

AVAYA PRESENTS

Cloud-based options for midsize companies



Small and midsize organizations need flexible solutions that support their unique migration strategies.

Introduction

In their pursuit of competitive advantage, small and midsize businesses (SMBs) are seeking technology solutions that increase agility, improve workforce productivity, and enrich the customer experience.

Communications solutions are the cornerstone of enabling these business benefits. Connectivity between colleagues, customers, partners, and suppliers is crucial for collaboration.

To better understand how companies are addressing challenges, investments, and cloud migration plans for their communications solutions, IDG Research Services conducted a quick poll among IT and business leaders. This white paper examines the results of the survey and offers best practices to help SMBs navigate their unique communication paths.

SMBs look to the cloud

Cloud-based or hybrid (a mix of on-premises and cloud) communications solutions offer tremendous promise for SMBs. They can

improve cost management and make it easier to scale up or down with growth, flex for seasonal demand, or outsource some operations. The right platform can also drive higher productivity by simplifying collaboration and enabling employees to work effectively from anywhere.

Also, many SMBs are implementing cloud-based productivity applications, and they need cloud-enabled phones to take advantage of click-to-connect features in popular environments such as Google for Work and Salesforce.com.

These business benefits are echoed in the IDG research results. SMBs' top objectives are boosting employee engagement and productivity, improving responsiveness to customer needs and requests, and improving internal communications and collaboration (Figure 1).

The elimination of productivity barriers is particularly significant in businesses that embrace Agile and other advanced collaboration practices. These organizations thrive

by working across traditional boundaries to accelerate processes such as product development, and advanced telephony supports the fluid collaboration they require.

The challenges of choosing a solution

Business leaders see promise in the cloud, but any migration also introduces challenges and risk:

Cost: 86% of the respondents said cost-effectiveness is a critical or very important factor for evaluating communications solutions. There are three major costs associated with telephony: equipment, maintenance and upgrades, and service charges.

Data security: Cloud-based telephony makes a company's data more accessible to employees and contractors outside the office. However, businesses want reassurance before exposing data to what they perceive as increased risks. That's why a significant majority (88%) has placed data security at the top of the criteria list when evaluating communications solutions.

Figure 1. Top Reasons to Consider a Cloud-Based Communications System

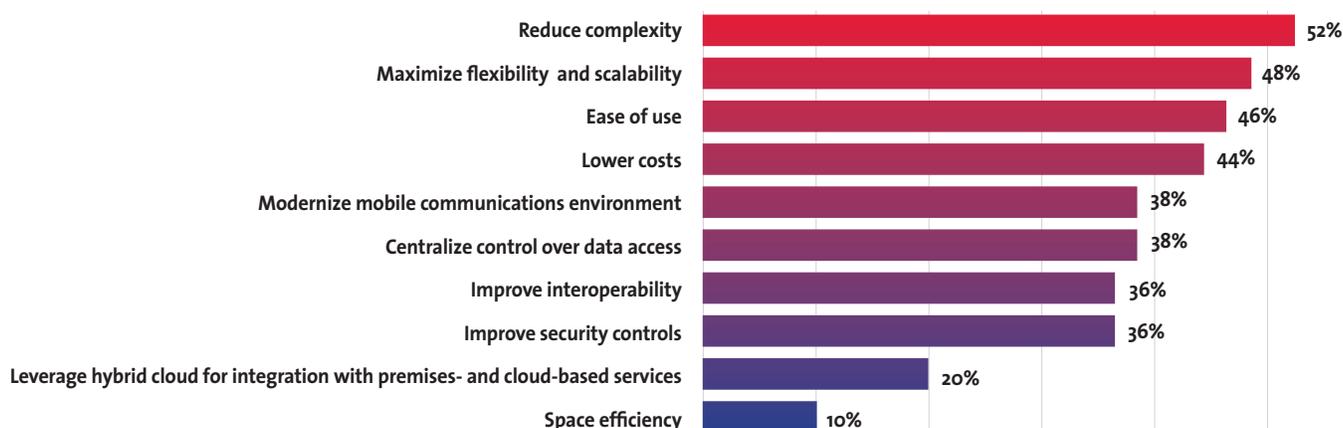


Figure 2. Top Communications Challenges



Resilience: Some businesses cannot afford telephone outages of any duration, and a pure cloud solution lacks the redundancy they require.

Data control: Employees at many SMBs are using their own devices to access company resources, which raises concerns for business leaders. The top communications challenges cited in the IDG Research survey (Figure 2) are securing data while also ensuring data accessibility and maintaining control over company data, such as client contact information and conversation histories.

Managing complexity: Among the respondents, 52% said they want to reduce operational complexity, whereas 48% are seeking to increase flexibility.

Your unique path to the cloud

The journey to cloud-based telephony looks different for each SMB. Some companies are prepared to “rip and replace” an on-premises system, but the IDG Quick Poll found that most (74%) prefer a measured approach, migrating systems over time.

This slower approach can minimize disruption throughout the organization. Customer service and sales staff are more likely to maintain standards of performance when they are not burdened by having to quickly learn new commands and procedures. A measured transition can also benefit IT, particularly for organizations with small IT staffs or those with little experience in cloud migrations.

Although pure cloud-based telephony is the final destination for many businesses, others are best served by a hybrid solution. For example, a

retailer or a financial services company might want to guard against a phone service outage caused by a loss of Internet connectivity. There are costs for maintaining both on-premises and cloud-based telephony, although companies that value high availability weigh costs differently from businesses that can tolerate a temporary outage.

Best practices for leveraging the cloud

When plotting a move to cloud-based telephony, consider the challenges identified above, identify your unique issues, and account for them. Here are five recommended best practices for evaluating cloud options and providers.

1. Make the transition your way. Take stock of your organization’s strengths, weaknesses, needs, technology road map, and budget considerations. Some telephony providers use networks of partners that help businesses navigate to the cloud. If your company would benefit from intensive, expert guidance, choose a provider that works with reseller partners.

2. Protect the business by controlling the data. Strike an ideal balance between making company and customer data readily available and maintaining strong security and control. Ask telephony vendors whether their technology is “multitenant” or “multi-instance.” Multitenant technology shares one application version with multiple businesses and could be susceptible to hacking and data theft, whereas multi-instance uses a separate, customizable software version for each client of

the telephony provider. When sensitive data is involved, multi-instance cloud telephony is often the better choice.

3. Optimize communications to suit your needs.

Focus on how your business connects with customers, and leverage the cloud purposefully to enable better experiences. Work with a partner that can merge unified communications, messaging, telephony, customer relationship management, and other applications your way—to improve business performance and achieve compliance goals.

4. Evaluate cost considerations. Look at the larger picture beyond monthly and annual costs, and find a solution that aligns with your financial resources. Do you want telephony to be exclusively an operating expense with a predictable cost structure? Are you best served by a hybrid solution that improves resilience?

5. Address scalability and flexibility. Cloud telephony can provide great elasticity for businesses as they evolve and/or respond to seasonal demands, such as staffing up for holiday shopping, tax season, or enrollment periods. Discuss pricing and implementation options with cloud telephony providers.

Conclusion

Every company’s journey to pure cloud or hybrid-cloud telephony is unique. SMB leaders need a telephony partner that can help them choose a custom solution that addresses cost, security, and resilience.

About Avaya IP Office

Avaya IP Office™ brings your calls, messaging, conferencing, and customer management into a single system. It’s a unified communications solution that, among so many other features, sends email, voicemail, and texts to the same inbox. There’s call handling, messaging, conferencing, presence, IM and built-in, always-on security and centralized management. Avaya IP Office connects you with your customers and employees the way that’s most comfortable for them: voice, SMS, chat, email, and even fax. Avaya IP Office is a purpose-built solution provided through a worldwide network of resellers that help companies strike an ideal balance as they migrate telephony to the cloud. IP Office is easy to administer and can be implemented as a pure cloud solution or as a hybrid of on-premises and cloud-based telephony. There are 600,000 IP Office systems installed worldwide, serving 24 million endpoints.



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