



Planning your transition to Cloud Communications

How to ensure you maximise the potential benefits to your business



Long-term success depends on making the right start



Cloud Communications increase your flexibility and productivity without the need for large capital investment. But to maximise the benefits, you need to plan your transition carefully, with a full understanding of your current communications processes, assets and capabilities.

By getting your preparation right will ensure you:

- transition without disruption to your business
- implement a solution that is tailored to your specific needs
- maximise opportunities to improve your working processes
- provide effective support for staff, suppliers, partners and customers

It is critical that you choose the right cloud services provider for your solution, giving you the ongoing support you need for your successful long-term adoption of these sophisticated communication and collaboration tools.

See inside to discover:

- The benefits of Cloud Communications
- How to plan for a successful transition
- The potential pitfalls to avoid when transitioning
- How the right service provider can ensure your success

The benefits of Cloud Communications



Compared to traditional, capex-intensive, on-site systems, the financial advantages of Cloud Communications are clear and compelling. But the economics are just the beginning of the real business value.



Expand your opportunities

Free from the constraints of a physical location and a fixed workforce, you can expand your opportunities and grow your business.



Ensure seamless experiences

By integrating multiple communications and collaboration services across fixed and mobile devices, you can deliver the seamless experiences that your employees and your customers expect.



Work smarter, anywhere

With access to all the information and tools they need – anywhere, anytime – your employees can significantly improve their productivity.



Stay ahead with the latest technology

Always being up-to-date with the latest technology, and having access to sophisticated new features, ensures you stay competitive and don't fall behind.



Reduce your risks

Equipped with built-in resilience and security, you significantly reduce the risk of damaging downtime.



Free up time

With your cloud services provider managing and maintaining the system, you can focus on growing your business, not your phone system.

The three stages of planning a successful transition

To realise the full benefits of a consolidated, company-wide Cloud Communications architecture, the right preparation is vital. Our 3-stage approach is designed to ensure you transition successfully.

Stage 1

Audit current situation

You need to identify and fully understand your current assets, capabilities and processes by comprehensively auditing your communications and collaboration environment.

Stage 2

Identify improvement opportunities

Different cloud solutions offer a wide variety of tools and features for improving working practices, so you need to identify which of your processes could be improved to make your business run more efficiently.

Stage 3

Prepare your business

Your staff, partners, suppliers and customers all need to be fully prepared for whatever impacts your implementation will have on them. You should also review whether any of your technology needs to be refreshed (such as broadband links and handsets).

A good cloud services provider will work with you through these preparatory stages to ensure that your new solution is the right match for your business and improves on current working practices.

Key elements of your transition

As you plan your transition, there are 3 key elements that you need to consider prior to implementing your transition to Cloud Communications: technology, processes and people.



Technology

Encompassing your communications tools and features, your physical equipment and your underlying network – your communications technology estate needs to be aligned for your transition to succeed.



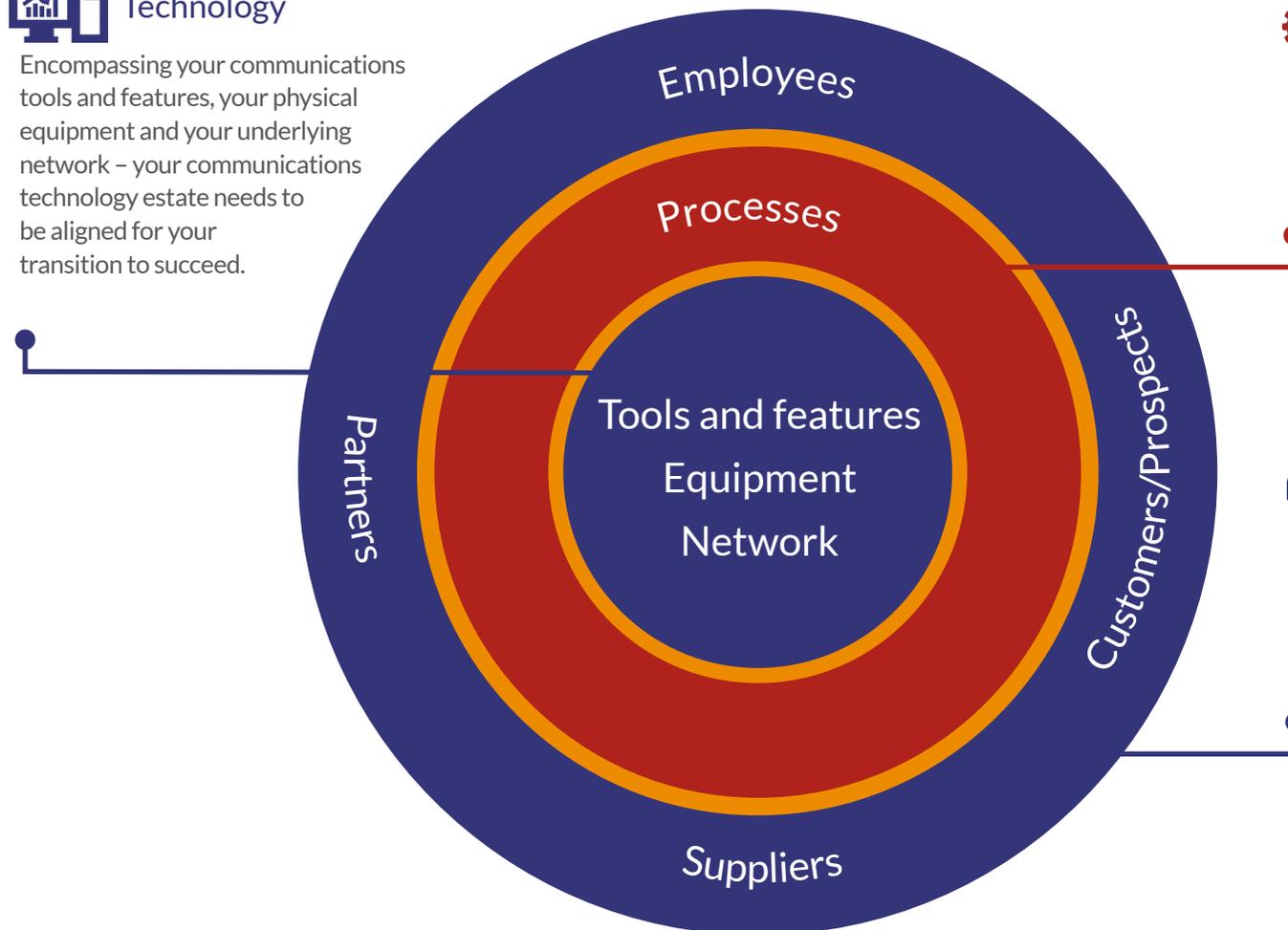
Processes

From identification to evaluation, you need to establish a clear and comprehensive understanding of all the communication processes operating within your business.



People

Preparing everyone who will be impacted by your transition – both internal staff and external partners, suppliers and customers – is fundamental.



Technology

From the tools and features you require, to the physical equipment and the underlying support network, all the technological elements of your solution must be aligned for a successful transition.

Tools and features

Your initial audit should establish:

- Which services, features and functionalities are used, how often, by whom and for what purpose
- If there are any non-business applications or productivity suites being used to fill gaps in your internal systems
- How you collaborate with people outside your organisation

You should then identify:

- Which potentially valuable tools and features are missing from your current solution
- Which business functions could benefit from new cloud features
- How collaboration could be improved

Equipment

An audit should include your physical communications equipment to establish whether:

- Existing CPE/phones can be re-used or need to be replaced, and whether you need to support BYOD
- All kit is to be replaced at once or a hybrid solution adopted – while benefits are maximised when everything is on cloud, a phased migration can efficiently manage existing assets and risk

Underlying network

Understanding the basic network requirements for your new solution will enable you to decide whether:

- Your current LAN and WAN can cope with the increased demands of cloud services, such as real-time voice and video
- Your network is sized for the level of concurrent calls expected, and if any upgrades or new networking kit will be required
- Any changes are needed to the Router or Firewall to enable security

The better your understanding of your existing technology, the more likely you are to make a successful transition.



Processes

Processes identification needs to be all-encompassing and rigorous. The clearer your picture of your current processes, the more you can ensure that your Cloud Communications solution improves your efficiency and adds value for your customers.

Mapping existing processes

Many businesses have processes that, having developed in an ad hoc fashion over time, might not be properly understood and documented.

So you need to map all your current processes, including:

- How inbound customer calls are handled in different scenarios - for example, what happens if customer service staff are unavailable? How does this vary at different times of day?
- How your teams share information, collaborate and manage projects, not just internally but also with external partners and suppliers.

Improving processes moving forward

Once you've mapped your existing processes, you can think how you might improve them. In particular, you should consider how new cloud functionality can help you to improve your customers' experiences.

You should consider:

- How new features – such as instant messaging and screen-sharing – can improve collaboration between customer service and back-office teams, enabling them to provide faster responses to customer queries.
- How you can take advantage of the cloud's potential to remove geographic barriers to optimise your call handling processes, for example by setting up hunt groups that span multiple locations.

To take advantage of the ways that new cloud functionality can improve your customers' experiences, you need first to evaluate your existing processes.



Business preparation must be comprehensive and supportive. Having your people not just aware of, but also fully committed to your move to Cloud Communications is essential for achieving a smooth and successful transition.

Getting everyone onboard

You can have the most advanced technology there is, but if your people do not buy in to your new Cloud Communications solution, your transition will end in failure.

You need to:

- Talk to your staff about how they use your current communications system and what improvements your new solution will bring – highlight the benefits to their working lives, such as simplicity and intuitive portals.
- Provide formal training to ensure everyone understands the new, added capabilities of your solution and how they can get the most out of it. Training needs to be appropriate to the user – for example, someone working on the customer support desk will need more in-depth training than someone working in the warehouse. Don't overload your people by trying to train them on every single feature, some of which won't be relevant to them.
- Ensure that your employees have access to the right training and guidance materials, post implementation. One-off formal training can only achieve so much – staff need on-the-job support too.
- Determine whether there will be any changed working practices, such as flexible working, home working, staying local to the customer and so on. These changes will have implications for staff that need to be worked through, agreed and understood to ensure that they are implemented successfully.
- Think beyond your workforce – training may also need to extend to your suppliers and partners, while your customers will need to be informed of any process changes/improvements that will impact them.

The clearer and more supportive your people's understanding of your new solution is, the more effectively they'll use it.

The pitfalls to avoid

There are a number of common mistakes that can be easily avoided when transitioning to a Cloud Communications solution.

Pitfall 1

Missing a key feature when the new system is launched

Example: On the first day the system goes live, the CEO's PA suddenly can't screen calls.

Solution: Make sure you listen fully to user requirements during your Stage 1 Communications audit, ensuring all required features/functionality are in place from day one.

Pitfall 3

Disruption on transition due to lack of process mapping

Example: A customer calls in when all your service staff are busy and the call is lost because it's not re-routed or held in a queue.

Solution: To ensure continuity of existing processes detailed data capture is essential and should include number blocks, call flows, call handling, hunt groups and contact center call routing. Get it right from day one to avoid confusion and calls being mishandled.

Pitfall 2

Network infrastructure hampers performance of new system

Example: You're trying to run a video conference suppliers, but the audio is constantly breaking up and the screen keeps buffering.

Solution: Ensure the appropriate underlying network is place before the system goes live, so that you have sufficient WAN bandwidth for expected concurrent calls and sufficient quality of service for real-time voice and video.

Pitfall 4

Lack of support leaves employees unable to get the best out of the new system

Example: Sales staff cut short their conversation with a prospective customer because they're unaware of the ability to move calls seamlessly between their desk phone and their mobile.

Solution: Ensure you implement the right user training and can rely on a well-staffed helpdesk for efficient issue resolution. You need the right cloud services partner, who will provide support every step of the way from planning to transition, to launch and beyond.



With an experienced cloud services provider you can trust at your side, you can be confident you won't make expensive mistakes.

Choosing the Cloud services provider you can trust

With the right cloud services provider guiding you at every stage of your transition, you can be sure of having the best solution for your business. When choosing your partner, make sure they can deliver these essentials.

Support

Getting the right level of support from your cloud services provider is critical for ensuring that your people maximise the benefits of your solution, your business achieves long-term productivity and growth gains, and your customers experience greater satisfaction.

Auditing and road mapping

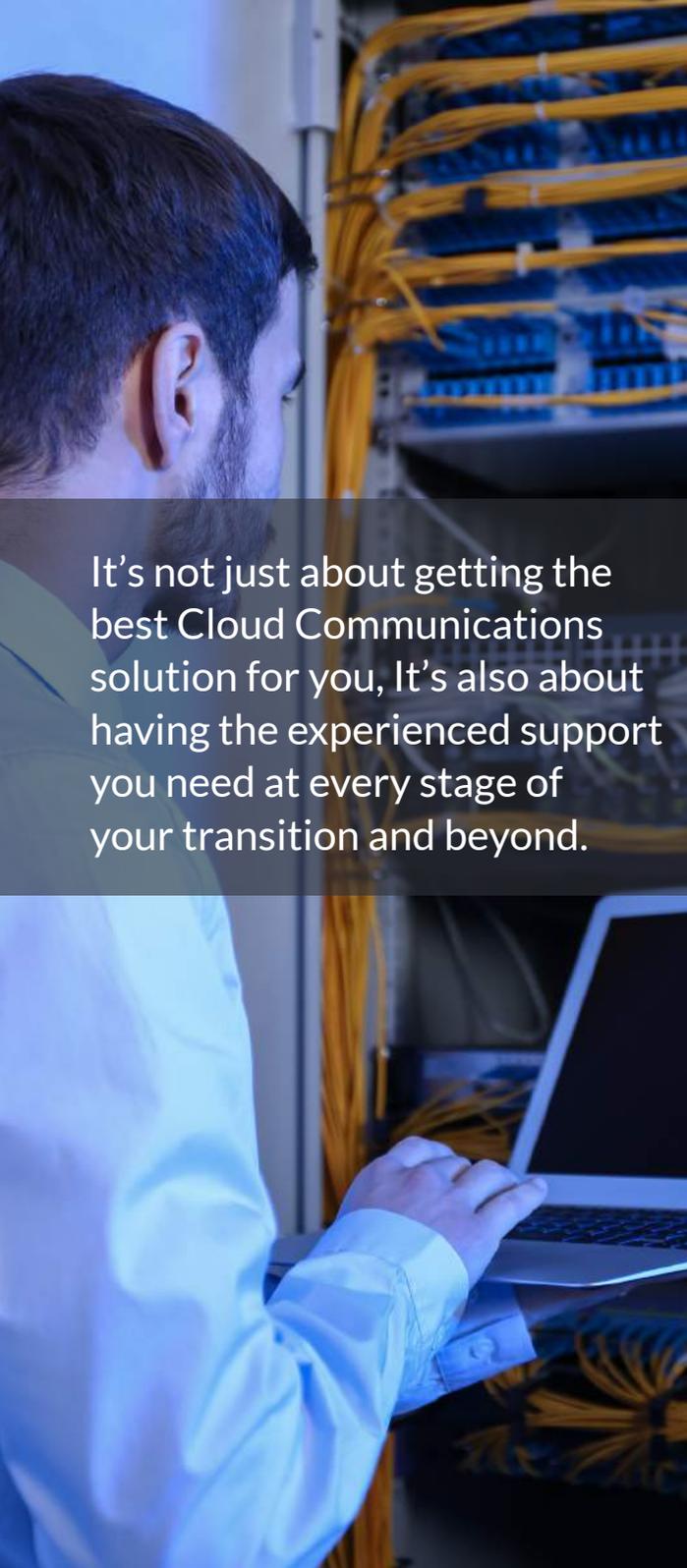
The right partner will help to audit your existing communications infrastructure and build a roadmap for your near, medium and long term futures. Offering a range of services to support your transition and ensuring you gain optimum benefits at every stage, your cloud services provider should also proactively suggest new services for improving your and your customers' experiences.

Monitoring tools

Your cloud services provider should offer network monitoring tools that provide a useful window into service levels. Constant analytics – such as delays and packet loss – can enhance management control and pre-empt service issues.

Experience

Your cloud services provider should be able to call upon their wide-ranging experience of having managed multiple transitions for other clients. You'll only ever do this once and your business can't afford to learn by making lots of mistakes, so work with a trusted provider who understands the pitfalls and can lead you painlessly through the process.



It's not just about getting the best Cloud Communications solution for you, It's also about having the experienced support you need at every stage of your transition and beyond.



Transitioning to a Cloud Communications solution can be a straightforward, uninterrupted path to stronger business performance.

Or it can be a nightmare.

The difference is how well prepared you are.



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