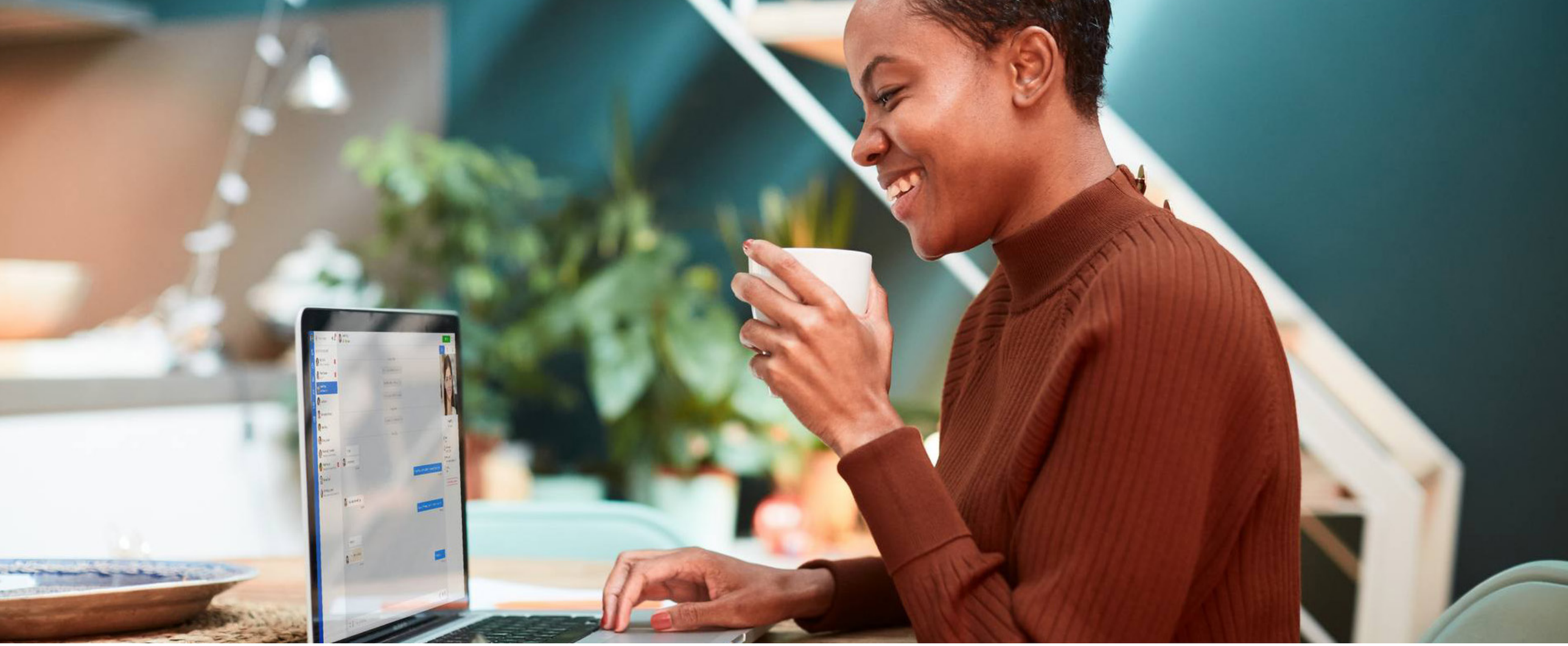


Enterprise communications in the new normal era

Alcatel·Lucent Enterprise

eBook

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Overview

In the first half of 2020 the term ‘unprecedented’ has become a cliché.

The way we lived, shopped, and worked was suddenly flipped upside down. The global health crisis meant that almost overnight, entire businesses were forced to close their doors, and families were asked to stay in their homes.

Enterprise communications was one of the many areas that incurred a significant impact from this new environment. Many contact centers have struggled to withstand the massive increase in demand. At the same time, companies have discovered that they were unprepared to continue operating in an environment where the traditional office wasn’t an option.

As the world begins to find its footing again and countries gradually re-open for business, all organizations need to have a plan. Today’s market leaders must ensure that they are prepared to deliver the experiences employees and customers expect.

How companies deliver communications going forward will have a significant impact on their future.



The new workplace: The rise of teleworking

The pandemic lockdown has triggered a massive transformation in today's businesses on multiple levels. Instantly, teleworking and remote working practices increased overnight. Companies acknowledged that the only way to ensure business continuity in this time of crisis was to allow employees to work remotely.

Although for many organizations the move to teleworking went well (considering the circumstances), there are pitfalls that business leaders need to be aware of. The transition to a post-pandemic remote working environment will require a structured approach and proper planning.

While the circumstances were unfortunate, companies have had the chance to discover the benefits of remote working[1] and it's unlikely we'll see a full-scale switch back to the old way of doing things. The workplace is officially no longer a specific place. Team members can be productive from anywhere with an internet connection and the right communication services.

Business leaders preparing for the new normal need to recognize that remote working will still be a valuable strategy in the future. That means, this is the perfect time to begin building the tools your teams will need for a long-term, flexible work environment.

As you prepare to return to the office the aim shouldn't be to rush everyone back to their position behind the desk as quickly as possible. The slow 'return to work' planned by governments around the globe would make this impossible anyway. Instead, take the time to consider which tools have helped your employees accomplish the most over the last couple of months.

Ask yourself how you can improve your remote technology stack to deliver better outcomes for your employees. Feedback from your team members, combined with adoption data gathered from your collaborative and cloud-based tools will be valuable here.

1 https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/coronavirus-covid19-remote-working-office-employees-employers



Prepare for the future

Experts believe that for the foreseeable future businesses will rely on remote working strategies for at least a portion of the workforce, with more than two-fifths of the workforce[2] remaining remote. As you may already have noticed in the last few months, remote working has a lot of benefits. Aside from offering business continuity in a time of crisis, a cloud-based workplace and remote working can also improve productivity and employee satisfaction.

With the right remote working strategy businesses can also cut office overhead costs. This is sure to be essential in an uncertain economy. The question is, how do you ensure you have the right technology?

It is important to recognize that while both corporate telephony and team collaboration are essential in this new environment they are still two different elements.

- **Telephony:** Voice will still be responsible for the bulk of business communications. Your remote teams will need access to the same full set of feature-rich business phone tools that they had in the office, when working from home. Leverage your existing communication infrastructure where you can and consider the benefits of moving to the cloud for flexibility. You might also need to provide your team members with efficient desk phones or soft phones to suit their needs. Reinforce mobility by giving employees access to voice mail, call management and other tools in a flexible way.
- **Collaboration:** A collaboration strategy will fall within your Unified Communications (UC) and Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) investment. Before you begin your transition to the new normal take this opportunity to think about how you are delivering collaboration services to the workforce. A cloud-based approach will help you to prepare for the future. However, you may need to combine offline and online collaboration tools. Offline collaboration tools might include file sharing and room discussions, while online opportunities will include video calls and desktop sharing.

2 https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252481579/Coronavirus-More-than-two-fifths-of-employees-likely-to-continue-remote-working-after-pandemic

Transform remote enterprise services

The global pandemic lockdown has highlighted a tremendous demand for efficient digital services. Most businesses were required to close almost overnight. However, even with physical stores closed, business still needed to provide support to their customers. Many businesses, particularly those in the travel, healthcare, and retail industries, received thousands of enquiries about purchases.

Although the demand on your company might not be as dramatic as the pandemic lockdown eases, you will still need a strategy for making customer service more efficient. This includes finding a way to continue to serve clients with a workforce disseminated across multiple remote locations.

To succeed in the new normal businesses need:

- **To provide their workforce with the right tools:** Employees in contact with customers need the same communication and customer service applications they needed when they were in the office. Cloud technology will make it easier to deliver the same technology in any environment.
- **Reinforced multichannel capabilities:** Peaks in customer demand triggered by an increase in voice calls generate longer call queues. This means that some consumers are beginning to seek service elsewhere. Multichannel capabilities will be necessary to provide a consistent customer experience in every environment.
- **Integration with business applications:** A future digital service strategy must integrate with existing business applications that employees are already using. This could mean finding a service that integrates with your CRM or ticketing tools.
- **Strengthened self-service:** Clients who may not be able to access an enterprise's services as quickly as they'd like may opt for self-service. This means having the right tools in place. This includes intelligent chatbots for websites and IVR with intelligent routing for voice.
- **Improved back-end collaboration:** Agents are more efficient when they work together as a team. A good collaboration solution ensures that employees can work together on complex problems. Integration with UCaaS through open APIs and Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS) solutions is essential. This will mean you can combine the back-end and front-end of your communication strategy.

Deliver the service that clients expect

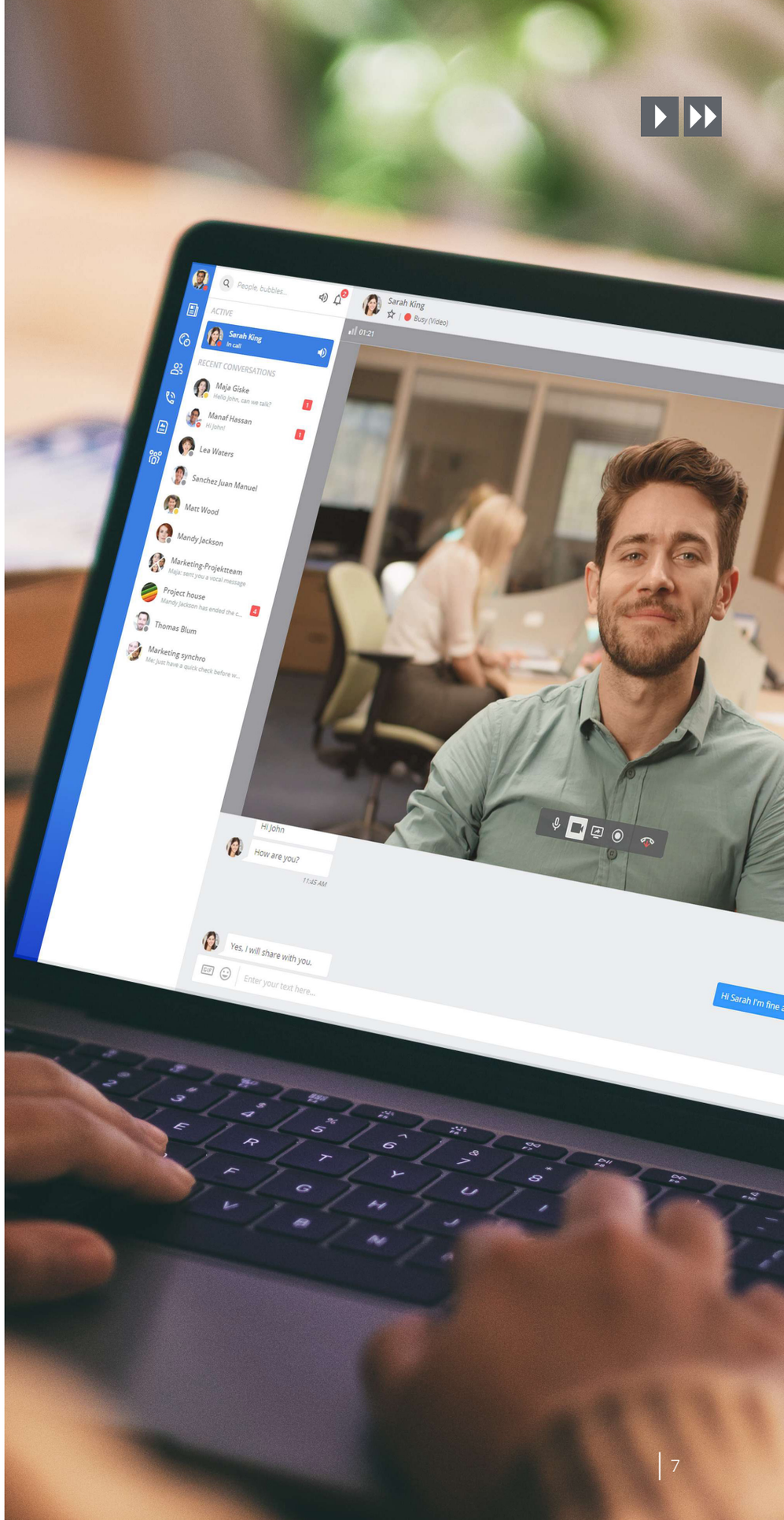
Even before the health crisis, research from PwC found that 59% of global customers felt companies were losing touch with the human element of their service strategy and 75% of the customers surveyed in the same report said that they still wanted to interact with a human being rather than an automated machine.[3]

The right blend of self-service options and multichannel customer support systems can allow you to better address the needs of all customers. Just ensure you don't over-automate in an effort to keep costs low. The new normal will likely highlight the need for a human touch in customer interactions more than ever.

Moving forward in the new landscape, businesses will need to ask themselves what customers need from them today and tomorrow. Self-service might not be what customers want when the return to the workplace first begins. However, at later stages, when things start to feel more normal, clients may be more likely to return to self-service habits if it means saving time on their customer journey.

As always, building customer loyalty in the months and years after the global health crisis will start with customer journey analytics. Gathering insights from your UC and contact center tools will be essential in helping to determine what your customers need most from you. With the decline of global economic spending it is more important than ever for business leaders to create new ways of building customer loyalty.

Intelligent tools that you use to improve customer conversations, such as client analytics and chatbots, can offer insights. Don't underestimate the power of your information. That data can also help you anticipate what comes next.



3 https://www.pwc.com/us/en/advisory-services/publications/consumer-intelligence-series/pwc-consumer-intelligence-series-customer-experience.pdf



Learn from a unique experience

The global pandemic has been one of the most significant events in our history. This means that it also provides an opportunity for businesses to learn and grow.

Virtually every leading analytics company agrees that the world has changed drastically in the last few months. The contactless era for digital customer engagement has arrived at an incredible pace. Now companies are under pressure to catch up to the needs of a customer base that has evolved much faster than anyone expected.

We don't know what the future holds after the pandemic. However, our experiences in the last few months will act as valuable lessons for how to prepare for the future. Now is the time for organizations to think about how to ensure they are prepared for the next crisis. After all, the future is never set in stone. There could be a financial crisis or another health crisis in just a few years.

This is a significant opportunity for everyone to learn what's worked over the last few months, and what needs to evolve to prepare for the years ahead. For instance, the first and most important task for a lot of companies will be developing their remote working strategies. Clearly, remote working isn't just a strategy for the future anymore. Companies will need to prepare for ongoing teleworking in the future to ensure true business continuity.

At the same time, it's important to rethink the customer experience, and what that will mean in the years ahead. For many businesses this means taking new steps toward a digital transformation strategy. For years now, an excellent customer experience has been the leading differentiating factor for any business. However, we now know for certain that when all else fails, superior service can keep a business's lights on.



Set your customer experience to the next level

Aside from enabling remote working, customer experience and employee experience are the two most significant concepts to consider in the new normal era. Following are four things businesses will need to think about:

- **Cloud:** All services that companies offer going forward need to be accessible from anywhere and at any time. This is only possible with the flexibility of the cloud.
- **Information:** All information, from historical records to sentiment analysis and customer profiling is valuable. This information helps to put every interaction in context.
- **Mobility:** All services need to be accessible from every device. This means ensuring that customers can reach you even on their smartphone.
- **Social (collaboration):** When employees collaborate effectively on the back-end, they can provide better customer experiences.

This is an excellent opportunity for companies of all sizes to take note of what's working for their business and what isn't. Outdated processes will require a redesign and new goals will emerge, such as how to keep employees connected and mentally healthy. After all, your employee experience is essential in delivering a good customer experience.

If employees don't get the support they need from you the tools you provide, then they can't meet your customers' needs. In recent months, the focus on employee safety and wellness has increased drastically. Companies will need to continue committing to looking after their team members in the months ahead.

When and if people return to the office, business leaders need to ensure that the workplace is safer and more welcoming. There needs to be more alarming, notification, and emergency solutions in place to help team members deal with issues when they arise. Additionally, a new approach to things like sharing equipment and terminals will be required. Business leaders will need to think about how they can protect employee health.

If you take this opportunity to move into the new age of communications, informed and aware of where you need to grow, the potential for your business is unlimited.



We are Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise.
We make everything connect by delivering technology that works, for you. With our global reach, and local focus, we deliver networking and communications.
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