end communications strategy also needs to embrace email, chat and other media, as well as being able to integrate into existing enterprise applications, such as CRM and ERP.

At the same time, the workplace has undergone a major transformation in recent years, with the rise of mobility, remote working and virtualised businesses, adding a further challenge to effective multichannel communication, which requires further resources and technical expertise that many organisations do not have.

Taken together, it means that implementing a productive and effective communication strategy can be a headache for many smaller businesses, redirecting important resources away from the frontline. As a result, many SMBs operate a disconnected communications strategy, which impacts productivity, customer service and, ultimately, the bottom line.

Conversely, those organisations that have a connected, multichannel communications strategy have been proven to achieve greater productivity, efficiency and to attract and retain talent better than their competitors. Furthermore, companies that prioritise customer experience generate 60 per cent higher profits than their competitors, according to Forbes.²

This paper discusses how an organisation of any size can take simple steps to achieve a comprehensive, connected communications strategy, without it having to cost the earth.

46%
OF CONSUMERS STILL USE
VOICE
AS THEIR MAIN MEANS OF
COMMUNICATION

1. [Logmein 2018 CX Report](#)

2. [Forbes Insights, The Clear Path to Personalization](#)



"the workforce is becoming increasingly mobile and virtualised, which when combined with a disjointed communications policy can lead to frustration between colleagues, missed sales calls and slow or poor customer service. Ultimately, this can affect the reputation, brand and bottom line of any business."

Pain points for your business

It's sometimes difficult to see the pain points in your own business, with processes often run 'the way we've always done it', but survey after survey shows that communications is often either a challenge, or ineffective, in many smaller organisations. Fear of IT complexity, and a lack of technical and financial resources compared to larger enterprises are common reasons for smaller businesses to 'bury their head in the sand' when it comes to communications strategies.

At the same time, the workforce is becoming increasingly mobile and virtualised, which when combined with a disjointed communications policy can lead to frustration between colleagues, missed sales calls and slow or poor customer service. Ultimately, this can affect the reputation, brand and bottom line of any business.

There are internal and external pain points associated with communications. Internal communications pain points concern communications between colleagues and employees, regardless of their location and the device they are using.

This has an impact on productivity and employee satisfaction. External pain points, meanwhile, concern those outside the company, such as customers, partners and suppliers, wanting to contact the business, which can directly impact sales.

More importantly, these challenges often mean that many businesses avoid taking decisions because they think they are too difficult or that they need a specialist.

The section below highlights many of the common pain points for businesses when it comes to communications.

Internal pain points

So, what are key pain points for small businesses? Here's a selection, which affect all small businesses, to various degrees.

They impede communications, reduce efficiency and impact internal operations – all of which can lead to costs and increased friction.

1. Missed calls from colleagues
2. Slow or delayed decision making due to poor communication
3. Lack of efficiency and productivity
4. Time wasted chasing colleagues who are unavailable
5. Maintaining contact with colleagues working remotely or off-site
6. Disconnected multichannel and multiple device communications strategies.

95%

OF EMPLOYEES PLAN TO USE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TOOLS INSTEAD OF FACE TO FACE MEETINGS

Staying in touch with colleagues, particularly those working remotely or off-site, is paramount for efficient communication with any business. For example, 28 per cent of respondents reported poor communication as the primary cause of failing to deliver a project within its original time frame, according to a survey by the Computing Technology Industry Association³.

Increasingly, employees want to be able to communicate with colleagues and the business on multiple devices, specifically the one they have with them at the time. For example, according to a study by uSamp Research, 85 per cent of employees use more than one device to communicate at work, with 32 per cent of those using three or more devices.

In the same study, 95 per cent said that they planned to use business communication tools instead of in-person meetings, including email (48 per cent), mobile (20 per cent), desk phones (10 per cent), text messaging (8 per cent) and web meetings (8 per cent).

If workers typically use three or more devices, it can be difficult to know where they are, or which device to contact them on – do you call their deskphone, their work mobile, personal mobile, or send an email to their laptop?

Such disjointed communication strategies can lead to delays in making decisions, gaining information, and catching up on project status, leading to poor or slow decision making across the organisation.

Likewise, how do employees want to be contacted? They may be travelling or otherwise engaged with a customer, so they may not be able to – or want to, access voicemails left for them, for example – preferring instead a text or an email.


The use of presence and availability can also boost productivity, ensuring that colleagues know whether someone is busy or not, which in turn means that they either don't waste time trying to contact someone who is unavailable or can contact someone else for information if that person is tied up.

Furthermore, like it or not, remote and flexible working is becoming one of the most important aspects for employee satisfaction, particularly among millennials, with many regarding it as more important than an increase in salary.

Poor internal communications can impact efficiency and productivity. The inability to contact a colleague can lead to delayed decisions and slow responses for information, meaning that organisations cannot react quickly and decisively in response to market conditions and even customer requests.

Further, colleagues increasingly expect instant communication. According to the uSamp study, 82 per cent of workers would rather receive voicemails as text messages. So, rather than listening to an entire recorded message, workers can quickly scan the message to determine what is important.

3. <https://www.slideshare.net/RingCentral/2015-communication-infographic>



External pain points can undermine business relationships and lead to lost opportunities, or damage competitive advantage and the ability to deliver. Here's a few common problems that reduce a company's ability to service its customers effectively.

1. Long wait times for customers – calls don't get answered quickly enough
2. Customers having to repeat the same story multiple times – because they don't reach the right person
3. The person callers need to speak to is unavailable, or they don't know how to reach them
4. Non-returned customer calls
5. Inefficient and disjointed external marketing and sales calls
6. Reputational damage to your business and bad customer reviews because of poor or inefficient service

External pain points

Poor customer service is arguably one of the most important things for an organisation to get right. It can impact brand reputation negatively and, of course, have a direct negative effect on sales and the bottom line.

We've all wasted hours trying to get the information we need, trying to reach the right person in an organisation, or waited for returned calls that never arrive. Missed and non-returned calls have a significant negative effect on the customer experience. Likewise, long wait and response times, not being able to speak to the right person, and having to repeat the same conversations with different agents or workers are all considered to be the most annoying issues for callers and customers.

Without an efficient way to route and direct incoming calls, customer calls cannot be transferred between departments or employees leading to frustration and inefficiency for all concerned. Being directed to the wrong person also means that the customer does not receive the information or the solution that they required, again leading to frustration and reputational damage.

If they do finally reach the right person, they may then have to go through the story with a different agent or employee every time they contact the business, compounding the problem.

There is nothing more irritating than having to repeat the same story or issue to three or four different people in an organisation.

In the least, it can create an unpleasant customer experience, but more importantly is likely to lead to damage to an organisation's brand reputation. In a Dimensional Research study, for example, 95 per cent of respondents said they usually tell at least one other person about a bad customer experiences with a company, while 54 per cent said they share it with at least five other people.

At the same time, organisations may need to perform outbound marketing and sales calls. The lack of a connected strategy to perform this leads to poor efficiency, repeat calls, and poor productivity – ultimately, it can lead to lower sales. External calls may be repeated or even missed without a connected communications strategy.

Having an effective, connected communication strategy is essential for organisations if they want to be competitive in a crowded market. Internal and external pain points exist for many smaller businesses, but there is a simple and cost-effective way to meet all of these challenges, optimise your business communication.

Market trends

The move towards mobility is now well documented. Employees are often off-site, working remotely or, even from home. In fact, employees now expect some form of flexible or remote working in order to manage their busy lifestyles. At the same time, as discussed previously, workers now expect to use multiple devices to communicate, with the vast majority using over three devices.


Traditionally, on-premise PBXs were the only solution to the communications conundrum, but required significant setup and maintenance, and as such were really only available to enterprises.

But as with most other enterprise applications, communications solutions are not moving to the cloud, with the important result that they are now accessible to organisations with one or one-thousand employees.

The forecast from Gartner (see Table 1) shown below highlights this shift, with the analyst firm predicting that Premise-based telephony and messaging will shrink at a CAGR of 9.5 per cent between 2016 and 2021. Conversely, Cloud-based telephony and messaging is forecast to grow at a CAGR of 15.8 per cent over the same period.

Table 1: The move towards cloud-based communications

Segment	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	CAGR
Total telephony and messaging	2%	3%	3%	5%	3%	3%	3%	3.3%
Premise-based telephony and messaging	-15%	-7%	-7.9%	-8%	-11%	-10%	-10%	-9.5%
Telephony product support services	-8%	-1%	0.5%	1%	-2%	-3%	-4%	-1.4%
Cloud-based telephony and messaging	10%	18%	18.3%	19%	16%	14%	12%	15.8%
Total conferencing	5%	9%	8.1%	7%	5%	3%	2%	5%
Premise-based conferencing	-8%	-2%	-3.4%	-3%	-5%	-6%	-6%	-4.6%
Conferencing product support services	1%	3%	2.8%	2%	0%	-1%	-2%	0.7%



"With SMBs making up the majority of companies in the UK, if you're not agile compared to your competitors, then that ultimately could be doomed to failure."

Agility

In a competitive and globalised marketplace it's also vital that any organisation can respond quickly and decisively to any changes in the commercial environment, or even to important customers, partners and suppliers and requests for information. Agility is key.

With SMBs making up the majority of companies in the UK, if you're not agile compared to your competitors, then that ultimately could be doomed to failure.

Employees need to be able to act quickly in response to new information, as well as add and remove people when market conditions demand, and be able to communicate from any location on a plethora of devices.

Pain points and solutions

So, with all that in mind, how can companies solve these problems? Well, there are many features and capabilities of communications systems that can help to promote a connected and efficient communications strategy and ultimately make an organisation more productive and more successful.

For example, IVR, which allows organisations to manage inbound calls and direct them instantly to the right department, can have a significant impact on communication. It means that organisations never need to miss a call. It enables automatic or manual transfer of inbound calls to available and relevant employees or departments. It means that calls are transferred to the right person at the right time, wherever they are. It offers quality customer service every time, and allows organisations to hit sales targets or meet seasonal or peak demand from customers.

Likewise, ACD allows calls to be distributed according to the availability and workload of employees, so calls can be seamlessly shared across teams at peak times.

Hunt Groups, meanwhile, offer a way of creating a team by adding users to a particular group. Such a group might

represent a sales team, or a customer support line. When calls arrive at the company, callers can select a group through the answering system (press 1 for sales, 2 for support, and so on). The incoming call can then be directed to the team and a rule can be applied. All phones in the team can ring at once, so that the first person to answer handles the call, or they can ring in sequence, or in a way that reflects the activity levels.

Connecting a team in this way ensures that calls are never missed, so that anyone can be reached by an incoming call, either in turn, in parallel or when one member is simply unavailable. Likewise, when a member of the team needs to absent themselves – for lunch, for holidays – they can withdraw temporarily.

For call centres, Reception Console allows organisations to equally distribute workloads, and fully utilise staff by sharing incoming calls efficiently and to the right person. This feature also enables tracking of staff performance, so that staff status and number of calls can be tracked over time.

Some organisations may also need to record calls for compliance or training purposes, so an optional Voice Recording feature records calls on any device automatically and then transfers the file to a secure and mirrored database in the cloud, meaning that organisations can quickly and easily meet their compliance obligations.

These, and other features remove the pain points for SMBs in a seamless and simple manner, ensuring no missed calls, efficient communication between staff, quality customer service by ensuring that calls are transferred to appropriate and available staff, flexibility and remote working, reduced customer wait times, and more efficient marketing and sales. All of which can add up to increased sales and a glowing brand reputation for customer service. But, how can my organisation benefit from these capabilities in practice?



What are my options?

Essentially, the choice is a simple one.

Just like CRM, Office 365, security and many other enterprise applications, there are multiple benefits to communications solutions residing in the cloud.

A cloud-based, hosted communications solution requires no software or hardware deployment and the associated capital expenditure.

Monthly costs are predictable, while employees can be added or removed simply and almost instantaneously. It's scalable – to meet fluctuations in market demand – provides access to the latest technologies without the need for organisations to upgrade and, of course, offers mobility and flexibility by providing access to advanced communications features on any connected device.

Furthermore, advanced features, such as auto-attendant and group hunting, offer organisations of any size the capabilities of a much larger enterprise.

As well as boosting efficiency, productivity, and the customer experience, it also lends smaller companies the air of a much larger, more professional organisation.

Cloud communications solutions can also be fully integrated into existing enterprise applications, such as customer databases, CRM capabilities, and so on, without the need for a complex IT project.

Conclusion

A cloud communication solution is essential for SMBs as it optimises efficiency, productivity, customer experience and offers the advanced features (and professionalism) of a much larger enterprise, at a predictable, affordable cost. No IT deployment is required, and no on-going maintenance or upgrade (and the additional costs involved). Simply, a cloud-hosted communications solution can help to improve the bottom line of any organisation, helping it to grow and navigate changing commercial conditions.

VoIPstudio is a comprehensive, powerful cloud-based communications platform that offers all of the communications features that you need, in a simple, easy to use package. It helps you to organise your business, create teams and ensure you manage all external and internal communications effectively and efficiently.

It's a platform for all communications with a wide range of integration possibilities to converge with your other business systems. It helps save administrative time, provides effective storage and retrieval functions, while boosting productivity. Best of all, it enables faster response times and helps build better customer engagement and service. And, to help you manage your costs, it's available with a simple monthly licence, with no contract period. So, if you want to help solve communications challenges faced by your business, while taking advantage of a flexible, easy to use solution, get in touch with VoIPstudio to find out we can help.

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