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CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS

SMART GUIDE

In partnership with Alcatel·Lucent Enterprise

2018

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Alcatel·Lucent Enterprise

Everything Connects with Cloud Communications.

For a growing number of enterprises of any size, the question is no longer to decide whether they will shift communications services to the cloud, but when it will happen.

Urged by customer and employee demand, organisations are initiating their digital transformation, looking forward to harnessing the power of social, big data and cloud to reinvent the way they are engaging in business situations. Putting communications services at its centre.

Embracing the cloud to enter a world of untapped opportunities

Cloud is far more than an architecture: it has to be understood as a completely new business model which enables organisations to rethink the way they communicate with their customers, how they equip their employees with borderless and ubiquitous collaboration services, and ultimately how they adopt an outcome-based strategy for lasting, trusted and profitable relations.

While on-premises communications are generally limited to person-to-person interactions due to the limits imposed by the integration of technologies, Communication Platform as a Service (CPaaS) coupled with Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) expands the possibilities far beyond collaboration, making people, objects and processes communicate together. All this topped with a financial model which limits risk for enterprises, as they pay as they go, for what they consume.

This smart guide is aimed at helping you understand what benefits you can grab from the myriad of opportunities that cloud-based communications can offer to your organisation. It also details how it is possible to leverage your past investments while enjoying the power of the cloud with hybrid communications.

Finally, it will help you choose where to start and to then securely move forward. Digital transformation is a journey and cloud-based communications are its vehicle. You're in the driver seat.

Xavier Martin
VP Market Development
for ALE Communications
Business Division

WHAT IS CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS?

Cloud communications is a method of contact that uses internet connections instead of a standard PTSN.

With a cloud communications strategy, **every message** you send, **conversation** you have, and **video conference** you host works on **cloud-hosted technology.**

That means that there's no hardware to install, no physical lines to place in your building, and more opportunities for enhanced scalability and diversity in your communication strategy.

Cloud communications is more than just a hosted PBX or IP telephone. We're talking about a brand-new way to build, deploy and manage communication systems. Used correctly, the cloud reduces costs, provide high-definition services and offer platforms filled with advanced features perfect for empowering your team.

To help you understand the cloud a little better, let's take a look at some of the applications and services cloud vendors provide.

1 UC&C

As the modern workforce grows increasingly mobile, cloud communications break the chains between employees and their desks. In 2018, more than half of the employers **in an Upwork study** revealed that they didn't have the policies in place to support remote working, despite the fact that half of the workforce will be mobile by 2020.

Cloud communications solve this problem by providing staff with a rich selection of essential tools and applications, all available on the same platform, regardless of your location or the device you use. The cloud transforms the work environment from a traditional "place" into a series of empowering tools and ideals.

Businesses can provide their employees with instant access to:

Call analytics tools

Instant messaging

File sharing

Video conferencing facilities

Calendaring and scheduling

2 Analytics and Digital Engagement

Because the cloud can hold huge amounts of information from a variety of backgrounds, it's also ideal for analytics and business growth. With the cloud, companies can tap into analytical solutions from top-tier vendors and discover the benefits of everything from predictive analysis to natural language processing and sentiment analysis.

In a world where customer experience is the key to success, cloud communications makes it easier to improve the impact you're having on your clients through a broad selection of channels. Real-time communications play a significant role in core business processes of many industries and can, when integrated in applications, provide tangible outcomes for both organisations and their customers. You can integrate CRM software with your cloud communication services to get deeper insights. Many modern cloud communication services integrate with everything from machine learning, smart bots and AI services, to CRM solutions like Salesforce to improve digital and team engagement.

3 Contact Centre Features

The scalability and versatility of the cloud is perfect for the contact centre. Since an average call centre generally sees high levels of turnover, the presence of a cloud-based portfolio of tools in your organisation ensures that you don't have to spend too much time setting new employees up with the right tools. You can onboard new staff and scale your workforce up and down according to spikes in demand, all without additional CapEx costs.

The cloud also allows companies with contact centres to expand their offerings to customers, by giving them access to multiple channels for communication. You can offer your customers the answers they want, through the platforms they like best. This is another important way for today's brands to stand out in an experience-powered world.

NAVIGATING CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE PROVIDERS

For most companies, the path to cloud communications starts with finding the right service provider.

Cloud communications service providers or "CSPs" are your organisation's path to the cloud. CSPs are responsible for hosting your cloud platform and offering you the perfect "unified" solution for your cloud experience, so you don't have to worry about collecting different cloud features from multiple vendors.

As the cloud continues to rise in popularity, with a predicted **growth of 27% through 2021**, we're seeing an increasing number of CSPs on the market.

The question is, how do you choose the right service provider in such a cluttered space?

Examine Certifications and Standards

Choosing the right cloud communications provider in a vast market isn't easy. There are many players in this market so it's all about finding the solution that works best for you. To start with, make sure that you pick a provider that complies with recognised standards and quality frameworks.

For instance, look for a CSP with security certifications like 27001. Your cloud service provider should be able to provide a comprehensive list of their certifications.

Look at the Innovation Roadmap

Once you're sure your CSP is certified, make sure that the R&D roadmap for the cloud provider meets with your cloud objectives. It's important to choose a company that's devoted to constantly innovating and delivering new solutions for their customers.

One of the biggest benefits of the cloud is that it comes with the flexibility and scalability to help you maintain an agile business. However, you can only be truly agile with a provider that stays ahead of the curve and offers tangible outcomes for both your teams and your customers.

Consider Security and Data Governance

Data management is more important than ever these days. According to The Economist, the world's most valuable resource isn't oil anymore - it's data. Since your cloud communications strategy will involve uploading, storing and managing huge amounts of data in the cloud each day, it's important to ensure that data is safe.

Look at your opportunities for managing your data with each service provider, and how they can help you to comply with regulatory standards like GDPR. If you have specific requirements for your vertical, like healthcare and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), it's worth exploring your options there too.

Simplicity and Ease of Use

Whenever you're implementing a new communications strategy, the most important factor in success is ensuring that you're able to drive adoption. Even the most feature-rich and reliable solution will struggle to deliver benefits if you can't use it.

The right cloud communications service provider will be able to offer a rich and robust selection of cloud-based features that are easy to use and explore.

Some providers offer you free accounts for your teams to test before production. If you're looking for integrating cloud communications into CRM and business processes, have a look at the integration capabilities and references.

Reliability and Serviced Quality

Finally, reliability and service quality are two essential components in choosing any service provider. Your cloud solutions are critical to helping you achieve your goals, so you can't afford for an outage or a problem to disrupt your performance.

Check out the service availability track record of your cloud service provider from previous years and months and look at any information they have about redundancy options.

In most cases, the cloud can be much more reliable than on-premise equipment. However, it's important that your service provider has the right solutions in place to deal with issues as and when they arise.

Plans and Pricing

From a time that used to be ruled by capital expenditure, we are now in a world where more and more organisations are asking for consumption-based or subscription-based models.

You should pay attention to whether the plan includes domestic and long distance call traffic (local, national and international calls). Some providers will allow you to take advantage of your existing telephony infrastructure and SIP trunking services. This is especially cost efficient if you have multiple branch locations.

PBX vs. CLOUD

In business spaces across the world today, the communications environment is changing.

Rooms previously filled with black boxes and blinking lights are suddenly empty. Tethered desk phones are quickly being replaced with headsets and softphone setups. We're finally making the move to the cloud.

However, just because the cloud is more popular and accessible today than ever before, doesn't mean that it's the perfect solution for every business. While some companies are actively migrating towards the cloud as part of their digital transformation strategies, others are sticking with an on-premise PBX, either through choice or necessity.

So, how do you choose between a traditional PBX and the cloud? Can your cloud communications provider offer you Hybrid models to connect PBX and cloud?

Feature Sets

One of the most important components to consider in any communication strategy is the features you'll be able to access.

While many on-premise PBX phone systems come with a range of fantastic features like high-level security, data governance and more, the cloud tends to offer a broader range of features that make it much easier to connect mobile workers and geo-dispersed teams. Cloud based solutions enable integration to 3rd party solutions for data analytics, AI, bots, IoT and other modern technologies.

Because cloud service providers can constantly upgrade their offerings with the latest solutions without the need to install any extra hardware, the cloud does offer an easier way for companies to stay ahead of the technology curve.

Capital Expenditure

Capital expenditure or "CapEx" costs are another area where cloud services have a significant advantage.

Any on-premise solution for communications requires a business to shell out for hardware or virtualisation software. On the other hand, with cloud solutions, you only need to shell out for desktop phones, headsets, or softphones.

Instead of the standard upfront costs of traditional PBX solutions, cloud communications offer a switch to an "OpEx" operating model. You pay for what you use, and nothing else. However, this also means that if you're a large enterprise that's already paid out for an on-premise offering, you won't be ready to move to the cloud until you've recouped the costs of your initial investment.

You may also choose a hybrid model where cloud communications connect to your phone system: This allows you to take advantage of the latest cloud features and benefits, whilst mitigating the cost of a full phone system replacement.

> "For most organisations the cloud has become a no-brainer, but there are still a lot of questions from our customers on how they should start. Really only a few people know that they can continue to leverage their past investments by complementing their existing communication systems connecting those to cloud-based services such as Rainbow UCaaS. Doing so mitigates the risk while offering new enhanced services to their users without any massive investment nor rip-and-replace approach."
>
> **Nicolas Brunel, Executive Vice-President, Head of Communications Business Division, ALE**

Scalability and Versatility

Another advantage in the cloud technology court comes with scalability and versatility.

When it comes to creating a communication stack for your business, an on-premise PBX requires you to make estimations about what you expect to accomplish as a company. You need to know how many phones you need to have in the office at any given time, and what kind of software you plan on using with them.

Upgrading, scaling, or adjusting your communication strategy with a PBX system takes time. However, cloud based deployments are much faster and can be set up alongside your current system, ready for a seamless changeover. With cloud communications, the freedom is there to scale and upgrade as you see fit.

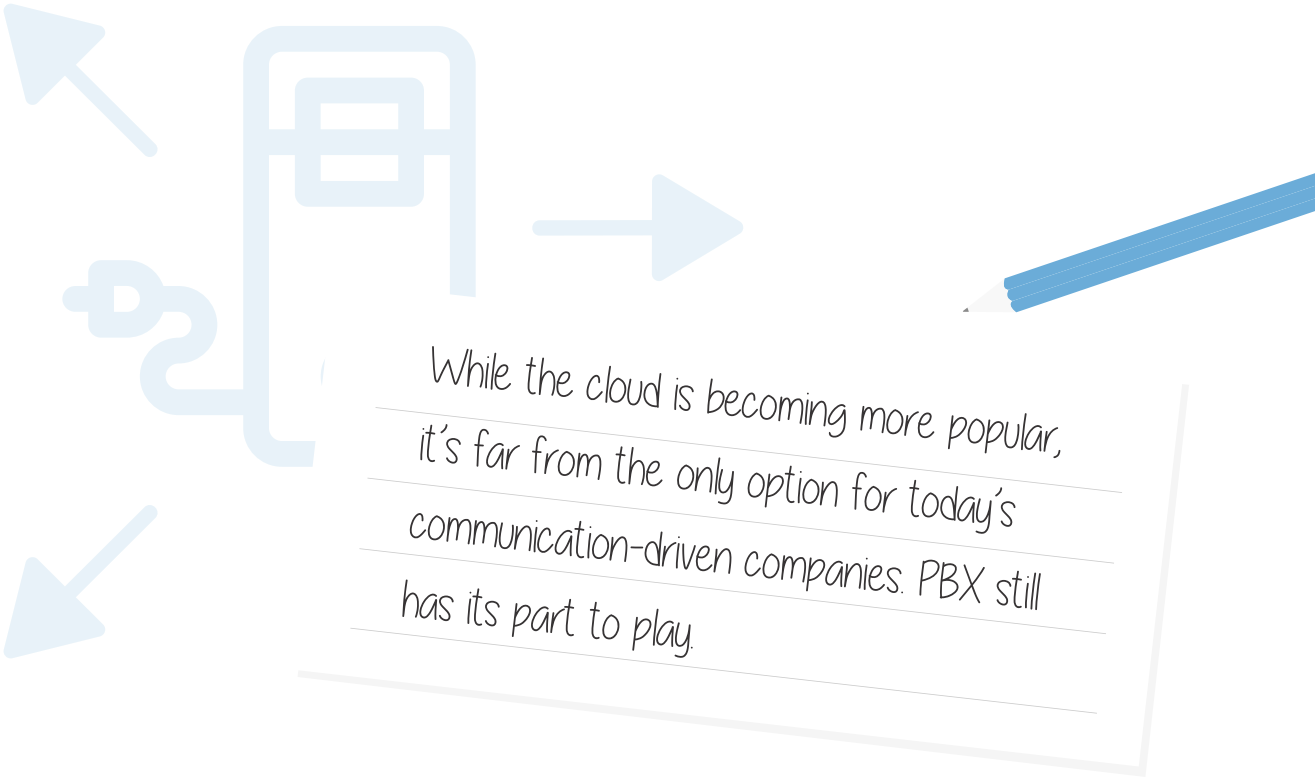
If you need more tools for your team, then you can implement them instantly, with very little downtime. If you need to scale back due to a drop in traffic, you can do that too.

> "Cloud Communications is a key ingredient for business agility. Never before have platforms been so simple to scale up and down – pay-as-you-grow beats investing your company's cash in unutilised capacity, any day of the week."
>
> Rob Scott, UC Today

MOVING TO THE CLOUD: IS IT AS SIMPLE AS IT SEEMS?

When you consider all the benefits of the cloud, switching away from an on-premise solution seems like an obvious choice.

However, larger enterprises with strict regulatory requirements, stringent security concerns, and existing investments may still find it easier and more cost-effective to host their own PBX on-site.



PRIVATE CLOUD vs. HYBRID CLOUD vs. PUBLIC CLOUD

Communication comes in many different forms.

Not so long ago, the only real options businesses had when it came to internal and external communication, were email and phone calls. Today, we've got everything from video conferencing, to Web Real Time Communication (WebRTC), instant messaging, and more.

Moving your communications to the cloud is one way to make sure that you build your communications around your methods of work, rather than approaching growth from the other way around.

The question is, how do you successfully deploy your new cloud-based strategy?

Deployment Options for Cloud Communications

Up until recently, there weren't many options available for deploying a business communications stack. The traditional model included a strong investment in PBX, and a lot of exhausting, and time-consuming hardware installations.

Unfortunately, while PBX systems have their advantages, they lack the scalability, agility, and mobility that many modern companies need. The cloud solves this problem, along with the issue of limited deployment models.

There are three primary methods of cloud deployment:

Public cloud | Private cloud | Hybrid cloud

Public Cloud Communications

Deploying your cloud communications strategy in the public cloud doesn't mean that anyone can access your conversation data. The public cloud is the most common communications deployment model for small to mid-sized businesses, and it simply means that you access the same cloud resources as a selection of other businesses.

Public cloud is available on a per-user, per-month basis, and it's often one of the cheapest models. However, your section of the cloud remains encrypted and secure for you, so you don't have to worry about losing access to information. Most public cloud services run on an "over the top" or "OTT" service.

Private Cloud Communications

Private cloud deployment models are most popular with larger companies, verticals with strict privacy policies (like healthcare) and government agencies. Private cloud communications access all the benefits of the cloud, along with a higher degree of security.

A private cloud communications service is managed by a solution provider and can also be offered on an "as a service" basis.

Private clouds are ideal for strength and security and can come with either a CapEx, or perpetual license model, or an OpEx model with recurring revenue features.

Hybrid Cloud Communications

This brings us to the most popular cloud communications deployment model: the hybrid cloud. The hybrid cloud is particularly popular today because it allows companies to access the "best of both worlds" for their communications stack. With a hybrid cloud, you can leverage your existing on-premise investments, while enjoying the flexibility and scalability of the cloud environment.

Some organisations use the hybrid cloud model as a transition strategy, helping them to move permanently from on-premise PBX to the cloud. However, the hybrid cloud model can also be an end strategy too. Some companies prefer the flexibility and security provided by the hybrid model. After all, it ensures that you can maintain absolute control over certain parts of your communication infrastructure, without having to give up on cloud resiliency and flexibility.

Hybrid cloud deployments are particularly popular among businesses who don't want to abandon their existing high-cost investments, but they do want to take advantage of the latest cloud capabilities on offer.

"Hybrid communications enable organisations to connect the ground – their on-premises equipment – to the cloud from where new services are made available on demand. Technology contingencies become transparent, wiping out all previous Unified Communications show-stoppers such as deployment, upgrade and maintenance costs."

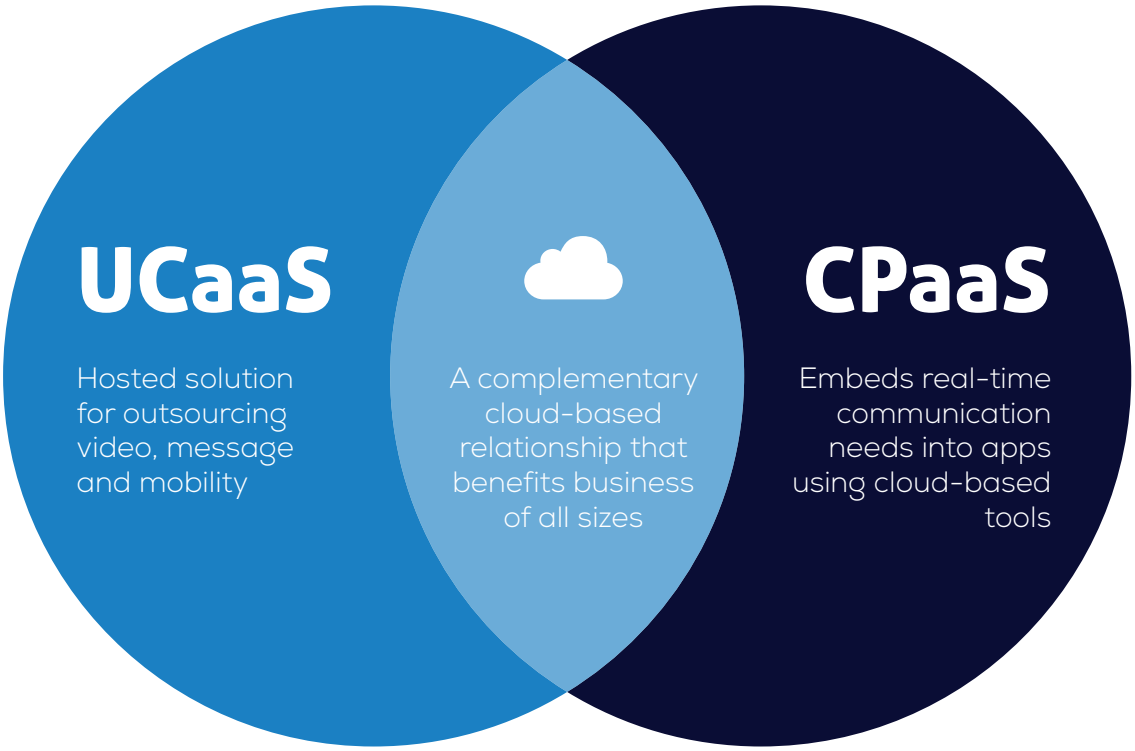
Jean-François Rey, Director, Product Marketing, Communications Business Division, ALE

UCaaS vs. CPaaS

As the communication landscape continues to change, the methods companies can use to access new trends and techniques are transforming with it.

Notably, the "as a service" model for communication deployments has grown increasingly popular in the modern world. In fact, there are so many "as a service" abbreviations in circulation, that it's hard to know for sure what these terms really mean.

If you want to make sure that you're taking the right steps with your cloud communications strategy, then it's important to know the difference between "CPaaS" and "UCaaS."



What is **UCaaS?**

Unified Communications as a Service or "UCaaS" is a fantastic hosted solution that allows companies to outsource their needs for video, messaging, and mobility to reliable third-party providers. UCaaS delivers the communication services you want most to you through an internet connection, ensuring that you get all the flexibility and scalability of the cloud.

However, while UC brings ready-to-go tools together on the same interface, the solutions you can access typically exist on a carefully designed platform, designed to give you the tools you need.

What is **CPaaS?**

CPaaS stands for "Communication Platform as a service," and it's designed to address the common integration issues presented by UCaaS. Essentially, you get access to a hosted platform that allows you to embed your real-time communication needs into applications using cloud-based tools. You can deploy apps that have already been built by someone else, or make your own services based on your specific needs.

Perhaps the biggest difference between UCaaS and CPaaS is the fact that the latter allows you to seamlessly integrate new communication needs into business applications that teams use to perform their tasks and into websites or mobile apps that your organisation provides to your customers.

CPaaS comes with support for various next-gen technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and WebRTC too, with no need to build out additional back-end infrastructure.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UCaaS AND CPaaS?

UCaaS is generally seen as the solution to consolidate existing conferencing, telephony, and collaboration services.

UCaaS provides users with a front-end interface that makes internal communication and external connections easier to handle. At the same time, CPaaS also offers video, voice, and messaging services. However, with CPaaS, the benefits rest largely on the use of APIs to create a more integrated experience.

Although CPaaS and UCaaS are different things, they don't always have to exist separately. In fact, the **relationship** between UCaaS and CPaaS **can be quite complementary.**

Often UCaaS will serve the needs of users and business units that require a 'ready to go' solution, whilst CPaaS will connect other people, processes and objects inside and outside of the organisation.

GLOBAL DEPLOYMENTS

The world we live in today is much smaller than it once was.

A few years ago, only the biggest and most well-established companies would have been able to launch and maintain a global presence for their brand. Now, thanks to cloud communications and the rise of collaboration tools, global deployments are more common than ever.

Even the smallest businesses can work with employees from across the globe by providing them with a set of cloud-based tools and communication strategies. Of course, just because globalisation is easier these days, doesn't mean you shouldn't plan your global deployments.

Here are a few points to keep in mind as you take your communication strategy worldwide.

Know what you need: Cloud communications, like any form of communication strategy, works best when it's built around the needs of your employees. To improve adoption across the globe, make sure you find a cloud UC strategy that's well-suited to the needs of your staff.

You can do this by assessing your current employees and finding out which tools they need to use every day. Create a list of applications that you need and try and find something that connects everything together into a unified platform.

Take language and other restrictions into account:
There are plenty of reasons to employee people from around the globe to help with your business growth strategy. For instance, you might need people in different countries to help you connect with broader markets as your organisation continues to develop.

When building a cloud communications strategy for your company, make sure that you take the needs of the workers outside of your country into account, as they may differ from the needs of people close to home.

For instance, contractors from overseas may need their tools to work in different languages or follow local federal guidelines and regulations.

Choose a partner that understands your global needs:
Globalisation is much easier with the support of an expert at your side. Look for a cloud communications vendor with experience spreading cloud solutions out across different countries.

Preferably, your vendor should have an in-depth knowledge of the regulations, requirements, and privacy expectations of each country you want to work in.

This will help you to make sure that your communication tools aren't going to harm your brand reputation or get your business into trouble.

Look for vendors with the right data centres: Reliability and resilience are key to a strong cloud communications strategy. When deploying your UC efforts in different countries, it's important to make sure that you have the support of a cloud vendor with data centres close to your users.

This should help to reduce issues of lag and packet loss. Check if your provider has the resources to support a globalisation strategy that includes the countries you're most interested in.

Make adoption easy: Finally, make sure that whatever your cloud communications plan is, you don't implement tools that are going to be too difficult for your employees to use.

As you deploy your cloud comms solutions around the world, make sure that you have the right resources packaged in with the tools to help your staff learn about the systems they're going to use.

"For example, we are using our own technology – some say we are flying our own jets – to support our customer engagement endeavors through the integration of chat bots in our websites. The cloud enables us to concentrate on the personalised experience we want to offer. We are global, but we know the importance of speaking the right language."

Yacine Mahfoufi, Director, Digital Marketing, ALE

REGULATIONS, RESILIENCE AND SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

These days, most companies understand the benefits of the cloud. It's scalable, flexible and doesn't require as much capital expenditure.

Of course, there are still some primary concerns that hold some organisations back from fully embracing the potential of cloud communications. The biggest issue of all for most businesses can be traced back to regulations, resilience, and security.

Though cloud security has improved significantly from the initial days of cloud deployments, some brands still believe that cloud-based communications can't be as secure as on-premise PBX systems. However, your cloud comms can be incredibly secure and resilient - all you need to do to ensure you're getting a robust system is your due diligence. Here are a few security considerations to keep in mind as you approach cloud communications.

Is the Data Centre Secure?

It's easy to assume that the cloud is some magical place in the aether, full of your communication data and customer information. However, the truth is that your vendor is responsible for hosting and storing your data on the cloud - and they're also responsible for keeping that information secure.

A credible cloud service provider will be able to provide you with evidence that their hosting package is secure, encrypted, and protected. It's worth checking that they have a backup policy in place too, in case disaster strikes.

Is Your Information Encrypted?

One of the things a cloud service provider can do to keep your data protected is encrypt everything that passes through the cloud. This ensures that everything, from your proposals and quotes to your private phone conversations with customers, is impossible to read without a security key.

That means that even if someone hacked into your cloud account, they wouldn't be able to read the data without your key. Certain regulations require a high level of encryption. For instance, HIPAA demands that all healthcare calls and messages are secured with encryption both in transit and at rest.

Do You Have Plenty of Control?

The best security strategies require work from both the side of the cloud communications provider and the company using cloud services. While your service provider can encrypt your data and offer firewall protection, it's up to you to make sure that your employees are using the tools available to them safely.

One good way to do this is to make sure that you choose a vendor with plenty of user management controls available as part of their cloud system. With the right access controls, you can access:

- Single sign-on features
- Two-factor authentication
- Strong password policies

Are You Protected Against Fraud?

Fraud continues to be a common security problem for both companies using cloud communications strategies, and those accessing traditional PBX. When looking for a cloud comms provider, search for someone who can offer you ways to defend against fraud. For instance, this could mean that your service provider constantly monitors your communications for anomalies or fraud indicators.

There are also APIs that can be built into cloud communication strategies for additional protection against toll fraud.

Is the Network Security Robust Enough?

Finally, in addition to the security policies that your company puts in place to safeguard data, it's important to ensure that your cloud communications vendor also has solutions in place to prevent attacks on your communication stack.

Network protections designed to defend your voice and data can help give you and your customers more peace of mind.

> "Our job is to make technology invisible to a business so they can concentrate on their objectives. Beyond the capabilities offered, latency, security and privacy are legitimate questions. We have strong credentials in that area and are continuing to innovate while addressing regulations."
>
> **Nicolas Morel, Chief Technology Officer, Communications Business Division, ALE**

CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Want to keep your small business connected?

Cloud communications have emerged as one of the most flexible and cost-effective ways for companies to stay in touch. Because they require very little initial investment, cloud communication services are ideal for smaller organisations driven by a restricted investment budget.

What's more, because most small businesses aren't restricted by too much complexity and legacy infrastructure investments, it's much easier for them to launch into the cloud.

Here are just some of the reasons why cloud communications can help small businesses to thrive.

Adopt Large Enterprise Capabilities on a Small Business Budget

The cloud offers unlimited access to all the latest tools and innovations in the marketplace.

This means that you can enjoy the same solutions as big enterprise competitors, without a huge initial outlay.

After all, most small businesses can see incredible benefits from services previously reserved for larger companies.

Whether it's video conferencing, contact centre tools, or auto attendant features, you can build the ultimate communication stack with minimal investment.

Scale on Demand

Small businesses don't stay small forever.

With the cloud, organisations can add new functionalities, accounts, and services to their communication stack as they begin to grow.

Scaling with the cloud is quick and easy because there's no additional software or hardware to install. A cloud communications stack can also be particularly useful for smaller businesses that see seasonal fluctuations in demand.

You can adjust to suit your needs instantly.

Embrace the Remote Revolution

With cloud-based tools for collaboration and communication, small businesses can keep their real-estate investments to a minimum.

The cloud provides a team with a broad selection of tools to access whenever they like, wherever they are.

This means that smaller companies can take advantage of freelancers and remote workers to keep expenses to a minimum.

When people work from home, there's less office space to pay for, the talent pool is greater and staff retention is improved.

Deliver Better Customer Service

When all your team members are empowered to work seamlessly anywhere, at any time, you can be far more responsive to the needs of your customers.

Your clients can contact you on a single number that follows your employees wherever you go. At the same time, cloud communications can spread across a range of channels, including video conferencing, instant messaging and more.

This means that employees can access a more diverse omnichannel communication experience, and your customers can too!

Enjoy More Resilience

Businesses of any shape or size need to be up and running constantly to provide the right experience for their customers.

The cloud can help with this resilience, by providing a host of redundancy and failover capabilities. When strong communications connectivity is always available, you never have to worry about losing your ability to do business.

The fewer disruptions you have, the easier it will be for your company to grow.

CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS FOR MID-MARKET ORGANISATIONS

Mid-market companies have an incredible opportunity for growth.

Although many people assume that small businesses are best-primed to enjoy the potential of the cloud, the mid-market segment is ready to thrive too. In fact, cloud UC penetration in the midmarket is expected to grow by **around 7 times by 2020**. This means that cloud UC is more popular in the mid-market than anywhere else!

Companies in the mid-market segment are in a perpetual state of growth - always looking for new ways to evolve. Here are just some of the ways that organisations in the mid-market space can benefit from the cloud.

Boost productivity: Every company thrives better when their employees are focused, engaged and productive. While there are countless ways to boost productivity in the average business, it all starts with giving your staff the right tools to thrive. Cloud-based communication ensures that teams and employees can access the applications they need to excel in their jobs. Mid-market enterprises can even assign specific UC tools to certain sections of the business, so that each team gets the services they need, without the threat of overwhelm.

Reduce costs: Small companies aren't the only organisations that need to cut costs. Mid-market businesses know that if they want to compete in the current marketplace, they need to generate high ROI for a low initial expense. The cloud is a powerful solution for cutting costs in some mid-market spaces. With the cloud, you can access all the tools you need instantly and pay only for what you use. For mid-market enterprises that want to compete in an ever-evolving market, the cloud reduces deployment costs, ongoing maintenance expenses, and capital expenditure.

Embrace the latest technology: Cloud communication services mean that the latest and most innovative technology isn't just reserved for large enterprises. Mid-market companies also want to be agile and creative. In the cloud, any shape or size of business can consider adding the latest services to their stack. For some mid-market enterprises, this might mean upgrading the contact centre with analytics and AI. For others, the cloud may simply open the door for better collaboration tools, or video conferencing services.

Attract the Best Talent: The mid-market is one of the spaces driving growth in economies around the world. For these companies to attract the best talent, they need to provide access to easy-to-use, on-the-go technology. With the cloud available to unlock the services and solutions that employees need to be more efficient and more engaged in the workplace, mid-market firms can continue to boost the economy and drive national growth.

Prepare for Expansion: Mid-market companies can easily expand beyond a single location, into spaces around the world. Cloud-based communication services are perfect for providing these firms with accessibility anywhere. A cloud communications stack ensures absolute productivity, with minimal IT intervention. Whether you're preparing for globalisation or embracing the rise of flexible schedules and remote working, the cloud allows for easy expansion.

CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS FOR ENTERPRISE

Finally, we come to the market sector that tends to have the most trouble with the move to the cloud.

Small and even mid-sized businesses can find it easier to move to the cloud for many reasons. They may be building their technology stack from scratch, which means they can embrace the cloud without wasting any on-premise PBX investment.

Additionally, small and mid-sized companies don't always face the excessive security concerns and privacy regulations that large enterprises deal with every day.

For a large enterprise, the move to the cloud is often met with hesitation. However, there are benefits available for those willing to move.

THE BENEFITS OF CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS FOR LARGE ENTERPRISES

For most companies, one of the biggest benefits of moving to cloud communications is the cost reductions available from embracing fewer hardware and maintenance costs. However, for enterprises already invested in on-premise PBX, this promise of eventual savings might not be enough.

Fortunately, there are other benefits offered by the cloud, such as:

The ability to offer a seamless customer experience:

Today's enterprises know that experience is the only way to compete in the modern world. A unified communications approach on the cloud allows a customer to enjoy an omnichannel contact experience.

Customers can switch between voice, email, and text, and service representatives can access the entire history of the conversation on a single app.

Scalability:

As enterprises continue to grow, they'll only need to pay for the number of users they need. As seasonality, growth, or turnover impacts the organisation, you'll only pay for what you use.

Enhanced security:

As enterprises continue to grow, they'll only need to pay for the number of users they need. As seasonality, growth, or turnover impacts the organisation, you'll only pay for what you use.

Investment protection:

If you've already invested in on-premises equipment, then a hybrid-cloud approach can pave the way to the cloud communications.

MORE THAN ONE WAY TO MOVE TO THE CLOUD

Although there are still hurdles holding some larger enterprises back from the move to the cloud, most companies agree that the cloud environment is the way forward.

The cloud is the only way to access the latest updates and innovations that today's agile enterprise needs to thrive. When you choose a cloud communication solution, you can ignore the headache of constantly dealing with software and hardware updates, but ensure you're still getting frequent boosts to your comms system.

As the possibilities of the cloud become increasingly competitive, more enterprise businesses will find themselves moving towards a flexible, scalable and integrated communications stack. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that they need to abandon the PBX entirely.

There are multiple ways to move to the cloud today, which can make life easier for an enterprise with existing investments. Plenty of vendors working with large enterprises offer hybrid services that integrate seamlessly with their on-premise technology. At the same time, you can implement your transitions as quickly, or slowly as you like. For the larger enterprise, the move to the cloud is all about creating your own perfect roadmap.

In a world where customer experience is the number one differentiator, UCaaS and CPaaS together are helping to improve customer engagement and collaboration.

CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS

BUYER'S CHECKLIST

Top 10 Things to Consider When Buying Cloud Communications

It's easy to see why CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS is so popular. Businesses are beginning to realise that if they want their teams to be empowered, productive and efficient then they need a lot more than just a telecommunications strategy.

They need cloud and mobile enabled web conferencing, remote working solutions, call analytics, messaging and tight integration with critical business applications. Today's companies need a host of tools and services designed to maximise worker performance, seamlessly curated into a single-pane-of-glass user experience.

As powerful as Cloud Communications can be in the right circumstances, it's important to remember that a careful implementation plan can make or break your strategy for success. Check out this top 10 buyers guide before you spend on your new cloud based collaboration and communication stack.

The popularity of Cloud Communications is **growing.**

1 Do You Have a Plan?

The most important thing you can do before you invest in Cloud Communications is make sure that you're doing it for the right reasons.

This means taking the time to define your business communication needs, and what you hope to accomplish for your teams. What are the communication and collaboration tools that your current users access every day? Which services could you implement to help them become more efficient and productive?

Look at:

- The people who will be using your Cloud Communications: Are they millennials ready to take on the latest tech trends? Are they teams or individuals who simply have a problem to solve?
- How you can improve current processes: Audit your existing collaboration strategies and ask yourself whether your people would benefit from file sharing, instant messaging, and other collaboration tools.
- The devices you need: Will you have to invest in headsets and desk phones to go alongside your Cloud Communications strategy? Would it be better to embrace Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), or will you equip your staff with smartphones and tablets?

2 What Will Your Deployment Method Be?

There are plenty of different ways to bring Cloud Communications into your ICT stack.

For smaller companies, startups, and innovators ready to launch a new communication strategy, a complete move to the cloud might be the ideal solution. In this case, you'll need to think about whether you're more comfortable using a "private" cloud, or a "public" cloud.

A private cloud can be offered on an "as a service" basis, with exceptional security, and plenty of great payment options to choose from. Alternatively, the public cloud is the most common model for small to mid-sized businesses, as it's cheap, effective and available on an "over the top" (OTT) basis.

For those who want to continue making the most out of their on-premise systems for as long as possible, hybrid cloud allows you to tap into the benefits of the cloud, while still using your on-premise PBX. Choose the model that suits your Digital Transformation (DX) roadmap, employee needs, and cloud goals.

3 Do You Need Contact Centre Functionality?

There are plenty of benefits to launching a Cloud Communications strategy. Unified Communications and Collaboration (UC&C) make it easier for your employees to communicate internally.

With Cloud Communications, staff can share files, host video conferences, and message each other instantly throughout the day. However, some Cloud Communications solutions come with extra solutions for those who want to focus on their external communications, as well as their internal strategies.

With contact centre functionalities, businesses of any size can access:

- Omnichannel capabilities to interact with customers on a range of platforms
- Call analytics and assessment tools
- Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and additional customer service solutions

If you're hoping to improve your Customer Experience (CX) strategy with Cloud Communications, then you'll need to find a vendor with contact centre solutions baked into their communications offering.

4 Will You Need Accessories with Your Cloud Communications Strategy?

If you're willing to support a BYOD approach to Cloud Communications, then you can keep your investment in hardware and endpoints down to practically zero.

However, most companies will need to consider at least a few accessories to go alongside their move to the cloud.

For instance, ask yourself:

- Will your employees need personal speakerphones so that they can access Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) conferences?
- For video conferencing, will they need cameras, speakerphones, and other accessories, like whiteboards and touch-screen file sharing devices?
- Will you need an ATA adapter to launch your VoIP strategy while maintaining your existing network?
- Will your contact centre staff and other employees need headsets, desktop phones, or softphones to handle customer and colleague calls?

Depending on what you want to accomplish with your Cloud Communications solution, you may prefer to stick to a simple selection of basic hardware. Some larger enterprises may consider setting up entire conference rooms or huddle rooms packed with useful hardware endpoints like webcams, digital whiteboards, and speakerphones.

5 Is Your Network and Internet Connectivity Ready?

This is one area that's incredibly easy to forget about when you're setting up your Cloud Communications strategy for the first time.

However, you can't have an internet-based communication stack if your network isn't secure, resilient and fast enough to support your employees. Before you start rolling out your new communication implementations, make sure that your network has the power to support your cloud contact end goals.

You should be able to speak to your network administrator about the capacity of your current connectivity environment. Make sure that you have enough data and redundancy available to host Cloud Communications solutions not just for the communications strategy you want to build now, but for the tools you might need in the immediate future too.

Remember, even the world's best Cloud Communications technology won't accomplish much if you don't have the infrastructure in place to support it. If you're uncertain about the scope of your connectivity, consider rolling your Cloud Communications services out slowly, and accessing new functionality when and as you need it.

6

Which IT Systems Will Your Cloud Communications Need to Integrate With?

Integration is one of the most crucial considerations for any Cloud Communications plan.

If you want your path to UC&C to be successful, then you need to make sure that your future tools will integrate with your existing stack. Integration goes beyond simply making sure that your new VoIP strategy will work with your existing conference phones or speakerphones.

There are plenty of resources that today's businesses use every day, so before you launch your Cloud Communications campaign, take the time to go through your technology assets and determine which of your tools your Cloud Communications services will need to integrate with to provide a truly "unified" experience.

Some solutions to consider include:

- Data storage and analytics tools
- Email and external communication services
- File storage and management systems
- CRM software
- Websites & apps
- IoT devices

If you're not sure which of your existing applications and IT systems need to integrate with your Cloud Communications stack, discuss your options with your IT team.

7 Will You Need CPaas? Does the Platform Offer an SDK?

As your business continues to grow thanks to Cloud Communications, you may find new requirements coming your way.

In the modern age of DX, it's crucial for today's companies to stay ahead of the curve. Implementing a Cloud Communications solution that you can build on and evolve to suit the needs of your business, is a great way to remain competitive.

CPaaS or **Communication Platforms as a Service** can offer Application Program Interfaces (APIs) for voice, messaging, contact centre and other services for your Cloud Communications stack. Choosing the right CPaaS provider, you can access Software Development Kits, (SDKs) which allow you to embed that communication technology into your existing business applications. This offers a more immersive and integrated experience, which can greatly improve your customer engagement.

For instance, you might integrate SMS notifications into your healthcare scheduling application, or you could implement IVR strategies into your contact centre. As new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT) and more continue to emerge in communications, a CPaaS service with access to SDKs ensures you have the flexibility to continue scaling and evolving.

8 Can You Trust the Provider?

When you're choosing the perfect Cloud Communications solution for your business, it's easy to get carried away looking at things like feature sets and possibilities.

However, if you can't work closely with your Cloud Communications provider, then you'll struggle to get the best experience from your technology stack.

Your communication strategy is what keeps your business up and running. Without communication, you can't connect with your customers and make sales, or help your staff members collaborate on projects. An unreliable Cloud Communications service could instantly bring your business to a screeching halt. That means that before you sign on the dotted line for any new technology, you need to ensure that you can trust your Cloud Communications provider.

Go online and investigate the history of the company you plan on working with. These days, it's much easier to find out whether a brand has a good reputation for positive customer service and support. While there are plenty of Cloud Communications providers out there, only a handful will be able to provide you with the constant guidance, and reliability you need. Check how many companies like yours the provider has supported in the past, and whether their deployments have been successful. The more you know, the more confident you'll feel as you roll out your new communication strategy.

9 What are the SLAs for Faults and Changes to the Platform?

Much of the work involved with finding the perfect Cloud Communications service provider comes down to doing your due diligence.

As you're looking for the ultimate communication and collaboration stack, make sure that you pay attention to the service-level agreements that you're agreeing to. For instance, you'll need to make sure that if there are any faults or issues with your platform, your supplier will be committed to getting your business back up and running as quickly as possible.

One of the great things about the cloud is that updates to your tools and resources can happen automatically. However, the last thing you want is for an update to start running when you're in the middle of a conversation with a client. Most Cloud Communications service providers will happily schedule your automated backups and updates to run outside of business hours so that you can keep disruption and downtime to a minimum.

Make sure that you thoroughly check through the SLAs provided by your service provider before you commit to anything.

- Can they offer 5 nines availability for peace of mind?
- Are they committed to a certain level of quality for your voice and video solutions?
- What are their responsibilities when it comes to making sure that you and your customers have the best experience?
- What are your responsibilities as a customer?

10 Will Your Users Need Training? Who Will Provide It?

Finally, the number one thing that will make or break the success of your Cloud Communications strategy is adoption.

If your employees don't feel comfortable using the tools that you implement, then they'll continue to use their own collaboration and communication systems instead. Not only does this make life harder for your CIOs, but it can also open the door for additional privacy and security concerns.

Once you've decided that you're ready to implement Cloud Communications into your business, you need to make sure that you have the right guidance and support systems in place to facilitate enterprise-wide adoption. For some of your staff, this could mean implementing training programs to help them get used to the new software.

Consider whether your team members will need help getting used to the new Cloud Communications technology you'll be introducing. If they don't understand the value of the tools you're implementing, or how they can use them, they'll simply avoid your new communication stack. If you do need training, find out whether the Cloud Communications vendor you're working with can offer that as part of your purchase. There are plenty of vendors out there today who can send experts to your office or provide online training sessions for people who need a little extra support.

Making the most of your Cloud Communications stack today means considering your existing technology, the needs of your employees, and the DX goals of your enterprise. Implement the right plan, and you'll find that Cloud Communications can boost your business culture, enhance productivity and generate better customer experiences in no time.

CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS

FAQs

Q: What is the Cloud? How Does it Work?

A: The cloud can be difficult to understand, particularly for people new to the technology world. In simple terms, the cloud is a network of strategically connected servers that allow businesses to access software, and store huge amounts of data online. With cloud communications, instead of hosting your PBX system within your own business premise, your VoIP and other communication solutions are hosted in a remote location. Another key difference is cloud services are subscription based, therefore pay monthly as opposed to paying upfront.

Q: What is the Difference Between OpEX and CapEX?

A: The switch away from "CapEx" cost models to "OpEx" solutions is one of the reasons why companies find the cloud so appealing. Capital expenditure, or CapEx, refers to the money businesses spend on physical goods and services. The price of this initial investment is generally spread out over multiple years to enhance ROI. For instance, CapEx costs in communication may include PBX systems, desk phones, conference rooms and so on.

Alternatively, OpEx costs are the day-to-day operating costs of running a business. These are often more manageable than CapEx costs and easier on cashflow. For instance, OpEx fees might include the per-month, per-user costs of the SaaS delivered applications such as a cloud phone system or a cloud CRM.

Q: What are UCaaS and CPaaS?

A: The "as a service model" has grown increasingly popular in the age of cloud communications. UCaaS, or Unified Communications as a Service allows you to tap into a platform packed with UC services like video conferencing, instant messaging and VoIP tools.

CPaaS, or "Communication Platform as a Service" provides companies with an opportunity to embed the communication services they need into their business-critical applications and workflows. The key difference between UCaaS and CPaaS is that the latter uses APIs and SDKs to allow brands to integrate new communication services into existing technology stacks.

Q: What is an API?

A: An API, or an "Application Program Interface" is a specific set of protocols, tools, and routines used by developers to simplify the process of building and customising software. In the cloud communications environment, APIs help developers to create deeper integrations between the business applications users access each day. APIs are a core component of CPaaS platforms.

Q: What is QoS? (Quality of Service)

A: The term "PBX" frequently appears in any discussion about communication. PBX stands for "Private Brand Exchange," and it's the private telephone network you use to serve the employees in your organisation and your customers. Traditional phone lines provide on-premise PBX equipment within your business location. However, for companies who require a greater level of flexibility and scalability, cloud providers can offer virtual PBX through an internet connection.

Q: What is a PBX?

A: Contact centres are one of the biggest adopters of UC&C technology. While chatbots, FAQs, and other services are beginning to reduce the number of people getting through to contact centres these days, the calls that do get through can be more complicated and require specific assistance from the right agent.

UC&C technology allows agents to collaborate with various departments quickly to solve customer problems. By ensuring strong cross-departmental interactions, UC&C technology can help companies to deliver better customer experiences.

Q: What is WAN and SD-WAN?

A: In the UC&C space, interoperability is the process of making sure that your UC&C services work perfectly alongside your other systems. Interoperability can include ensuring that your new UC&C services work with your existing call recording systems, video conferencing endpoints or peripheral devices. On the other hand, you may need your software to integrate with other tools you're using in your technology stack, like CRM systems and Email services. Interoperability helps to ensure that a UC experience is truly "unified," and contributes to a single-pane-of-glass UX.

Q: What is BYOD?

A: Cloud communications offers plenty of unique options when it comes to hardware and end-points. One growing trend in the age of remote and flexible working is the rise of Bring your Own Device, or "BYOD" strategies. BYOD campaigns encourage employees within a company to work on any device they choose. This means that they can access the same corporate tools on their personal tablet, laptop, or smartphone.

While BYOD systems require careful privacy and security measures, they can reduce costs and improve employee productivity. The nature of the cloud makes BYOD easier, by ensuring that every employee has access to the same tools on any device.

Q: What is Session Border Control (SBC)?

A: Although the cloud is more secure today than it once was, it still comes with several privacy and safety concerns for companies to think about. UCaaS providers can offer a host of security solutions designed to provide today's firms with peace of mind. One solution is "Session Border Control" or SBC.

Designed to work alongside SIP strategies, an SBC service manages the flow of the information on your IP network, acting as a firewall for your network. Because SBCs control the data coming in and out of your network, it can reduce many of the security concerns associated with cloud communications.

Q: What is SIP?

A: SIP, or Session Initiation Protocol is a type of signalling technology used in cloud communications to initiate voice, video, and messaging sessions. SIP provides secure real-time connections between endpoints in an IP network.

Q. What is WebRTC?

A: WebRTC (RTC stands for Real Time Communications) is a recent technology which allows voice and video communication directly through a web browser.

It's a technology that allows unified communications vendors to stream conversations through a web browser without the need for locally installed software. Therefore, WebRTC requires little or no setup and anyone with an internet browser can gain access to a VoIP call or video conference in seconds. End users can choose to work on virtually any device or operating system.

Q: What is Globalisation?

A: Globalisation is one of the trends pushing the rise of UC&C and cloud communication strategies. The term "globalisation" refers to the way that markets in the global economy are merging together today, breaking down geographical borders. As more companies expand across seas and invest in strategies with remote, global workers, cloud communications will be essential to ensuring that everyone stays connected.

Q: What is Digital Transformation (DX)?

A: Digital transformation refers to the journey that many of today's companies are taking towards digital processes, activities, and models. There's no one-size-fits-all path to digital transformation, but many organisations agree that embracing the cloud is an important part of a DX strategy. With digital transformation, firms empower their staff with the latest technology in strategic and personalised ways, to deliver better business results.

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