

The Converged Future

How a unified fixed and mobile voice solution will benefit SMEs



The drivers of convergence



When one considers that two thirds (66%) of SMEs now use remote workers, it's clear that the way we approach communications must change rapidly. With the growing need for agility, the increase in flexible working practices and increase in the use of mobile devices over traditional handsets, the boundaries between fixed and mobile communications are blurring.

This is particularly true for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), for which the challenge is to be able to do more, with less. As such, they must always be looking for ways to drive higher margins and gain greater business agility to create a level playing field with competitors great and small.

More seamless communication with customers can allow SMEs to increase staff productivity and maintain a focus on the delivery of great customer service. Through the introduction of features more commonly associated with fixed-line phone systems on mobile devices, businesses are able to create efficiencies that maximise the overall ROI of their telephony investment.

To meet SME needs, telecoms providers are developing offerings that combine the best of both fixed and mobile communications in one converged solution.



What is convergence?

A fully unified communications system incorporating voice, data and mobile. A telecoms solution that delivers the same telephony features and functionality regardless of whether the end device is a mobile phone or a fixed-line handset.

Converged (or “fully unified”) communications are more suited to the ways that businesses want to work than any telephony system that has come before. Employees are less and less tied to their desks in their traditional 9-5 working day. They expect flexible working hours and need to be able to communicate on their mobile devices when on the move or working remotely. To deliver a great experience to customers, employees need to be as available on their mobile devices as if they were at their desk on a fixed-line handset. For many SMEs, this can be a crucial competitive advantage and a key to business success.



Even if a workforce is small and potentially dispersed across many physical locations, the customer experience between fixed and mobile telephony must be seamless. Customers should be able to get in touch with employees regardless of whether or not they are in the office. And if the customer has to hunt for a mobile number, it’s highly likely that the inconvenience will drive them to competitors. Similarly, SME employees will expect a full suite of telephony features on whatever device they are using so they can keep working and stay in contact at all times.

☞ Employees are becoming less and less tied to their desks in their traditional 9-5 working day.☞



According to our Connected Business research, 90% of telecoms-dependent organisations are of the opinion that they could improve service and alleviate communications issues with a fully converged solution. At present, however, most businesses and SMEs alike will have components of their telephony infrastructure tied up with several pre-existing contracts.

Many providers are now building towards fully-converged solutions, so the time to start considering how to make the most of these future advancements is now.

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The advantages of converging fixed and mobile



Long-term cost savings of having all services from one provider



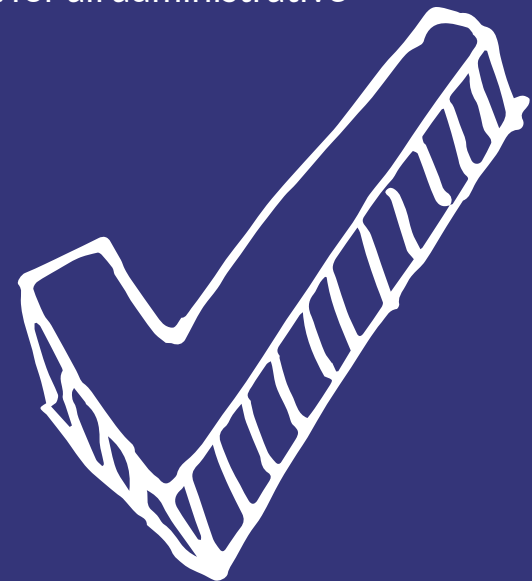
A well-defined, easy to understand service package



A single bill from a single provider that avoids payment confusion



Efficiencies from having a single point of contact for all administrative requirements



How SMEs can benefit from a converged future

In the converged future of telephony, all the feature functionality of a fixed-line handset will be on a mobile device – and vice versa. A single number will direct callers to an employee's mobile or landline, whichever is free. Applications like advanced voicemail and data sharing will be available across all devices. And SMEs will be able to present their entire telephony network as being in any geographical location.

For SMEs in particular, a converged future will support the growth of mobile working without compromising on the quality of service delivered to customers.

What's more, many of the existing fixed-line or mobile features that providers offer will be transferrable, creating new efficiencies and ways of working that will give SMEs a competitive edge.

☞ SMEs will be able to present their entire telephony network as being in any geographical location ☞



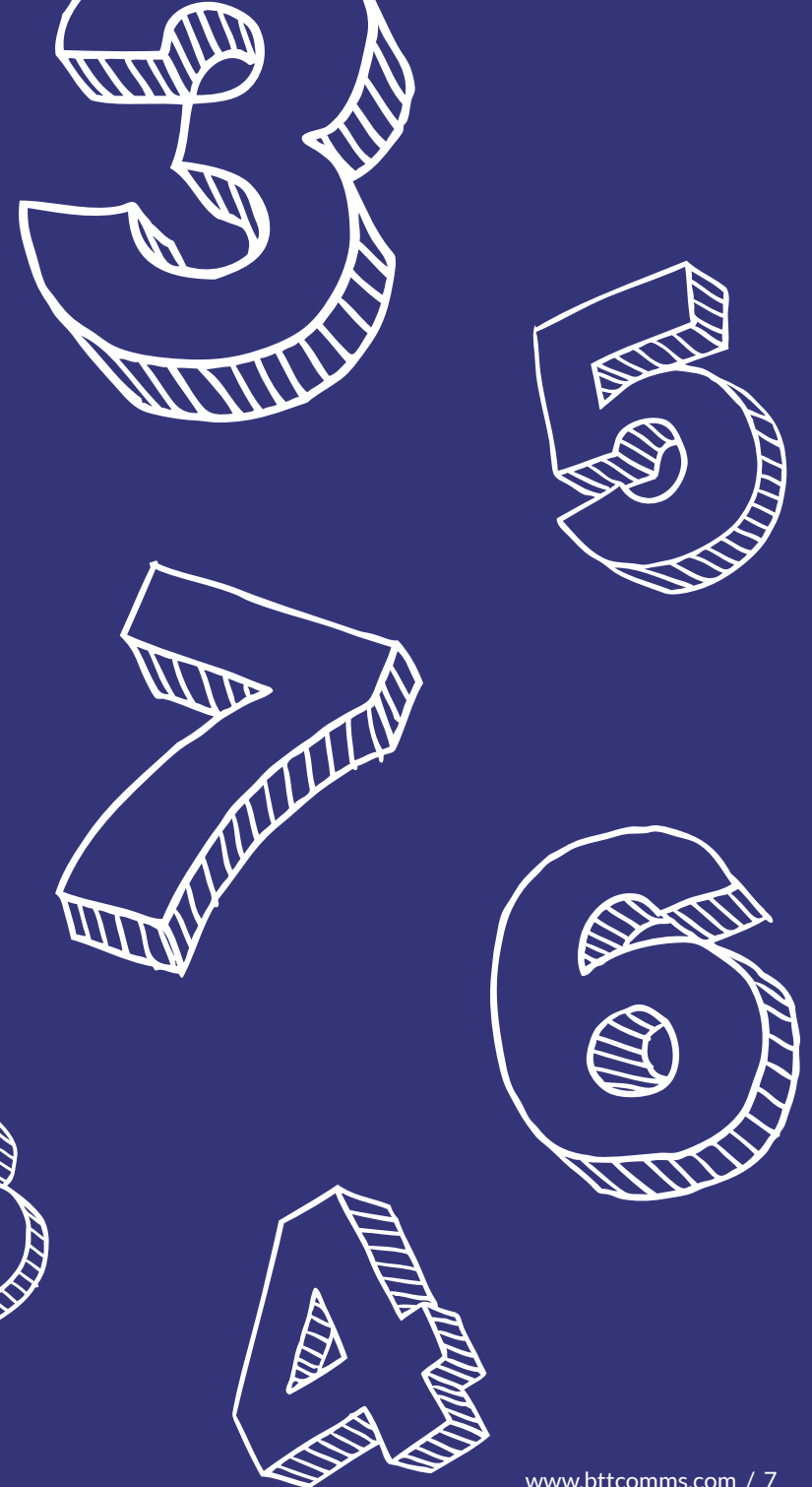
A unique number for fixed and mobile

As it stands, many providers offer fixed-line numbers that redirect in the event of an employee being away from their desk.

With convergence, this capability will be taken to the next level. Providers will be able to offer one unique number for both fixed and mobile – not just a redirect.

This will provide a seamless experience for customers – they will be able to contact one number and reach an agent regardless of whether they are in the office, on the road or working remotely.

SMEs taking advantage of this solution will be able to benefit from the brand positives that come from improved customer service delivery.





Geographical numbers

Many providers already offer multiple geographical (and non-geographical) numbers via IP-based voice services that allow businesses to choose the number presentation they want, regardless of physical location. So, for example, if an office is in Manchester but the owner wants customers to think they have a London office, they can have a London number that's linked to the phones in Manchester.

This allows SMEs to give the impression of a national presence even though they are only a local operation, with all the reputational benefits this brings. And as convergence grows and improves, this will be a feature that providers can offer through similar technology for mobile numbers as well, giving smaller businesses the ability to make the impression that they are bigger players.

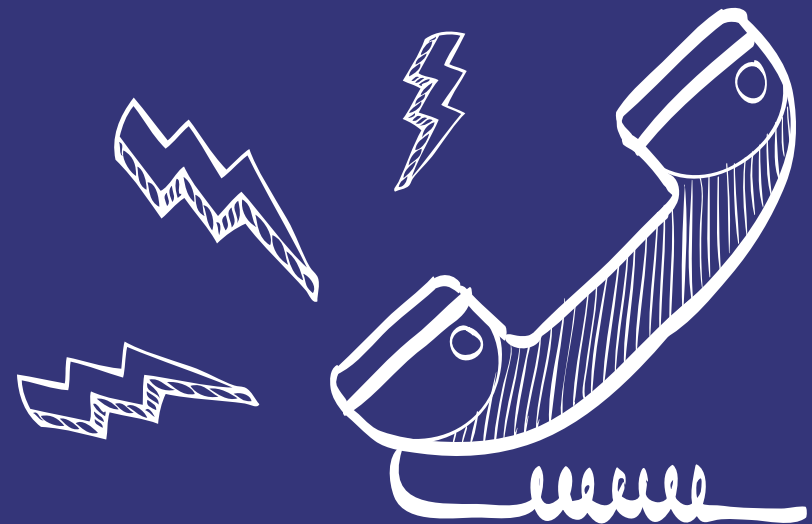
Apps across both fixed and mobile

The great promise of the converged future is that commonly available applications will work across both fixed and mobile.

So, features that are traditionally aligned with fixed-line systems, such as hunt groups, call queuing and inbound call handling, will be available to mobile devices too.

It also means that businesses will be able to apply greater control over their entire telephony network, regardless of the device. Converged solutions will grant more powerful call management across fixed and mobile, with improved reporting capabilities and greater visibility of call costs. It will also be possible to integrate mobile devices into CRM systems more effectively.

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Business-class voicemail

Nowadays, it's regarded as old-fashioned for a customer to reach a mobile voicemail when they call a business. Many people do not even setup a voicemail greeting for their direct dial, let alone their company mobile!

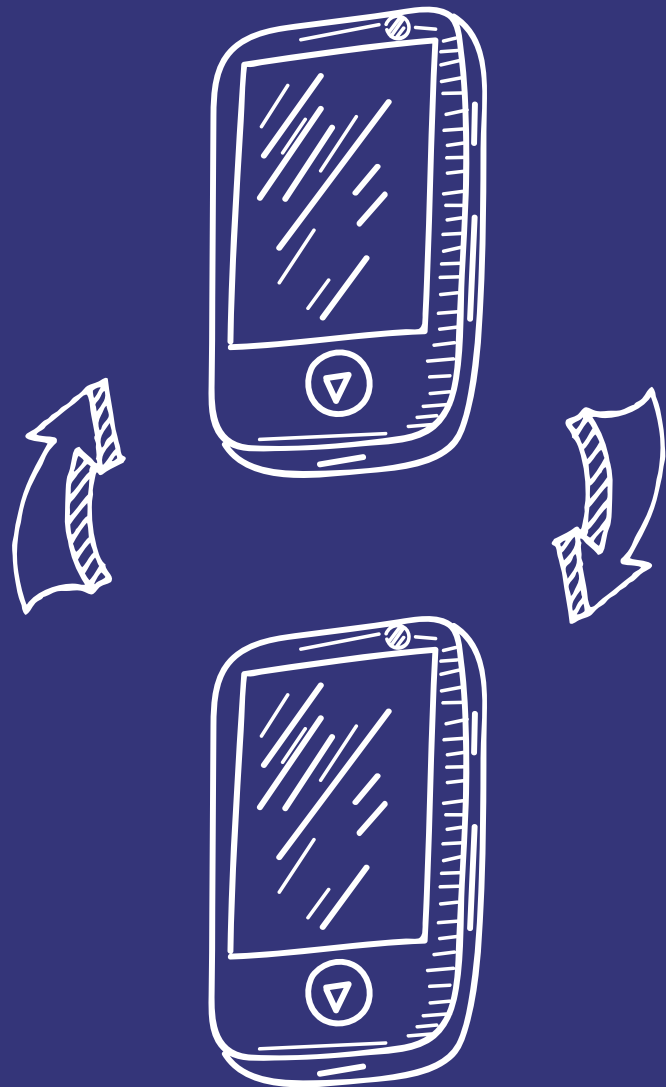
Many providers offer business-class voicemail for fixed-line handsets. However, convergence provides the potential to have an integrated fixed and mobile voicemail that delivers the powerful features and functionality currently available.

That includes multiple notifications, personalised greetings, extended message storage and flexible message delivery methods across all devices. It will offer a seamless experience that will make any business look slicker and more professional to its customers.

Data sharing

Convergence will also mean that many of the features currently available for fixed-line handsets will be available for mobile devices. But the opposite is also true – powerful mobile applications will be available for fixed-line too.

Take data sharing, for example. Something that is standard with a lot of mobile packages, but has no real equivalent for fixed-lines. Converged solutions will bring this capability to fixed services, allowing SMEs to maximise data rates by sharing minutes and data across their entire communication estate.

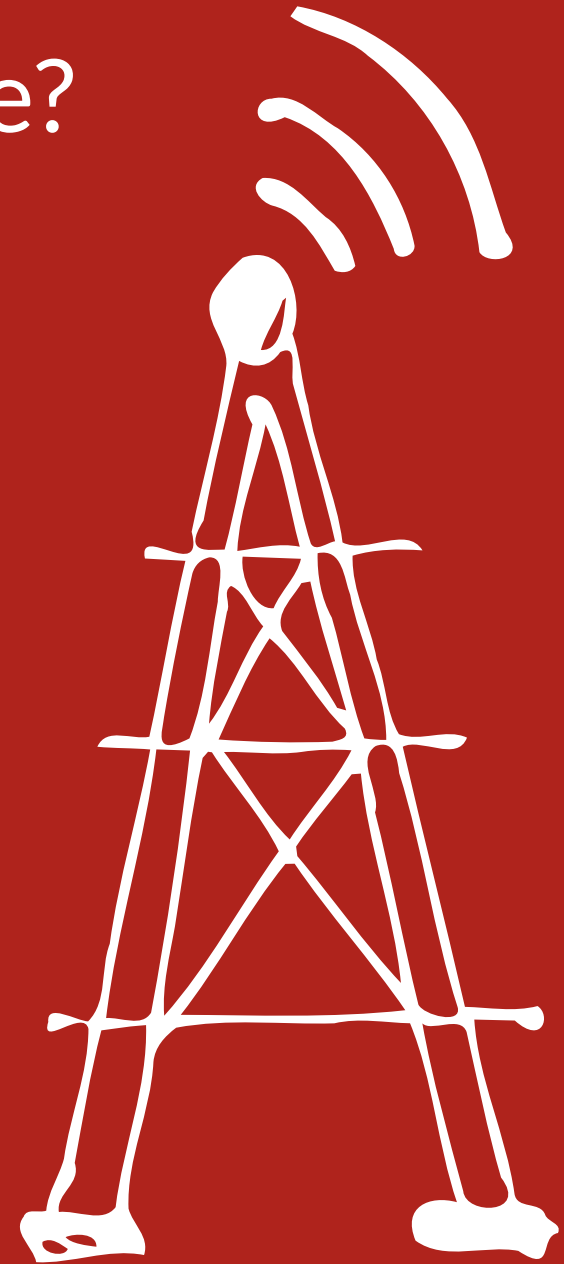


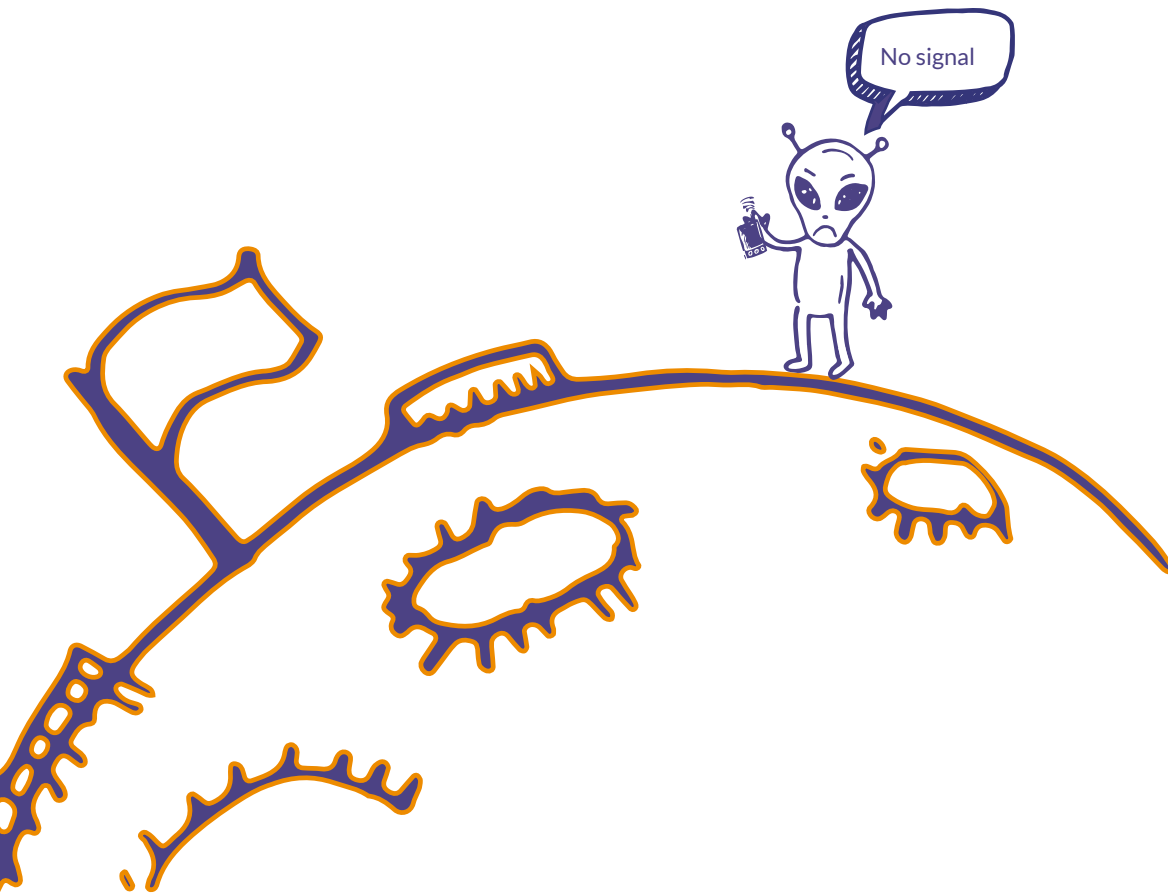
Are you ready for convergence?

Converged solutions are on the horizon. It will not be long before providers start bringing compelling offerings to market. And the benefits of bringing together the best of fixed and mobile services will be enormous for SMEs.

It is hugely important that businesses partner now with providers who are going to be a part of this future. Working with a provider that is seeking to build a full-service communications offering by investing in their own fixed and mobile networks is crucial to get ahead of competition.

Indeed, there are powerful developments in mobile already coming to the market that can deliver huge benefits to SMEs. Converged telephony will build on these capabilities and drive SMEs into the future. Companies that engage with the providers looking to offer converged solutions will be best placed to reap the rewards of game-changing technological advancement.





Mobile



UCC



Phone
Systems



Phone
Lines

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