



How effective business communications deliver real results

Today's communications systems are designed with capabilities businesses can use to attract more customers, expand operations, streamline routine customer transactions and much more. This whitepaper looks at four key ways any growing business can benefit from IP-based communications solutions, including taking advantage of built-in cost savings.

To deliver an exceptional customer experience, drive growth and maintain a competitive edge, businesses must replace outdated communications systems with new technology.

When most businesses think about acquiring a new communications system, they usually consider the following: Does the system have the features we need? Is it reliable? Is it the right size? Can it grow as we grow? Will it fit within our budget?

All of these questions are important, but unfortunately, the most important question is often overlooked: How will the communications system deliver real results for our business?

Executive takeaways

You will learn the following from this whitepaper:

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| <p>1 New technology is better suited for today's business development than outdated systems</p> | <p>2 IP-based communications solutions enable faster responsiveness, improve CX and support future growth</p> |
| <p>3 Real-life examples of benefits obtained from upgrades</p> | <p>4 Overall cost benefits of upgrading to IP-based communications solutions</p> |

IP-based communications solutions

Most businesses don't think of their business communications as something that can help attract new customers, increase revenues, develop more repeat business and keep overhead in check—all of the ways that a business grows. But, in fact, that's exactly what today's new office communications system can help you accomplish.

Why? What is it about today's new communications systems that makes them suited to the task of business development? In a nutshell, it's the technology: communications systems today are based on the Internet Protocol (IP). These new communications systems are often referred to as VoIP or Voice over IP systems. The voice signals are digitized and transported as packets, in the same way emails and data files are transmitted over the Internet.

What does that mean in terms of practical, everyday business realities?

It means that today's communications systems are really more like computers than traditional communications systems. They are more versatile, able to accept applications, ready to become integrated into everyday business operations, becoming a "go-to" resource for:

Managing and administering all your business communications—not just voice, but also video, email and instant messaging (IM)

Communication-enabling every day sales and service functions

Simplifying and speeding office or mobile interactions among employees, partners, customers, etc.

Reducing the cost of existing expenses

Lowering the risk of down time or lost productivity

No communications system will ever replace all the other important ingredients needed for business success. You still need to offer a great product or service, price it right, market it effectively and maintain quality and competitive differentiation.

The right communications system leverages your strengths to transform your operations by helping make your business operate more efficiently, reducing expenses, enabling people to be more responsive, and providing an added measure of flexibility to manage the peaks and valleys of business expansion and contraction.

1 Enabling faster responsiveness

In the old days, people always worked in an office. They might "take work home" and even take calls at home, but this was all ancillary to the work done at the office. Just about everyone knows that this is not the case anymore. People today can work not only from their primary office, but also from home offices, colleagues' offices, the offices of customers and partners, coffee shops, hotel rooms, airport terminals—just about anywhere. They stay connected using mobile devices: laptops, smart phones or tablets.

Being connected in so many different ways and being able to work in so many different locations is a great convenience, but it also creates challenges. Knowing how to best reach someone has become more complex. How often do people ask "What's the best number to use to reach you?" or "Why didn't you text me?"

The fact is, simply being able to connect anytime, anywhere is no longer enough. Businesses that want to truly leverage the power of remote workforces, dispersed operations, teleworking, etc. need solutions that enable them to proactively manage and integrate today's anytime, anywhere communications capabilities. That's exactly what today's IP-based communications systems are designed to do. And they are doing it in a way that can deliver real, business-building benefits.

Take the case of a television production firm in New York City. Staying competitive in this fast-paced world requires top-notch creativity produced on time and on budget.

Television and Video Production Firm

LOCATION: New York City

CUSTOMERS: 150

EMPLOYEES: 78

COMMUNICATIONS: UCaaS IP Office™, powered by Avaya

This firm is unquestionably creative; it has a credit list of top-rated shows on a range of cable networks. When the firm looked for ways to become more efficient, it quickly focused on communications. The firm realized its existing communications system was actually handling less and less of its overall communications and not doing a particularly good job.

There was no Caller ID or easy way for callers to get directly to a staff person, causing a delay and missed calls.

Producers on location, who wanted to collaborate effectively with their colleagues back in the edit room, were constantly juggling their mobiles, the office communications system, email and IM—with no easy linkage between any of them.

There was no way to tell who was calling or who was available to talk so that information had to be relayed and referenced manually.

To keep in touch with productions in progress throughout the country, the company lives on conference calls, but had to pay an outside company to host them. This resulted in high costs.

Simply answering and transferring calls kept one person busy all day and added a buffer to connecting with “the right person”.

Even though its old communications system was still working, the firm decided to make the move to IP-based communications, with UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya. The difference has been dramatic.

The result: their communications is now as top notch as their creativity—supporting the business, instead of getting in the way.

Now, all staff members have their own extension and can be easily reached through the company directory.

Staff can see at a glance who is available and how best to reach them—email, mobile, chat, etc.

When a call comes in, staff can have their office and mobile communications ring simultaneously, so they don’t miss a call simply by being away from their desk. If the call is not picked up, the voice mail gets digitized and sent as an attachment to an email to be picked up anywhere.

Conference calls are now hosted on UCaaS IP Office—eliminating the need for outside conferencing services.

The firm estimates that UCaaS IP Office has cut communications management time in half and made the company easier to do business with, which is another way to drive real results for your business that we will look at next.

2 How easy are you to do business with?

How easy do you make it for customers to choose and do business with your company? Thinking about it quickly, you might answer “We’re a small company, we can respond to any situation quickly.” In reality; however, it’s the very rare company that can make that claim. Nearly every company has procedures and processes that must be followed when taking on a new customer, a new job, making a bid or signing a contract.

When a call comes in, it’s not uncommon for even the most customer-focused company to throw up roadblocks. How often do you find someone in your company saying: “Our person who handles that kind of project isn’t here right now,” or “The person assigned to your account will be in the office later today.”

During peak buying seasons, or when a call comes in outside of regular business hours, or if the customer request is not quite routine, these delays tend to increase. Even a company with generally fast response times can find them slowing to a painful crawl. In today’s world, when the competition is a click away, these delays invite the prospect to move on and find a company more responsive.

This was exactly the situation at an online retailer of custom clothing (custom printed designs on garments) whose revenue is heavily dependent on phone-based orders.

Online Clothing Retailer

LOCATION: Des Moines, IA

CUSTOMERS: Thousands

COMMUNICATIONS: UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya

The retailer became increasingly concerned its communications system was hurting business. Some of the tell-tale clues were:

The phone-time devoted to new sales vs. existing orders had dramatically shifted to the latter.

Sales reps were devoting more and more time routing calls to the appropriate contact, taking time away from answering sales calls.

The number of complaints about messages not making it to intended representatives, or calls being unreturned, had also risen.

Upon investigation, the source of the problem was uncovered. The retailer had grown both in sales and number of locations, but the communications system hadn’t kept up.

Calls were misdirected, requiring staff to transfer calls between departments. There was no easy way to route a call to a specific sales representative, frustrating customers who wanted to speak with their designated representative and not a new person each time.

The solution: The retailer decided to take advantage of the intelligent call routing capabilities in UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya.

With UCaaS IP Office, customers now call one number and are routed to the appropriate department or person. Sales people, for instance, don't get calls that were meant for artists or billing. Customer complaints about unreturned calls due to lost or delayed messages largely went away. Also, the system makes it easy to support telecommuting and work-at-home capabilities, so the retailer is able to hire talent from anywhere to help them more effectively handle the growing influx of orders, and ensure they are prepared for the high volume of customer inquiries during the summer.

The retailer's implementation of UCaaS IP Office demonstrates a key capability of the new IP-based systems: intelligent routing that simplifies and streamlines the customer engagement process in ways that can help you grow your business.

Call routing capabilities that minimize hold times, quickly delivering customer calls even during peak periods.

Programming your system to instantly recognize repeat customers: providing the personal touch that drives customer loyalty.

Providing automated, self-service options such as access information, directions and service status, speeding response for customers and freeing up staff to answer more complex inquiries.

Customize your attendant solution to handle calls in different ways at different times. Equip your automated attendant with a directory, making it easy for callers to dial by name.

Taking advantage of features such as "call parking" that enables staff to deliver calls directly to the individual who can best serve a particular customer, but make sure that the call is picked up and handled promptly.

Point-and-click call management that makes it easy to handle calls via an on-screen interface with a script to answer general questions correctly and prioritize incoming calls.

By increasing the chance of a smooth, efficient, responsive customer interaction, you enhance the image of your company in ways that can lead to measurable business improvement.

This also establishes a clear competitive differentiator, demonstrating that you are a company that is committed to delivering a quality customer experience. That's a third key way today's IP communications solutions can help build business.

3 Creating the right customer experience

Customer service is critical to any enterprise today. It's the key to competitive differentiation, customer retention and overall brand awareness. Surveys show that SMEs know how important good "word of mouth" advertising is and that service is the critical factor for recommending a business.

Financial Services Company

LOCATION: New York City

EMPLOYEES: 8

COMMUNICATIONS: UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya

A growing financial services company knows the importance of customer service first hand. The company provides merchant account funding, enabling businesses to borrow against future credit card receipts. It's a solution for businesses that have good cash flow through credit cards (i.e., restaurants) but need an infusion of working capital and may not be able to obtain a conventional business loan. It's a very competitive industry. The company knows that keeping customers on hold for just a few extra seconds can lead them to give up and move on to a competitor. The best growth strategy for the company is to get one of its sales representatives connected to an incoming caller as quickly as possible.

Taking advantage of one of the most powerful capabilities in today's IP-based communications solutions, the company organized its sales team into a formal contact center. Large banks, brokerage firms, major credit card processors and other companies have long enjoyed the ability to set up formal contact centers with agents dedicated to handling calls. Today, a solution such as UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya, enables a smaller company to do the same thing.

When a call comes in, the company is committed to engaging a customer within seven seconds. The company offers a range of financial services and uses different toll-free numbers. With UCaaS IP Office, the sales representative instantly knows what the caller is interested in. If it's an existing customer, the solution automatically triggers the retrieval of the customer's record from the company's CRM solution (Salesforce.com). The days of having callers repeat basic identifying information are over.

Calls to specific sales reps can always get through. If the sales rep has stepped away, the call automatically rings to a mobile. The system is also set up so that voice mail messages are automatically forwarded as an attachment to the sales rep's smartphone. If a call center is at capacity, calls are automatically forwarded to another location.

Because the company's business is very fax-oriented—new agreements have to be faxed and approved before financing can take place—the ability of the UCaaS IP Office solution to handle voice, fax, email, IM and more makes it easy for new financing agreements to be approved quickly.

The power of the contact center capabilities goes beyond call routing—with today's communications systems the contact center becomes a well defined business unit with specialized software and reporting capabilities to fine-tune performance. The company is able to carefully evaluate agent workloads and consequently put more focus into outbound calling efforts.

The company also takes advantage of another key capability of today's IP-based solutions: call recording. This is a critical way that customer-focused organizations can use their communications system to keep tabs on quality, identifying instances of inaccurate or poorly conveyed information that can negatively impact customer experience. Gaining knowledge through call recording is vital for training purposes.

The company's goal is to be a one-stop resource for all kinds of financial services for businesses. That gives the company a seamless path for business growth—a fourth key way that today's IP-based communications solutions make it easier to keep building a business.

4 Efficiently managing business growth

Ideally, every business likes to see a growth chart that shows steady, well timed business expansion (figure 1).



The reality in business is that a “steps and ladders” growth pattern (figure 2) is more typical than simple, steady upward growth. That's what can make managing a business such a high wire act: projecting incoming business and matching it with cash flow and overhead.

Providing your business with an extra measure of flexibility to manage inevitable fluctuations in business growth is a critical way today's IP communications systems deliver a compelling value proposition for businesses.

Veterinary Hospital Clinic

LOCATION: Highland Heights, KY

CUSTOMERS: 30,000

EMPLOYEES: 34

COMMUNICATIONS: UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya

A veterinary hospital with a growing clinical practice and dog grooming service in the greater Cincinnati area, is an example of a company that is using IP-based communications, specifically UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya, to carefully manage its growth and expand its practice in a very innovative way.

While most pets are brought to the main clinic, the clinic has launched a mobile service using specially equipped vans to make house calls. This enables the practice to expand its market reach (without investing in costly new facilities) while offering a desirable perk to customers. The vans are outfitted with examining tables, diagnostic devices, medicines and VPN remote desk phones to handle communications between the clinicians in the van and veterinarians back at the main office.

The clinic could have used cellular links—but the goal was not simply connectivity, it was to make the vans mobile extensions of the main office. This illustrates a key capability of the new communications: the ability not simply to route calls and messages but also to extend the full functionality of the office communications system to virtually any location served by an Internet connection, and any device (such as a mobile, an IP phone or a PC).

By using mobile broadband and the VPN remote telecommunications, the vans are just a 4-digit extension away. Clinicians can respond to voice calls and group pages, take part in conference calls, rely on speed dials, messaging etc., as if they were in the office. The vans are, in effect, just another part of the office—they just happen to be on wheels.

The clinic also takes advantage of this capability to hire home-based workers: part-time receptionists, equipped with VPN communications, who are available to handle calls during peak periods. These home-based workers have full access to the network for transferring calls, forwarding messages and setting appointments. Now the clinic is able to effectively adapt its office support as patient volume—for the hospital, the mobile clinic and the grooming service—expands and contracts.

Adding up the cost savings

All of the companies described in this whitepaper selected the UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya, solution to meet a business challenge. In most cases, they had an existing communications system that was still doing the job they bought it for, it simply wasn't supporting their business strategy. In addition, the world around them had rapidly evolved and shifted expectations so they proactively sought a way to get their business aligned. All of the companies described here also realized significant cost savings:

The Television and Video Production Firm estimates that cutting reception routing and handling time has **saved \$50,000 a year**

The online retailer boosted customer satisfaction and employee productivity, helping to **generate a 15 percent increase in sales**

For the financial services company, the functionality of the UCaaS IP Office system (such as better, faster sales coverage) instantly justified the investment; and by eliminating the need for separate fax lines and other services, the solution **paid for itself within a year**

The Veterinary Hospital Clinic estimates that it would have needed to hire five to eight additional people to handle the increased volume of business, translating into an **annual savings of over \$200,000 a year**

Other companies have also reported significant, hard dollar savings:

Bringing communications in-house: Eliminating or reducing the expense of outsourced conferencing fees, teleworker costs (second line charges), real estate costs and legacy PBX maintenance costs.

Scalability and investment protection: Being able to keep growing (up to 1000 endpoints) with the same product; being able to keep existing wiring (if you choose to) and saving up to 60% of the new system price by working with a wide variety of phones that you may already have.

Reducing calling costs: Connecting multiple sites to enable site-to-site calling in network; routing mobile communications and long-distance calls over existing broadband links.

Consolidating or re-deploy resources: Automating reception across sites, load balancing work loads or simple routing to prompts are a few ways that existing service expense can be re-deployed to more revenue driving roles.

Simple administration tools: Being able to easily do moves, adds or changes to your system without incurring extra technical expenses.

The time is now

In today's challenging economic environment, growing businesses need to be able to take advantage of any window of opportunity to drive innovation and realize benefits from the return of favorable business conditions. An IP-based communications solution such as UCaaS IP Office, powered by Avaya, gives you power and flexibility.

In addition, working with a single provider that offers UCaaS IP Office as part of a larger portfolio of solutions can help meet your broader needs. SD-WAN, for example, provides a flexible foundation for UCaaS and other IP-based services.

For some companies, there may be one specific advantage such as the ability to transform how they serve customers. For others, it may be the flexibility and empowerment that these new solutions provide to their people while mobile.

These capabilities can be part of the solution itself, but can also be provided by an ecosystem of independent companies who develop applications that customize a communications system for the needs of different kinds of companies and organizations, such as retailers, medical practices or law firms.

For every company, these solutions offer opportunities that can be implemented without causing disruption or discarding existing assets such as the desk phones you may now be using in your business. This makes the value of these solutions to your business more compelling than ever.

About Windstream Enterprise

Windstream Enterprise collaborates with businesses across the U.S. to drive digital transformation by delivering solutions that solve today's most complex networking and communication challenges.

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