

# NOW IS THE TIME FOR YOUR ENTERPRISE TO ADOPT AN OPEN COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORM

One area I cover closely as a tech analyst is workplace productivity solutions. While perhaps it's easy to take for granted the tools we all use on a daily basis, businesses' success ultimately depends on the ability of its employees to communicate and collaborate effectively and productively. It's communication that makes a team a team. I initially got into the world of productivity solutions through packages, such as Office 365, which led me to popular chat solutions, such as Slack and Teams. From there, my research led me to the field of UC, or "unified communications."

Today there are many mediums utilized for enterprise communication, including real-time methods such as voice calls, instant messaging, audio/web/video meetings, contact center software, desktop and data sharing, voice and speech recognition, and static mediums such as email and voicemail. Furthermore, out of the many different forms of enterprise communication out there, a single organization may employ a wide variety, depending on the differing needs of each department and role. UC seeks to unite these different tools into one, readily accessible open platform, with a common UI and experience across all devices. Let's take a look at this topic, and why now might be a good time for enterprises to take a harder look at UC.

## THE NEW OFFICE

Frankly, communication methods have never been more crucial to business operations than they are now. Mandatory Covid-19 shutdowns across the world forced businesses to figure out how to support a remote workforce (many for the first time) or shutter their doors entirely. The physical workspace known as "the office" has ceased to exist for many, forcing workers to shift to apps on PCs and mobile devices and replace physical infrastructure and processes. Businesses are depending heavily on their patchwork of communication tools to keep things up and running remotely.

While many will say this development presents a positive, even inevitable change of work norms, I would argue that this comes at the price of losing some of the company culture and connectedness that comes from being in the same physical workspace. No longer can you wander around the office and wave at people, or stand around and chitchat beside the actual water cooler. In the digital world, working remotely, you might have a conversation over chat, but once it's over, you get up and go make a sandwich

and that's that. When you're in the office, you might run into that person in the elevator 30 minutes later and circle back to that conversation. Human communication is not a static, linear thing. It's comprised of many different ongoing conversations, both planned and spontaneous. So, the question is, how does one replicate that and maintain the same levels of connectiveness and continuity in communication in the new digital office? Could it perhaps even be improved upon, with the ability to archive all conversations, planned and spontaneous?

## STREAMLINE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

One of the answers, I believe, lies in unified communications. In my mind, the benefits of these solutions can be broken into three areas. First, a unified communications platform gives workplaces a common communication experience where anyone can access any employee through a common directory. That includes everybody—not just knowledge workers, but *everybody* in an organization. Everyone is on the same cloud platform, regardless of what communication mediums they prefer. Line workers may only utilize a phone and a chat platform while at work. A receptionist, on the other hand, very well might only use a phone. An agent at a contact center may utilize contact center software as well as voice, and team chat. Meanwhile, knowledge workers might use phones, chats, video conferencing, etc. An ideal UC platform can provide whatever combination of communication capabilities they need for these different roles, in a single app experience, instead of employing a patchwork of disparate, incompatible platforms. Ideally, the platform would also have seamless integration with other business apps like Salesforce.com.

The second selling point of UC lies in its ability to bolster enterprise security. With so many people suddenly working from home, being supported by organizations that, in many cases, have never had to support remote workers before, comes a radically expanded threat surface. It's one thing to secure your on-prem infrastructure—making sure your employees can work securely from anywhere, on any device, is a whole different animal. By consolidating all of your organization's communications into one platform, there are significantly fewer cracks, or edges, for cybercriminals to find and exploit. You only have one platform to secure, so you can focus all of your resources there.

The last selling point—and this is a big one—is data. If an organization employs multiple communication platforms, it runs the serious risk of creating so-called “data silos,” where one department may have trouble accessing and using the data generated by

another department. On the other hand, when all of an organization's communication is happening on one cloud platform, all of the data from these correspondences is stored in one place. This makes it easier to analyze and mine this rich data for insights, which can be leveraged to improve business efficiency, performance and customer experience. No matter what industry you're involved in, I truly believe that the ability to collect and analyze internal data will become table stakes for businesses hoping to remain competitive in a digitally transformed world. Communication data is ripe for this, as it can help businesses streamline and optimize the way their teams work and communicate together for the best possible results. A team that communicates better performs better.

## 8X8—A UNIQUE UC SOLUTION

One interesting company that I've stumbled across in my research into UC is California-based 8x8, who, despite having less brand recognition than other vendors in the space, has one of - if not the best - broadest unified communications platforms available. Its open platform covers communication from the conference room (video/voice conferencing, screen sharing, meeting analytics), to the contact center (routing, analytics, workforce engagement, AI-based automation and assist), to telephony (native VoIP, Cloud PBX, hard-phone integration, native softphone), to messaging (group and 1:1, channel elevation, and a team messaging solution aggregator). All of these capabilities are located on one common platform, accessed through one common app across the entire organization. Last, all this technology is developed by 8X8 without reliance on other partners, minimizing the issues previously discussed.

## WRAPPING UP

When it comes down to it, digital transformation is about leveraging technology to optimize business operations. In many cases, this optimization requires streamlining and simplification. Generally speaking, one quality solution is better than five incompatible ones. UC stands to disentangle the current, often convoluted world of enterprise communication, bringing with it added security and the power to better aggregate and leverage rich communication data to the company's benefit. In our current moment, with more people than ever working remotely and depending on communication tools, I believe UC platforms are poised to have "a moment." At the very least, it's worth it for CIOs to take a look at their current system and ask themselves if there's a better way of doing things.

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