# M247

# Buyer's guide
# to building a Unified
# Communications strategy

# Unified Communications tools have enjoyed a massive surge in popularity over the last few years.

**In the event of the global Coronavirus pandemic, businesses have come to recognise the benefits of Unified Communications (UC) as a means of keeping their teams connected, their businesses agile and their bottom lines healthy.**

Now that the dust has settled, and organisations have fully adapted to the new normal of remote and hybrid working, thoughts have started to turn towards how organisations can utilise UC to enhance those all-important customer experiences.

But what's the best way to go about improving customer satisfaction while adopting and implementing a UC strategy that harnesses the full power of its tools? What do you need to do to maximise the potential of UC for your organisation?

In this buyer's guide we take a look at the 5 key steps every business needs to take in order to build a solid UC strategy that changes the way customers interact with your brand.

# Boost customer satisfaction with Unified Communications

# 5 key steps

### Understand your customer
Traditional and new generations of customers interact with brands in different ways. Building the right solution starts with a detailed understanding and analysis of your customers' buying behavior.

### Choose the right solution
Customer and employee engagement are the key drivers of an effective UC strategy. Find out the best way for your business to boost satisfaction.

### Train and engage
Empower users to get the most from UC with an adoption strategy that develops skills through teaching and training.

### Analyse customer behaviour and act on feedback
Customer experience (CX) tells you all you need to know about your UC tools.

### Adapt, evolve and continually optimise
Don't ever think it's done, a good UC strategy is always a work in progress.

# Understand your customer

**Build your Unified Communications strategy from the ground up, through detailed analysis and understanding of your customer.**

Every good customer experience (CX) begins with a solid business strategy, and every solid business strategy must begin by placing the customer front and centre.

If you want to adopt UC tools as part of your business's CX strategy, you'll need to start by carrying out an in-depth analysis of the people you want to connect with.

There will, for example, be little point in shifting wholesale to AI chatbots if your primary customer base features a more traditional buyer who prefers the sort of personal touch that's inherent in a telephone call.

This might mean you only need to look at upgrading traditional telephony and technology that your organisation uses for inbound and outbound calls, without big impact to your customers but with a huge benefit to your business and employees. One example is using Microsoft Teams direct routing to allow calls and other reporting features for day-to-day customer conversations.

At the other end of the spectrum, if your main customer is under the age of 30, it makes more sense to choose a contact centre solution with seamless omnichannel capabilities, that would integrate and complement your standard telephony. All the statistics show Generation Z to be primarily visual consumers, who want quick and easy omnichannel access to businesses.

They appreciate speed and cross-channel support rather than human input and are more than happy to undertake DIY problem-solving if it means they can do it on their own time and on their own terms.

## Top tip

Understand who your customer is, what are they interested in, their preferred communication channel and why they come to you. The more you know about their buying habits, the more insight you will gain into how they want to connect with you, and the ways you can make this as easy as possible, while making sure you have visibility of all interactions in a single platform, such as Microsoft Teams.

### Is your main customer under the age of 30?

If your main customer is under the age of 30, it might be best to consider a contact centre solution that has seamless omnichannel capabilities.

Under these circumstances, a Microsoft Teams Contact Centre solution that integrates Whatsapp, email, phone and SMS into a single view and allows your business to use AI-enhanced chatbots to manage interactions is one good option.

With the additional benefit of showing all analytics and reporting into a single pane of glass, this solution is most likely future proof, that will add value to your business and reduce the suite of applications you would otherwise need to fulfil the same enagement and business needs.

As with the evolution of customer behavior in the digital world, it is important to remember that not all customers are created equal, and neither are all UC tools.

Every Unified Communications platform will offer a different solution for a different customer and generation and every UC strategy needs to be worked back from the specific end user. So dig deep into your customer mindset and build your strategy from there.

# Questions to ask yourself

- ☑ Can or should customer interaction be automated?

- ☑ Where does your customer make first contact?

- ☑ What is your customers' preferred communication channel?

- ☑ At what point are exit rates at their highest?

- ☑ What do customers contact you about most often?

- ☑ Where do you want your teams to focus their energies?

## The next step

Once you've perfected your customer profile then its time to think about the Unified Communications solutions available and which will help you connect in the best way with your customers.
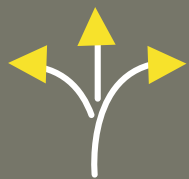
# Choose the right solution

**How to choose the best UC option for your business to boost customer satisfaction**

With a wealth of UC tools on the market it's important to consider which tools are right for your business and will allow you to connect with your customers in the way that makes the most sense.

Having undertaken detailed customer analysis you know exactly who your customer is, what their pain points and problems are; why and when they want to connect with you. Then you can start to think about the types of UC that might work best to fulfil both your customer and business goals as part of your strategy.

There's plenty to think about when it comes to choosing the right UC tools for your business. The best solutions depend on a number of factors that are unique to your business, it's crucial your IT team play a central role from the very start to ensure everything aligns with internal systems.

Your UC needs could be anything from purely agent-level usage, such as with Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS) through to a full, company-wide solution incorporating UC tools from across the spectrum.

One of the key considerations is the legacy environment your new UC tools will be joining. Unless your infrastructure, applications, devices, and connectivity are solid and reliable, it could be challenging to build and sustain effective and seamless integration with even the simplest of UC tools.

UC solutions are designed to converge all communication tools, systems and devices into one, interconnected, user-friendly interface. Its therefore important to consider if this is achievable within your current infrastructure? If it isn't, as a decision maker, you will have to think about the pre-requisites of a seamless UC deployment.

## Top tip

Choosing the right solutions for your organisation is the key to harnessing the full power of unified communications, so it's important to carry out a full analysis of the options and alternatives from a customer, organisational business perspective and a legacy perspective.

## Activate the full potential of voice data

By centralising and interlinking communications, UC helps streamline processes, automate workflows, analyse voice data and utilise teams more effectively to aid first-contact resolution. It can play an important, strategic role in improving customer experience, engagement and retention by ensuring seamless integration across web, email, voice, video and messaging.

# Questions to ask yourself
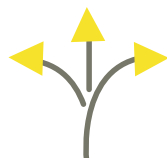
☑ Will you maintain current hardware and integrate UC solutions on-site?

☑ If the need for supporting remote workers is driving your company's move towards UC, will other aspects of the legacy environment, such as servers and bandwidth, be able to support the increased demand?

☑ Do you want to transfer your infrastructure to the Cloud at the same time and implement everything as an OpEx solution?

☑ Will on-premise or UCaaS serve your teams and customers better?

☑ What's the best set-up for ensuring your business remains agile?

☑ Will you need team collaboration and workflow tools to integrate with as a means of supporting an enhanced customer-service offering?

☑ What sort of backup and security measures will you need to have in place to ensure business continuity?

# The next step

When you've chosen the most appropriate UC tools for your business and environment, the next step is to think about deployment. One of the most powerful tools in your arsenal for ensuring the success of your UC strategy are your colleagues.

# Train and engage

**Empower users to get the most from UC tools, with an adoption strategy that enables them to adapt quickly through teaching and training.**

User buy-in is essential for the successful deployment of any new system or process, and UC is no different. When implementing or migrating to a collaboration platform such as Microsoft Teams you are introducing potentially thousands of users to a diverse range of new tools and processes, and to promote successful take-up your colleagues will need to understand the benefits of the new systems.

Unless everybody knows what they're doing, as well as why they are doing it, there is an inherent risk of even the best-laid plan being met with apathy or even opposition.

Start laying the groundwork ahead of deployment to whip up excitement amongst your teams. Keep colleagues in the loop and involve them where possible in the process of identifying and choosing the solutions that will be used.

Another way of getting everyone on board is to ensure there are plenty of training opportunities available pre-deployment, as well as ongoing support after the launch of new applications.

Any new working environment requires a period of adjustment and getting the most from a UC solution requires users to be well trained in features that will help them optimise workflow.

Put together a suite of supporting information, including short how-to videos and cheat sheets your teams can print out and keep easily to hand, will not only put them at ease in terms of feeling empowered, but it will also help improve adoption rates and ensure users can fully engage with the applications.

It might be that a phased rollout is the best way to handle the deployment. Considering a phased adoption of Microsoft Teams and UC capabilities to a chosen number of teams or roles, on specific sites, can help identify what works, what doesn't, and what is simply unnecessary.

## Top tip

Ask for regular feedback and input from the people who will be using the Microsoft UC tools every day – the chances are they will have good ideas about what functionality will be most useful, and which a waste of resources.

# Questions to ask yourself

- ☑ How will Microsoft UC benefit your teams?

- ☑ Who are the key players in your teams - can they offer insight about the best solutions?

- ☑ What role do teams play in making your UC strategy successful?

- ☑ What can you do to make transition to UC easier for colleagues?

- ☑ What hands-on training will you need to offer?

- ☑ Will user-manuals, troubleshooting guides or videos be helpful?

- ☑ Could you build a knowledge hub for self-service training?

- ☑ How can you gather feedback on an ongoing basis to make sure the Microsoft UC tools are providing the necessary support in day-to-day work?

# The next step

Once your teams are ready for the roll out of your UC strategy, the next thing to consider is how you're going to collect, visualise and analyse data coming from customer interactions (including feedback and reviews). In any UC strategy that has been built with the express purpose of improving customer and employee satisfaction, the input of those users is vital in ensuring you are making the most of your Microsoft investment.

# Analyse customer behaviour and act on feedback

**The right mix of tools and capabilities as part of your UC strategy will help you achieve the right level of customer engagement, be sure to use this insight to drive your business forwards**

You know who your customer is, you've chosen the Unified Communications tools and the Microsoft capabilities that will help them connect and interact with your business, and your team is invested in your new strategy.

The next thing to consider is how you can make sure your business is getting the most from this new environment.

If you've developed and deployed a UC strategy with the sole purpose of engaging more purposefully with your customers, what is your customer behaviour telling you about how it's working for them? Gathering, analysing and acting on feedback is the best way of ensuring your UC tools are working hard for your business.

Among the major benefits of the vast array of UC tools available is the enhanced data-gathering and reporting features they allow for, as well as the agility and scalability they allow to businesses of all sizes. By tapping into the full benefits of a Microsoft UC solution, organisations are empowered to take seemingly small steps every day to dramatically improve the experience for customers.

## Top tip

As soon as the initial deployment has been successfully implemented, it's a good idea to shift the focus of your efforts to gathering data about how it's working. You can do this by harnessing the in-built analytics of specific tools, and through direct customer feedback.

If customers are telling you they've been left hanging on a phone line for too long, make changes to your call routing that will alleviate that sticking point. Draft more agents in for the busier times, or direct customers to a self-service knowledge hub with AI-enhanced troubleshooting.

The in-built analytics that the contact centre solutions for Microsoft Teams are providing, are an invaluable tool of unified communications solutions.

Analytics allow managers to spot issues like common queries with straightforward answers that take up a disproportionate amount of agent time. A quick tinker to the backend and you can spin up DIY troubleshooting functionality that not only empowers customers to solve their queries at a time of their choosing but frees up resources within the organisation to focus on more time-consuming or complicated queries.

One of the major benefits of a UC contact centre environment is the ability to improve first-contact resolution rates across platforms, so paying heed to analytics and deploying tools like automated call handling, AI and sentiment analysis will ensure the right person with the right skillset is always in the right place at the right time.

Not only will this result in a more positive experience for the customer, it will mean you can use enhanced analytics to spot patterns in customer behaviour over time, and make changes as and when needed. All this information is invaluable for improving the experience of your teams, as well as your customers, so use it to refine and enhance your workstreams, boost productivity within teams and help streamline operations across the whole organisation.

# Questions to ask yourself

✓ Does the initial contact point change according to day or time?

✓ As customers grow used to messaging, do they seem to be favouring that over a phone call or social media interactions?

✓ Is there a day when it's more likely a customer will call rather than email?

✓ Are customers abandoning online chats before their issue is resolved?

✓ Are there certain touchpoints where it makes sense to ask for customer feedback?

✓ Can you have an exit poll on the chat function or messaging platform, or an automated email following a phone call?

✓ Who will be responsible for gathering, analysing data and implementing changes in data collection?

**Look into data relating to customer queries**

Contact points, communication channels and sentiment analysis, help identify where resources – whether manpower, money, or time – are being wasted.

# The next step

Acting on direct customer feedback and analysing data across different communication channels is essential to ensuring Unified Communications tools you are using are relevant and future proof.

# Adapt, evolve and continually optimise

**Don't ever think it's done! UC is a continuous evolution of data, systems and IT tools to help your business to learn about the ever changing requirements of your customer and business**

Used well, Unified Communications can be an incredible approach for your business and customer communications strategy not only in terms of improving customer experience and driving engagement but for improving productivity, streamlining workflows and maximising resources.

The inherent flexibility and scalability of UC means it can quickly stagnate if you don't keep abreast of the latest consumer and technology trends. All good UC strategies have one thing in common: they are constantly evolving.

Technology is advancing at such a rapid rate that customer expectations change on a seemingly weekly basis. In order for your business's UC plans to continue serving the needs of your customers, it's vital to ensure the two are always aligned.

If we cast our minds back to pre-pandemic, UC was a very different proposition to now. In the face of a mass-scale shift to remote working, UC providers have added new features and integrations on an almost daily basis. They have been responding to the wide and varied needs of businesses of all sizes across all industries, and there's no sign of slowing down. This means that even IT managers who think their set-up is perfect today are likely to find there are new applications and processes just around the corner that are an even better fit for their needs. workstreams, boost productivity within teams and help streamline operations across the whole organisation.

## If there's a sudden shift in trends tomorrow

Your business will need to be able to react quickly. Again, UC gives us the tools to remain agile – but the onus is on IT managers to ensure their set-up remains relevant and effective.

Another aspect to keep an eye on is the continuous shift in trends and behaviour among consumers. While the population is becoming more embedded in the digital mesh to fulfil their needs, particularly younger generations, users will also need to reduce the application clutter that is being created while adding more applicatios, devices and systems to do everyday tasks. This is in stark contrast to older people, who still value phone calls and seeing things written down, and communicate via traditional channels. Today's customer wants to be able to access whatever, whenever, from whichever device they want, and UC gives us the tools to make this possible, all while maintaining open lines of communication with older generations.

# Questions to ask yourself

- ☑ Is your customer base changing over time i.e. older/younger?

- ☑ Is there a changing pattern in the way customers find or reach out to your company?

- ☑ How do you assess customer engagement and create a shift in the tools your employees are using?

- ☑ Are there new tools that would help streamline processes further?

- ☑ Does your solution support remote workers and office-based workers equally - is there adequate support for hybrid working?

- ☑ Has feedback from customers changed for the better/worse? How can you fix this?

- ☑ What blogs/resources can you follow to ensure you are up to date with current UC trends?

## Top tip

Making sure you are up to date with what's going on in the world of UC and particularly with all the great capabilities that can be used on top of your Microsoft Teams platform, will ensure you are always harnessing the most appropriate, most powerful tools for your business.

Unified Communications is a big and continuously changing requirement for IT decision makers wanting to stay relevant to the market and keep improving the efficiency of daily business operations.

The ultimate goal of every change and innovation in technology, systems and collaboration platforms is to support and sustain customer loyalty and employee engagement over time by activating the value data, and adopting robust platforms, such as Microsoft; all while plugging in the right features for omnichannel communication, call reporting, call recording and integrations with telephony systems across devices and locations.

With 247Unified, we are bringing all these together, so that decision makers can choose the features they need, for the their customers, employees and business today, and for the future.

**To find out more about Unified Communications and how our 247Unified offering can transform your business, get in touch with our team today**

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