



The Unified Communications Buyer's Guide: Four Steps to Prepare for the Modern, Mobile Workforce

Not all that long ago, the word “office” had a pretty straightforward meaning. When you heard it, you’d think of the physical headquarters for a business, one with assigned desks, phones, and computers for all of the company’s employees. From 9am to 5pm, those desks would be occupied, and beyond those hours, they would be empty. There would be exceptions, sure, but for your average office, these standards would hold true.

Now, the old, traditional office is increasingly becoming obsolete. There is a new way of office work, and it is mobile, decentralized, and less rigid. To meet the needs of this evolving trend, businesses need to embrace robust unified communications solutions, or else risk falling behind their competitors. Here, four key steps to keeping up with the times.

1. Embrace the New Definition of Office

The modern “office” isn’t a single office at all. Instead, employees are based out of a wide range of locations, from their homes to satellite offices to the road. This presents both challenges and opportunities. On the positive side, employees can remain productive at virtually any time. The rules for work are more flexible, meaning employees can enjoy more freedom in their work lives. This makes them happier, more productive, and more likely to stay with a given firm for a long period of time.

One of the challenges, though, is ensuring a disparate workforce can still communicate and collaborate just as effectively now as they could in the old, everyone-under-one-roof office days. To achieve this goal, robust UC tools are essential. With UC, an employee can participate in a project virtually, contributing to his or her utmost ability without the need to arrange for a physical, in-person meeting. Sophisticated audio and video conferencing solutions further improve the ability for a remote worker to check in with superiors and collaborate with colleagues.



The term “office” is much harder to define than it was 20 years ago.

To experience these benefits, business decision-makers must choose the right UC solutions for their organizations. Selecting a sub-par offering will compromise employees’ ability to perform their job functions in this new, flexible office-lite paradigm. For example, many consumer-grade offerings lack the robust security features necessary to keep corporate data safe. That means a business using such tools may not be able to offer complete access to company assets for its remote workers.

Choosing a robust, high-quality UC solution can ensure that no matter where employees are, they can utilize the full range of corporate resources, maximizing their performance and job satisfaction.

2. Empower Remote Workers

Unified communications has made it possible for employees to work effectively even when outside the office, which has big implications for business leaders. Most significantly, younger professionals are not only aware of remote work, but actually expect to have the ability to telecommute part-time or full-time. Business leaders that don't recognize and adapt to this trend will have trouble attracting and retaining the most talented up-and-coming employees.

Yet remote work is still a fairly new concept, and it presents challenges for organizations, not the least of which is the issue of hiring. How can you tell whether a new worker will remain productive and responsible when based outside the office?

Here are a few ways:

- **Background Matters.** Naturally, hiring managers always look at potential employees' backgrounds before they make a decision. But when it comes to employees who will be operating off-site, their backgrounds become even more important. To employ a remote worker, you need to trust that the employee can operate without the normal level of in-person supervision and oversight. An applicant's background can tell you a lot about whether he or she is likely to thrive under these conditions. The key thing to look for is demonstrated responsibility. You want your remote workers to have handled positions in the past where they were largely operating independently. Freelancing and other self-employed experience is a good indicator that the worker can be trusted to remain productive even if he or she is telecommuting.



Employees who work remotely need to be empowered, but they also need to be monitored upon starting.

- **Reasons Why.** Another major factor to take into account is the applicant's motivation. Why does he or she want to work remotely? Don't assume – you should actually ask candidates to explain their reasoning. In some cases, those reasons won't be particularly satisfactory. If applicants say they want to sleep in later or don't like to work with other people – well, those are obviously red flags. Applicants that say they will be more productive by eliminating their commutes and creating their own schedules, on the other hand, may be better suited for remote work.

- **Trial and Error.** Most importantly, business leaders need to closely track remote worker performance, especially at the outset. For these arrangements to work, managers need to ultimately trust their employees – but this trust needs to be earned. It's wise to keep fairly close tabs in the early stages until the remote worker proves his or her productivity and responsibility.

3. Watch What the Kids are Doing – and Take Notes

A lot gets said about millennials, especially by those who are not millennials themselves. You'll hear about how entitled they are, and lazy, and apathetic. And so on. While most of these sentiments don't have any truth to them, it is true that millennials differ from earlier generations in a fair number of ways, including their approach to work. But lambasting them isn't likely to have any real impact. On the contrary, it's businesses that need to change their ways in order to accommodate tomorrow's workforce.

Cloud telephony can and should play a major role in these efforts.

One of the most significant differences between millennials and older workers is that the former group expects their jobs to be a lot more flexible. In their minds, the idea of being in the office at 9 and out at 5 is rather outdated. Instead, they want to be able to set their own hours and, critically, to work remotely at least occasionally. They have the mindset that as long as the work gets done (and done well), it shouldn't matter where or when it happens.

If an organization wants to attract and retain the most promising up-and-coming workers, it can't afford to ignore these trends. Sticking to the old management style will make a business less appealing to the most highly sought-after young professionals. Instead, candidates will take positions at your more accommodating competitors. Not a desirable outcome.

With a cloud-based unified communications platform, businesses can accomplish two key goals. First, the workforce gains access to a wide range of robust collaborative solutions. Second, these tools are available at all times, even when workers are operating outside the office.



Young employees often set the trend in terms of modern work practices.

Cloud telephony solutions are reliable and easy to deploy, and they allow managers to monitor worker output and engagement. With all of these capabilities, allowing employees to work remotely is no longer worrisome – it's standard operating procedure.

4. Accept the Fact That Ready or Not, BYOD is Coming

How long has it been since you've played hide-and-seek? Unless you're a relatively recent parent, then it's probably been quite a while. But hide-and-seek is a skill that doesn't really go away. If a game were to suddenly start up in your office, you'd probably get back into the swing of it pretty quickly.

The thing is, this might have already happened – you just may not have noticed. The key difference is that it's not people who are hiding, but employees' personal devices. And if you don't catch them, the consequences will be a lot more serious than a bit of good-natured ribbing.

Fortunately, there's another option available: embracing BYOD. When your company accepts BYOD and starts to support it, rather than demonize it – well, that's a game changer.

Let's step back a moment and look a little more closely at how a non-BYOD office is a lot like a game of hide-and-seek. In these scenarios, the business does not officially allow workers to use their personal smartphones and tablets to access corporate assets or perform work-related functions. That means that company leaders and the IT department will be tasked with finding out who is violating this rule.

Unlike your standard hide-and-seek, though, this is a game that you, as the decision-maker, cannot win. There are just too many players involved. Employees increasingly see BYOD as the standard, and they will largely ignore rules that forbid such efforts. Furthermore, there are no physical boundaries. When you played hide-and-seek in the neighborhood, were the players allowed to hide in their homes? No way – that'd be unfair. But BYOD will happen in employee's homes, as well as their cars, hotels, and beyond.

Lastly, there's no end to this game. If an employee is caught, he or she doesn't sit out until the next round. There is no next round. This is an ongoing situation, and there will always be more devices hiding on your corporate network. As time goes on, this situation will inevitably increase the risk of a data breach or other security event. Eventually, your company's luck will run out.

If you embrace BYOD whole-heartedly, though, the odds can suddenly swing into your favor. Instead of searching in vain for an endless number of potential threats, your employees will step forward and reveal which devices they use for work. Your IT team can then take the appropriate steps to mitigate risk and maximize worker productivity and flexibility.



Instead of being a threat to workplace autonomy, BYOD can help your employees become more efficient.

ABOUT THINKINGPHONES

ThinkingPhones is helping enterprises evolve their communications capabilities to meet the realities of today's increasingly global, mobile, visual, social, and distributed knowledge workforce. Our cloud communications ecosystem allows organizations with multiple locations and hundreds or even thousands of employees to improve collaboration, access applications securely from anywhere, and significantly improve business processes – all while reducing business costs.

As a Gartner, Inc. Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) Magic Quadrant "Leader," our agile and scalable software platform has been recognized for its innovation, for its breadth and scope, for its cost effectiveness, and for the extensive collaborative benefits it provides to our enterprise customers.

Where would you like the cloud to take your communications today?