Keep It Simple and Cost-Effective: Enable Communications and Collaboration as One

Make YOU the center of YOUNified communications.

Communication in the workplace has been missing an integral component – a key player in what makes communication work. It’s you – the modern employee. The fearless leader. The team champion. The creative collaborator. And Fuze provides technology that works for YOU, adapting to every person and every business, reimagining and simplifying business communications and collaboration.
If you’re like many IT leaders, you find yourself selecting communication and collaboration tools from the vendors that already supply many of the other everyday tools being used throughout your organization. We get it: it’s convenient and simple to go with an approved vendor. And if that vendor happens to be a well-known brand, it also looks good on your résumé. But ask yourself: are you making this decision because it’s easy for you and your department or because it’s good for the business and its users?

Rather than pursue the low-risk strategy – and maintain the perception that IT is simply there to “keep the lights on” – you can adopt a new mindset and approach. The answer is to select the tools that are best for the business and your colleagues while reducing the costs and complexity of communications and collaboration. By making it easier for your colleagues across the organization to do their work – and to do it better – you become the hero. Specifically, you become a business enabler, save your company money, and free the IT department to contribute in other strategic ways.

Simply put, enterprise communications is often an afterthought. In many organizations, the current system – usually a PBX and desktop phones – may not be optimal but it works. However, organizations are under growing pressure to change the status quo. Today’s end users – including a new generation of younger workers – expect rich, consumer-grade software delivered to their desktops and mobile devices. And they’re taking matters into their own hands.

User-installed, cloud-based tools are proliferating across many enterprises in an ad hoc manner as different departments adopt a tool of their choosing. While marketing might use Slack to communicate around a campaign launch, the sales team may use Chatter to communicate on the fly, and the customer support group may rely on Skype as it diagnoses remote issues.

“Large enterprises with sales, marketing, HR, and customer support teams regularly use different applications to get work done, but there are a number of processes between the lines of business that don’t always get taken into account by IT.”

– Vanessa Thompson, research director of enterprise social networks and collaborative technologies, IDC

1 CIO Magazine, CIOs must embrace consumer cloud tools or risk losing control, July 14, 2015
This is shadow IT in action. And it goes hand in hand with the IT department feeling as though its role has diminished over time. Today, just 38% of CIOs spend at least 50% of their time on strategic activities.

Unless your IT group provides lines of business and users with a better alternative – secure, reliable, enterprise-grade communications – it will remain in the shadows and out of control.

These are all the ways that lack of control manifests itself:

- **Less security and auditability.** When IT isn't aware of the tools being used, it's impossible to control how communications are taking place or keep track of what's happening on these tools. As they use unsanctioned communication tools, employees could be communicating with external partners over an insecure channel. This exposes your company in numerous ways, including the potential for sensitive information to leak out and malware to find its way in.

- **Less reliability.** Few "teamware" tools are backed by service level agreements (SLAs). That's fine in our personal lives, but unacceptable when business is on the line. Imagine a sales rep is trying to close a major deal at quarter's end using a communication tool downloaded in a rogue fashion. During a critical video call with the prospect, the tool keeps disconnecting and finally the prospective customer gives up in frustration and doesn’t answer the sales rep's final call back. That's money flying out the door.

- **Lower quality.** Consumer-grade tools are cheap (sometimes even free), and usually easy to install and use. But none come with the enterprise-level quality that organizations can rely on. And whether we're talking about quality of voice, quality of video, quality of service, about sharing a screen, or trying to control a remote desktop, poor quality degrades the user experience. When those users are your company's employees, that bad experience translates into low productivity. Sometimes these tools require third parties (such as partners and customers) to use browser plug-ins that are hard to install or simply work sluggishly once installed. In those cases, the bad experience reflects poorly on your company's image in the market.

- **Difficult application management.** The classic issue of properly managing all these tools is the same one that has been on the radar with the rise of the BYOD movement. When IT needs to apply a patch or update to every employee's instance of a tool, it’s inconvenient to do so on a one-to-one basis. However, unless everyone is using standardized tools, IT cannot manage them centrally.

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2 Fuze, The App Generation: How employees of the future are shaping the way we work
3 Logacalis, The Shadow IT Phenomenon, 2015

Your company needs to make it easy to do business
Remember: you don’t need to just satisfy the expectations of colleagues who increasingly prefer social media, video, and other modern tools for communication and collaboration. You need to satisfy the same expectations of those that your company is trying to do business with.

90% of the 420 CIOs surveyed worldwide report that they are now by-passed by line-of-business colleagues at least occasionally.

Technology Choices Should Reflect the Style of Today’s Generation

The changing face of today’s workforce makes it more pressing than ever to address these issues. Consider these facts: 20-25% of the US workforce works remotely on a regular basis. Our own research found that only 37% of workers in Europe work from home, though another 49% would like to but can’t or just don’t. And whether they are on the road or in the office, numerous studies show employees are not at their desk 50-60% of the time. That said, it’s clear that getting work done while traveling poses its own unique set of issues.

Picture the businessperson traveling three out of four weeks every month. The car, train station, or the airport quickly become makeshift workspaces. Thanks to free WiFi in select airports and in the sky, your colleague can make the most of a few extra minutes here and there. But too many steps, dial-ins, log-ins, and passwords to remember can quickly make work travel a huge hassle.

Now let’s consider how millennials come into play. They represent the largest generation in American history and will make up 75% of the U.S. workforce by 2025. They are highly fluent in technology, addicted to social media, and have high expectations of connectivity and interactivity. In fact, this “is the first generation to enter the workplace with a better grasp of a key business tool than more senior workers.” And they prefer employers that emphasize a culture of collaboration.

This more distributed, younger workforce is accustomed to working from anywhere, anytime. And organizations have no choice but to accommodate the always-connected style of collaboration sought by today’s workers who are used to engaging via social networks and mobile devices. More than that, companies must satisfy the expectations of today’s younger workforce for easy collaboration. Used to rich communication and collaboration in their personal lives, these employees are often frustrated by being forced to use outdated and multiple technologies at work.

Here’s what PwC unearthed in its global study of millennials: “Millennials routinely make use of their own technology at work and three-quarters believe that access to technology makes them more effective at work. However, technology is often a catalyst for intergenerational conflict in the workplace and many millennials feel held back by rigid or outdated working styles.”

Just as important is the up-and-coming ‘app generation,’ which is defined as 15 to 18 year olds. Our survey of 2,500 members of this generation across Europe clearly shows that the desk phone is on the decline and the smartphone is on the rise as younger generations continue entering the workforce.

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4 GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com, Latest Telecommuting Statistics
5 Fuze, The App Generation: How employees of the future are shaping the way we work
6 Ibid
7 US Bureau of Labor Statistics
8 International Association of Conference Centres, IACC Reveals the Top 10 Meeting Tech Trends for 2015
9 PwC, Millennials at work Reshaping the workplace
10 Virgin, Survey: what do 16-21 year-olds say about the language of business?
11 PwC, Millennials at work Reshaping the workplace
In fact, the app generation has high expectations of using mobile phones when they enter the workforce. 72% of the ‘app generation’ agree having the latest technology will be important when they start working.12

When employees are forced to use multiple tools for communicating and collaborating, they experience friction. Rather than focus on the work to be done, they waste time toggling back and forth between different apps and experiences. What they really want is consistency across all the devices they use, including their desk phones. Fail to satisfy this desire and your company may very well find it hard to attract and retain today’s top talent.

It’s Time for IT to Reassert its Value

Like it or not, IT has been losing clout within most organizations over time as lines of business make more technology decisions. A Bain & Company survey found that nearly a third of technology purchasing power has moved beyond IT to executives with responsibility for marketing, customer service, and supply chain functions. Savvy CIOs are proactively taking steps to remain relevant to lines of business and avoid being viewed as a roadblock. And their financial counterparts are simultaneously seeking ways to support their company’s efforts to innovate, improve the employee and customer experience, and keep up with rapid growth.

Desire vs. reality

2013: In an ideal world, how would your time be split between day-to-day management of technology and strategic planning?

2015: What is the actual split now?

- PwC, Millennials at work
Reshaping the workplace

Survey says...millennials take matters into their own hands

59% said of millennials surveyed said that an employer’s provision of state-of-the-art technology was important to them when considering a job. Over half of those surveyed routinely make use of their own technology at work, and 78% said that access to the technology they like to use makes them more effective at work.

- PwC, Millennials at work
Reshaping the workplace

12 Fuze, The App Generation: How employees of the future are shaping the way we work
The realm of communication and collaboration offers a prime opportunity for IT to become this business enabler and the hero by empowering end users. Why? Because no single line of business can “own” communications company-wide… which is why everyone from IT leadership and the COO to the CFO and CEO often has a say in how communications are handled. In companies where these tools are brought on board in a rogue fashion, each department decides separately on the communication and collaboration tools to use within their groups. As discussed earlier, this siloed approach poses many risks and actually undermines attempts to work together more efficiently.

The modern and proven approach to communication and collaboration is clear: it’s enabling users with a cross-platform, cross-device solution in the cloud. That’s what today’s users expect. And it’s what forward-thinking IT leaders are delivering.

Virtually every enterprise software category (CRM and ERP to name a few) has or will be moving to the cloud. If you’re not thinking this way, you’ll be working for a legacy organization or be seen as an “old-school” IT person – and your organization will be left behind by the competition. No matter which of these scenarios holds true, you could possibly be limiting your career option.

Money matters
Cloud-based communication and collaboration add up to big cost savings due to:
- No upfront required hardware costs
- Lease options for equipment and professional services
- Predictable monthly billing
- Pay-as-you-grow features and functionality
- Software integrations that help you get more out of existing software subscriptions

Make sense of today’s “digital order”
Today’s modern workplace must empower workers to make greater use of flexible work options and tools. Teams must overcome the challenges of distance created by distributed organizations, championing new ways to get things done.

Recognize that Communication and Collaboration are a Single Problem

If you embrace this approach, you also need to change your mindset when it comes to addressing communication and collaboration. In many organizations, desktop phones and VoIP are seen as one expense, while video collaboration, chat/video presence, and team collaboration tools are given their own line items. In other words, organizations have gotten used to thinking about all of these tools and technologies separately. And it introduces numerous headaches.

Managing multiple vendors, carriers, and technologies separately and by region is expensive and challenging. Consider the overhead alone in handling and negotiating different contracts, billing terms, support agreements, service expiration dates, and invoices. Now add to that the logistical nightmare of managing an array of on-premise equipment – and the range of IT skills and time needed. This approach leads to wasted spend on different – and often overlapping – technologies that are fundamentally solving the same problems: communication and collaboration.
Still not sure it’s necessary to unify your communication and collaboration tools? Answer these questions – are you grappling with:

- High maintenance or ad hoc service costs?
- Inconsistent quality of service, across your organization?
- Version control issues?
- Shadow IT and remote initiatives?
- Collaboration tools no one uses?
- Remote employees with inconsistent access to business communication tools?
- Multiple communications platforms for multiple departments?
- Limited communications functionality during business travel?
- Unresponsive or ineffective communications support?
- Service delays when scaling or moving business?

If you answered ‘yes’ to even a few of these, it’s time to consider a new approach.

**Enter Cloud-based Unified Communications**

While modern technology has changed our world, desktop phones are still viewed as enabling the highest quality mode of remote communication in the workplace. What if end users could have the same quality experience no matter where they are, whether on a cell phone in an airport or using their laptop speakers? It would change the way that work gets done. And it’s possible to make this happen today due to the consolidation of technologies enabling unified communications, which is simply the fusion of voice, text, content, and video.

**Control costs and future-proof your organization**

When all of this is enabled through the cloud, it’s called Unified Communications as a Service or UCaaS, a special category within Software as a Service (SaaS). And UCaaS helps your organization control costs and future-proof itself for the future.

By consolidating with a single vendor, even if you’re only doing so in a local office, your company can realize significant cost savings. Consider the impact alone of the following:

- Replacing PBX systems and web conferencing solutions
- Reducing costs for international calls and conference calls
- Reducing help desk staff and administrators for on-premise equipment
- Reducing the time IT spends managing and interacting with multiple vendors
- Reducing the time Legal and Finance spend negotiating contracts and rates and managing invoices and payments
- Increasing the time IT dedicates to strategic business initiatives
6 ways to drive enterprise collaboration

Invite end users to the table. Survey users for the tools they prefer to use and find out what makes these tools appealing – and in what ways they fall short.

Recruit champions. Launch a pilot with a select group of users who are open to trying a unified communications suite, and then harness their enthusiasm to get others onboard.

Solve a pain. Share examples of cross-device or cross-channel collaboration solving a problem.

Focus on adoption. Train all users – including new hires – to use the tool contextually (i.e., as they would in their day-to-day work) and create online and hard-copy reference materials for those that need a refresher.

Make a game of it. Reward super users with monthly prizes like gift cards, t-shirts, and other small tokens that would appeal to your employees.

Promote a culture of collaboration. This type of technology opens the door to more and better interactions. Make sure everyone throughout the organization – from the front lines to the c-suite – are on board with the importance of building an open culture of communication.

When dealing with a single vendor that manages the unified communications suite, your organization can rein in this management nightmare and gain a single, predictable expense in the process. Plus, if you choose a solution that supports third-party integrations, you no longer need to worry about rip-and-replace scenarios. Moreover, with a cloud-based platform, you avoid continually upgrading to the latest versions of technology.

Beware of “cloudwashing”
When a cloud solution is not designed for the cloud from the ground up, you’ll suffer in the following ways:
- Sluggish application access and performance
- Infrequent and painful upgrades
- Expensive, unwieldy integrations and customizations
- Downtime and end-user complaints

Why Enterprise-Grade from a Single Vendor Matters

That said, not all cloud-based unified communications solutions are created equal. Many new cloud vendors focus on a narrow solution, such as team collaboration. Even traditional telephony providers are jumping into the fray by offering web/video conferencing.

While each vendor specializes, none address all communication and collaboration needs with a single cloud-based tool. Even those expanding the capabilities of their single-focus tools lack the history of providing high-quality voice communications.

Moreover, many of these incumbent vendors offer solutions that were not built as true SaaS solutions. Instead they are simply hosting their on-premise solutions and exposing them through the cloud. As a result, these vendors can’t provide the elasticity, scalability, reliability, and continuous upgrades you get through true multi-tenant UCaaS.

When deciding on a solution that will impact nearly everyone in your organization, it’s critical to partner with a vendor that has already solved the hardest problems. You want and need the quality that only comes with tools designed for the enterprise so there’s no chance of dropped calls, poor audio quality, or choppy video.
Here’s what to look for:

- A vendor whose heritage is in the unified communications space and guarantees the highest levels of security and quality. Find out what security measures the vendor calls upon and how it addresses network latency and congestion.
- A solution backed by a published, guaranteed SLA of five nines (99.999% uptime). Beware of vendors that hide their SLAs or only provide three or four nines. Outages can translate directly to lost sales or revenue.
- A solution designed to support regulatory and compliance requirements. Across industries, most organizations must comply with data and privacy standards and regulations. Determine how the solution satisfies your requirements now and how it will do so going forward.
- A vendor and solution proven to scale and support thousands of users without a hiccup. Ask to speak with customers whose use of the solution expanded over time.
- A solution that works seamlessly with your existing systems. Ensure the vendor offers options for integrating with third-party systems so you’re not forced to rip and replace what’s already working.
- A solution that works consistently across devices and geographies. Find out if the solution can support any and all devices and works equally well across an unlimited number of locations. Just as important, make sure the user experience is consistent across all communication modes (i.e., web conferencing, video conferencing, instant messaging, telepresence).

Conclusion: Give Users the Communications Experience They Crave

To keep up with today’s workforce, your business tools – including those used to communicate and collaborate – must be agile, secure, scalable, affordable, and predictable. In the end, you and your colleagues want the same experience with workplace technology that you’ve come to expect from your personal technology. Simply put, you need a solution that infuses the spirit of consumer apps into a business application backed by the promise of an easy-to-use, global platform. Such a solution ensures consistent, consumer-like experiences that reduce the cost and complexity associated with enterprise communications and collaboration.

Ready to become the business enabler and IT hero? Request a demo today.

Fuze is a global, cloud-based unified communications platform that empowers productivity and delivers insights across the enterprise by enabling simplified business voice communications, flexible video conferencing, and always-on collaboration. Formerly ThinkingPhones, Fuze allows the modern, mobile workforce to seamlessly communicate anytime, anywhere, across any device.