



Buyer's Guide: Choosing the right **UCaaS** solution for your business

Key considerations and key
questions to ask your potential
provider

Why you should read this

In today's digital world, success depends on your business' ability to adapt in the instant.

With the right collaboration tools, you can be one of those agile companies that achieves better performance and results through the teamwork of employees, customers, and partners.

There are now a number of different cloud voice solutions available. When you are ready to choose your solution, you need to be sure it matches your business needs and ways of working—allowing you to take full advantage of all its benefits. It is important to appreciate that not all solutions are equal in terms of functionality, flexibility, management complexity, or resilience.

Through this Buyer's Guide, discover:

- The advantages of UCaaS.
- The different types of solutions available.
- Key purchase considerations.
- Key questions checklist.



The advantages of Hosted UC

Hosted UC is a cloud-based, fully hosted unified communications (UC) solution, designed to completely replace aging telephone systems.

Hosted UC from CBTS enables you to gain complete control of your business communications with a web-based dashboard. The main components are local; long-distance toll-free; advanced mobility and collaboration features; and IP handsets.

Beyond financial benefits

The real value of Hosted UC goes far beyond the economics.

The Cloud Communications share of the total market is forecast to increase nearly 6 times to **41%** over the next 5 years.¹



Work smarter

By freeing your business from the constraints of a physical location and a fixed workforce, you can drive operational efficiency.



Stay sharp

By being constantly upgraded to the latest technology, you can ensure that you stay competitive and don't fall behind.



Switch seamlessly

The integration of multiple communications and collaboration services spanning fixed and mobile devices enables you to provide a seamless experience for employees and customers.



Reduced downtime

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



Get mobile

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



Stop worrying

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

Know your options

A number of different types of Hosted UC solutions are available. The most helpful way to distinguish between solutions is to understand the six different types of providers.

Types of providers:

Network service providers

Many traditional telecom service providers now offer fully-featured Hosted UC as an integrated part of their offering to business customers.

With cloud services and the underlying network delivered by the same company, these providers are able to offer strong end-to-end Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with guaranteed quality of service.

IT-centric cloud app providers

These tend to be software vendors with a background in productivity applications, who have incorporated communications functionality such as messaging or voice calling into their IT suites.

As the services they provide are built onto the IT platform, these services are part of the IT suite and not integrated into office telephony systems. Typically such solutions lack many of the features of a traditional phone system and so do not replace your existing phone system—they can only be used alongside it.

Over-the-top (OTT) service providers

These providers offer communications solutions that operate over the Internet. While these solutions initially tended to offer only limited functionality (such as basic telephony features and text chat), the latest versions now often support enhanced capabilities.

Although these solutions can be lower cost than traditional services, it is important to understand that they run over the public Internet. This means that they are detached from your data network and in some cases, there may be a trade-off between service quality and cost.

Traditional network Centrex providers

The first generation of hosted telephony service providers, delivering PBX-type functionality as a hosted service.

Typically they offer basic cloud telephony services that have only limited collaboration and business applications functionality.

Types of providers continued...

Private cloud services providers

These companies provide private cloud services that are deployed in a distinct and secure cloud-based environment, in which only you can operate (essentially you are getting exclusive access to your own private data center via a private network).

While private cloud offers you greater control and privacy, the financial cost is significantly higher than other options. In general, private cloud services are only feasible for large enterprise organizations.

CBTS

The roots of the organization are in the service provider world with a rich history of delivering on-premises, hybrid, and cloud unified communications solutions.

Since the industry has drastically changed and options of providers are endless, we have encompassed them all. Whether you are looking for private or public deployments, you must ensure quality of experience for your voice traffic. CBTS can accommodate any request using the latest in SD-WAN technology or utilizing one of our many ISP partnerships.



Interested in Hosted UC?

While all Hosted UC solutions tend to perform the same basic functions, they are not all equal in terms of functionality, flexibility, management complexity, and resilience. When selecting the solution that's right for your business, you should carefully consider the following issues:



Core voice functionality



Ease of management



Integration capability



Your mobility requirements



Scalability and flexibility



Resilience and service levels

Understanding your needs

Dispersed workforces

Multi-site businesses and businesses with a high proportion of mobile or remote workers need the ability to collaborate effectively across different geographic locations and are more likely to require sophisticated collaboration tools such as web conferencing and file-sharing capabilities.

Smaller, single-site businesses may not require such advanced collaboration tools for internal use. However, they may still need to collaborate with external people such as customers, prospects and partners.

Partner, supplier, and customer alignment

If your business has a closely linked supply chain or is reliant on third parties to deliver services to customers, then collaboration with partners and suppliers is crucial. By expanding collaboration tools outwards, your suppliers and partners become more closely aligned with your business.

Collaboration with customers is also a key consideration. Tools that make it quick and easy for a customer to interact with your business will have a big impact on customer service. This will require a Hosted Communications solution that makes it easy to extend collaboration functionality to external parties (for example, through browser-based tools), and has sophisticated access rules to protect company data without constraining the flow of communications.

Key questions

- What types of activities do your employees need to work on together remotely?
- What tools do you need to improve collaboration within your line of business?
- Who do you need to collaborate with in the wider business environment?



Core voice functionality

A Hosted UC solution can offer valuable new features, but it's no good if you lose a lot of the functionality that your users currently rely on. Your existing phone system probably provides a lot of features that you take for granted, such as hunt groups and call screening. Those features aren't necessarily supported by all systems, particularly those provided by traditional IT application providers.

It's vital that your chosen solution has all the functionality required to successfully manage your business day-to-day. Best practice is to audit all of the current communications services actively used by the business, then ensure that your new cloud solution can deliver all of these.

Key questions

- What PBX features do you currently use?
- What are the features that you cannot live without?



Ease of management

How you manage your Hosted UC solution and what sort of management tools you'll need are crucial considerations. Levels of management simplicity vary dramatically across the range of solutions available.

You also need to consider what management tasks you're happy to do in-house and what you want to outsource. If you're looking for a fully managed solution, then this will help define the type of technology partner you need to work with.

You also need to consider whether it's feasible for you to manage a solution that comprises different elements provided by different providers, or whether you would prefer a 'one-stop-shop' solution. If your business has a large IT function, your people may have the time and skills to manage complex solutions, utilizing a variety of services from different over-the-top suppliers across different platforms and networks.

Whether your business has a robust IT department or a smaller one, hosted communications solutions should allow you to refocus your resources on important business initiatives. In either scenario, ensure that the provider offers simple interfaces and intuitive management tools.

If, however, your business is light on IT skills and your communications solution will be managed by a non-expert, then a single supplier offering a fully integrated solution would be simpler for your in-house IT team. You'll also need to ensure that the provider offers simple interfaces and intuitive management tools.

Key questions

- Who will be managing the service and how skilled are they in IT and telecommunications?
- Which tasks do you want to manage in-house and which do you want to outsource to a third-party provider?
- Do you have the capacity to manage an environment where you use different providers for different services?



Integration capability

As you explore ways to utilize communications to enhance your existing business processes, you're likely to identify requirements to integrate your Hosted UC solution with both existing business applications and other cloud applications. For example, you might want to integrate with your CRM system in order to improve your customers' experience when calling in or to improve the productivity of your salespeople.

You need to ensure that you can integrate your Hosted Communications solution with other applications without prohibitive expense. Some solutions offer "out-of-the-box" integration with popular CRM and productivity applications. The more advanced will offer open APIs that enable easy integration with other apps.

Another area to consider is integration with your existing phone systems. If you have multiple sites, you might not want to switch them all over at the same time. This may be because you're still tied into an existing contract or you haven't fully written-down a previous investment, or perhaps because you want to take a cautious approach to implementation to minimize your risks.

For any of these considerations, you will need a solution that can support a hybrid model or a phased installation.

Key questions

- What business applications do you need your solution to integrate with?
- Do you have the resources to manage bespoke integration projects or do you need something "out-of-the-box"?
- Do you need a hybrid model for a period of time as part of a phased transition?



Your mobility requirements

The ability to support mobile workers is one of the key advantages of Hosted Communications compared with traditional PBX solutions. You need to consider how important mobility is for your business and what functionality you need to support mobile workers.

Some Hosted Communications solutions offer a completely seamless app-based experience for the mobile user, with access—from any device—to all the tools and functionality that an office-based user has. Some solutions also enable your teams to be fully integrated within your business phone network, with seamless moving of calls between fixed and mobile devices, and access to features such as the company directory. Whether your people are at their desks or on the road is invisible to external callers; location becomes irrelevant.

More advanced offerings include the ability for services to be delivered over a combination of fixed, wireless (Wi-Fi), and mobile/cellular networks, with automatic switching to the most cost-effective and highest quality network available as users change location. Fixed-mobile convergence can also enable users to have a single number across fixed and mobile devices without the need for a mobile app.

Key questions

- What communications and collaboration tools do your mobile workers need to be effective when away from the office?
- How important is it that your mobile workers are fully integrated with your business' communications network?
- What devices and platforms (such as Android and iOS) do you need your solution to support?



Scalability and flexibility

Different Hosted solutions have different limitations when it comes to scalability and flexibility. Some can easily scale up to handle many thousands of users and allow you to flex up or down as your business requirements change.

Others are more restrictive, either because of technology constraints or because of the way that the service is priced. This can be particularly important for advanced applications such as call recording or CRM integration, which can become prohibitively expensive if you need to purchase additional server capacity. So you could be making an expensive mistake if you opt for a solution that doesn't offer the flexibility you need.

For example, if your business has high seasonality of demand, it is essential to go for a solution that allows you to scale up and down without a cost penalty. You'll also want to ensure that adding and removing users is a straightforward task, and isn't going to add a significant admin overhead to your costs.

Given the rapid pace of change in many markets, it's also important to prepare for the unexpected. Ensure that whatever solution you choose is able to scale to support anticipated business growth over the medium to long term.

Key questions

- How 'peaky' is demand in your business—how much flexibility do you need to quickly scale up or down?
- Do you have a need to regularly add and remove users (such as large numbers of short-term contractors)?
- How much growth should you allow for if you achieve your business goals?



Resilience and service levels

Cloud takes away from your own business premises some of the direct burdens of business continuity and disaster support, but it is important to understand the measures that the cloud services provider has in place to ensure that you and your data are fully protected and always available.

If the ability to maintain communications and access information is vital to the running of your business, then business continuity measures will be a high priority. For example, automatic redirection to a mobile if a desk phone is unreachable could help ensure your customers can still reach you in the event of a fire, flood, or network failure.

You should also consider what minimum level of service quality you need. For example, if high quality, real-time voice and video (for example, for customer communications) are critical, then opting for a combined Hosted Communications and network solution from a single provider is likely to be most suitable as the service provider will be best placed to ensure a constant quality of experience.

For example, some service providers like CBTS now offer Hosted Communications and SD-WAN as a bundle to ensure the quality of experience for your voice and chosen cloud applications.

Key questions

- What level of resilience does your business require—what's your tolerance to occasional downtime?
- How essential is consistent, guaranteed quality of experience for applications such as voice and video?

Key questions checklist

Compared to traditional, CapEx-intensive, on-premises systems, the financial advantages of Hosted UC are clear and compelling. But the economics are just the beginning of the real business value.

- ✓ What types of activities do your employees need to work on together remotely?
- ✓ What tools do you need to improve collaboration within the business?
- ✓ Who do you need to collaborate with in the wider business environment?
- ✓ What PBX features do you currently use?
- ✓ What are the features that you cannot live without?
- ✓ Who will be managing the service and how skilled are they in IT and telecoms?
- ✓ Which tasks do you want to manage in-house and which do you want to outsource to a third-party provider?
- ✓ Do you have the capacity to manage an environment where you use different providers for different services?
- ✓ What other business applications do you need your solution to integrate with?
- ✓ Do you have the resources to manage integration projects and can your selected partner help you integrate?
- ✓ Do you need to deploy in a phased transition?
- ✓ What communications and collaboration tools do your mobile workers need to be effective when away from the office?
- ✓ How important is it that your mobile workers are fully integrated with your business communications network?
- ✓ What devices and platforms (such as Android and iOS) do you need your solution to support?
- ✓ How quickly is your business growing—how much flexibility do you need to quickly scale up?
- ✓ Do you have a need to regularly add and remove users (such as large numbers of short-term contractors)?
- ✓ How much growth should you allow for if you achieve your business goals?
- ✓ What level of resilience does your business require—what's your tolerance to occasional downtime?
- ✓ How essential is consistent, guaranteed quality of experience for applications such as voice and video?

The longer you shackle your business with an outdated phone system, the more growth opportunities you're missing out on.



Making the best choice for your business

The momentum driving the replacement of traditional business PBX phone systems with Hosted solutions is gathering pace. By 2020 the majority of business communications services are forecast to be cloud-based.²

Given the considerable advantages of Hosted Communications, this trend is no surprise. But it's vital that the desire to achieve the benefits available shouldn't result in businesses making rash choices.

Although they perform the same function, Hosted Communications solutions vary significantly in their cost, functionality, flexibility, scalability, support, training, and resilience. Some offer a basic communications capability but not much more, others are far more advanced and effectively provide a platform for the digital business of the future.

Before you select your new Hosted UC solution, it's important to evaluate your own requirements and put together a list of criteria that will give you the solution that's right for you. This guide is intended to help you do just that.

For more information on
Hosted Unified Communications
and CBTS, **contact us today.**

Contact us

