Unified Communications take center stage, as staying connected becomes a priority

Survey shows organizations ready to modernize UCC — with a little help

THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS CAUSED UNPRECEDENTED ECONOMIC SHOCKS. Governments around the world have issued stay-at-home orders to hundreds of millions of people, forcing companies large and small to enable their employees to work from home, often with no more than a day or two of notice. In light of these sudden, massive changes, unified communications and collaboration (UCC) solutions have never been more important to the normal function of businesses operations. Without them, most businesses would have ground to a halt during March and April.

Many countries and most of the U.S. are starting to emerge from lockdowns. Even as governments loosen stay-at-home restrictions, however, many employees will continue to work from home, given that the virus has not gone away and that no vaccine or cure has been developed. Even those organizations

that are bringing employees back to the office recognize that, if infections once again spiral out of control, governments may restore stay-at-home orders.

The urgent need for UCC solutions

As a result, IT organizations are prioritizing the deployment and augmentation of their UCC solutions. A recent survey of IT decision-makers by IDG shows that 55% have either instigated new plans or accelerated existing ones to modernize their communications infrastructure. Also, while businesses are slashing costs in many areas of their operations, IT looks as if it might avoid the cuts, given its heightened importance during the pandemic. IDC April market research shows that 39% expect IT spending to increase during the pandemic, while another 17% foresee the pandemic having no impact.

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It's a remarkable shift, said Norma Cernadas, Director Product Marketing at Verizon. Before the pandemic, many employees had just a passing familiarity with UCC solutions. Today, they are fundamental to day-to-day work, and organizations are seeking assistance to implement them.

UCC has value beyond enabling operations during lockdown

Both workers and employers have come to value UCC for far more than its utility during lockdown. IT decision-makers cited UCC solutions' ability to deliver increased productivity (55%), better operational efficiency (54%), and improved agility (47%) in the IDG survey.

Additionally, more than one-third of respondents said that UCC solutions provide access to an expanded talent pool, because it essentially eliminates geographical limitations. UCC enables employers to conduct nationwide — even global — searches for the best talent they can afford without worrying about candidates' willingness to relocate.

IT decision-makers have very specific requirements for the UCC solutions they want to deploy. For starters, they expect UCC solutions to be secure, but don't want IT administrators or end users to need a virtual private network (VPN) to access collaboration technology; 88% said this is critical or very important. Likewise, they expect UCC solutions to integrate functionality seamlessly (89%), to switch between devices during a call without losing the connection (84%), and to take calls from anywhere via any device with a single number (81%). Other key features they require include web voicemail (74%) and the ability to see information about a colleague's availability (80%).

IT organizations need UCC assistance

Organizations need help choosing, deploying, and maintaining UCC solutions, however. In the IDG survey, 50% said that their top priority regarding UCC is to ensure that the communications network can meet user demands and 52% want to be sure staff have the skills and training to leverage the necessary technology. Following close behind is the need to provide employees with modern tools that are easy to use and accessible (46%).

Fig. 1 Where organizations need help to ensure network can meet user demands (Source: IDG)

52%

Ensuring staff has skills and training to enable the necessary technology

50%

Increasing network flexibility / scalability

"Communications is our business," said Michelle Emerson-Russell, Managing Director, Advanced Communications at Verizon. "So we've worked with hundreds of businesses on their UCC strategy and implementation. Given the urgency of deploying UCC solutions, many organizations are jumping in without sufficient planning or strategy, and the result doesn't meet their needs. That's a situation where expert assistance can help accelerate the process."

For example, it's important to fully understand the differing needs of the various roles and personas within the organization when selecting and deploying a solution. Ideally, end users participate in the process, giving IT a direct view into their communications challenges. Once solution and infrastructure requirements have been determined, it's time to start preboarding sessions with employees so they'll be ready to go.

No one knows exactly what the future looks like or how long the pandemic will last. It's clear, however, that remote work and the need for UCC solutions is here to stay. Verizon has a proven track record of enabling customer success with UCC solutions — and a proven process for analyzing and evaluating an organization's varied needs, designing and deploying a comprehensive, integrated solution to meet them, and assisting with employee training.

Learn how Verizon can help accelerate and enhance your UCC strategy

IDG Communications, Inc.