Collaboration is more than a corporate buzzword—it’s one of the main drivers behind business success today. Empowering employees to instantly communicate, share ideas, and brainstorm solutions can boost productivity, enable faster and better decision-making, improve performance, and increase profitability.\(^1\)

Achieving seamless collaboration requires improving real-time communications capabilities, taking into consideration the trends shaping today’s business landscape. Companies are more mobile, with employees working remotely using their personal devices on the job. Video conferencing is widespread: less costly than in-person meetings, more personal than conference calls, and offering increased access to top talent and business partners without geographic constraints. Multivendor is the new normal, with companies expecting to be able to add new communications tools and technologies from a variety of key partners, without losing their original investments—and needing to be able to easily integrate and manage it all.

Of course, some things haven’t changed: Companies are always concerned about increasing return on investment (ROI) and lowering total cost of ownership (TCO). They want to get the most out of the investments they make, and continue to gain value from the investments they’ve already made.

In this Trend Advisor, we’ll examine some of the top challenges for implementing an integrated multivendor unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) solution—and solutions to help your business achieve it.
When workers can instantly connect, share, and solve problems, they can be more productive, make better decisions, and perform at a higher level. That’s good for them — and good for your business. So, how can you improve collaboration within your organization?

It’s important to consider the unique needs of your employees, as well as all the ways and places they work. You may need to support mobile workers who are in the office only part of the time—or in the field, at home, or at other remote locations all of the time. You may rely on distributed teams located in different regions or countries, who must meet regularly, share documents and files, and discuss emerging issues “on the fly” despite their physical distance from each other. To be as productive as possible, they all need access to the same collaboration capabilities as workers at their desks in the office—wherever they are, whatever device they are using, and whenever they need them.

Change can be difficult for both individuals and organizations, so don’t overlook the appeal of the familiar. Employees may be more likely to use consumer-inspired communications methods that are simple to access, easy to use, and look and feel like the tools they use every day, such as instant messaging and e-mail. These tools can help encourage fast adoption by the broadest set of users, so you can get the most from your investment and maximize the benefits to your workers.

This includes personal smartphones and tablets, too. The “bring your own device” (BYOD) trend is popular, not just because it’s more convenient for employees to carry and use one device for personal and professional purposes, whether they’re in the office or working remotely, but also because it’s more comfortable for them. There are no new technologies to master and no extensive training needed. Your business can also benefit by eliminating the costs of business-owned devices, although you will also need a way to ensure the security of your corporate data and communications.

A wide variety of solutions is available to help you improve collaboration among all your workers, whatever size your organization is and wherever your employees are located. Here’s an example of how it can work.

**PICTURE THIS:**

A salesperson in the field with a customer discovers a design problem with a product. Accessing the company’s UC&C client on her smartphone, she locates the project manager and sends him an IM. With a few clicks, they quickly switch to video, then bring the manufacturer into the collaboration session. The salesperson shares images of the design issue, and within minutes of seeing the problem, the vendor has a diagnosis and proposes a solution. The salesperson arranges for parts to be shipped immediately to the customer. After ending the video conference, she assures the customer that the shipment will arrive the next day. The result: a problem solved, a crisis averted, and a very satisfied customer.
CHALLENGE #2: RISK OF LOSING CURRENT COMMUNICATIONS INVESTMENT

Like many companies, you may already be working in a multivendor environment, for example: presence and IM from one vendor, email from another, and telephony from a third. And if that’s not the case today, it may be soon, as you add new communications capabilities or upgrade existing ones.

This can seem like a risky proposition. You need to be confident that you won’t lose the investments you’ve already made—or the ones you will make in the future. You need to be sure that what you add tomorrow will work with what you have today, without disrupting your operations, posing a steep learning curve for your users, creating hassles for your IT staff, or stretching your budget thin.

Rest assured, multivendor solutions don’t have to be complex, difficult to use, or expensive to manage. You can put together a combination of best-of-breed solutions that are seamlessly integrated with your current setup for ease of use and management. Each one should be selected because it’s the best choice for the specific functionality you need, at the lowest cost. The result is a feature-rich solution that looks and feels familiar to your users, is simple for your IT staff to manage, poses the least risk, and offers the greatest return for your business.

Here’s an example of how a multivendor best-of-breed solution can help you reduce risk, simplify communications, and maximize the value of your investments:

Bringing UC&C to the Community College

Constrained by tight budgets, a regional community college is undergoing a three year, multi-phased transition to provide a unified communications and collaboration platform designed to better support faculty, staff, and students. The school has about 6,000 full-time and part-time students with three campuses. The original campus has administrative offices, dorms, and classrooms while the other two locations, each over 50 miles from the main location, support on-site faculty, staff, and classrooms. The college also offers online courses.

Today, the school uses Microsoft 365 as a cloud-based platform for its student e-mail system. Faculty and staff use a premise-based Exchange Server to support Microsoft Outlook, along with a SharePoint Server as a common repository for documents. To consolidate desktop operations, the school is replacing their premise-based desktop support with a hosted Microsoft Lync service. The Lync service will allow for common faculty, staff, and student directories, e-mail services, and calendaring—plus host desktop applications like Microsoft Word and shared documents in the cloud.

Like the desktop services, voice communications are being upgraded to include UC&C. Unlike the decision to use hosted service for desktop upgrades, the school determined that a premise-based system was more cost effective for UC&C. Because the school’s budget can only afford to upgrade one campus UC&C per year, the installed system will support the legacy PBX locations in the interim. Avaya’s Aura platform offers the engine behind the UC&C features, including VoIP.
intra-campus video calls / desktop video conferencing, presence management, inter-campus SIP trunking, and support for BYOD. As each campus upgrades its legacy PBX to an Aura platform, the school will integrate common directories to facilitate click-to-call / click-to-chat between the Lync, 365, and Aura platforms—and among campus locations.

Although the distance learning facilities will remain on the school’s legacy system for now, the hybrid Aura / Lync architecture can easily incorporate distance learning under the UC&C umbrella in the future. Long term plans also call for the integrated UC&C platforms to support inter-campus video calls and multi-site video conferencing, as budgets permit.

### CHALLENGE #3: RISK OF DEPLOYING NEW SOLUTIONS

Organizations looking to improve their current collaboration capabilities have a choice:

**A.** Replace their current infrastructure with a complete solution from a new vendor.

**B.** Upgrade the current system with new capabilities and tools from a different vendor—integrating with existing platforms and devices.

Some companies may believe that the first option is best, hoping that a total “rip-and-replace” will give them the complete set of capabilities they need in one package, with the simplicity of dealing with just one key partner.

In reality, the choice is not so clear-cut. While each vendor’s UC&C solution may offer specific features that others don’t, no solution is perfect — and none has every capability your business may need today and in the future. What’s more, no one vendor’s solution is likely to offer a large enough advantage to offset the cost, disruption, hassle, and time involved in a complete replacement of your current infrastructure (assuming your current system is from a major vendor who is providing ongoing development and affordable support).

Upgrading your current infrastructure or migrating to an integrated multivendor solution can help you simplify your deployment while improving your collaboration capabilities. Here are just a few of the benefits of this approach:

- **Reduced need for retraining.** This expense may not be tracked in your IT budget, but training users and IT staff on new systems and applications involves real and substantial costs, including time and resources diverted from other priority projects. Since your workers are already familiar with your current infrastructure, keeping all or part of it greatly reduces the need for retraining.

- **Reduced expenses.** Like many organizations, your budget may not account for the loss of unamortized assets replaced with new endpoints, servers, gateways, and other equipment that represent new expenses—but actually perform the same functions as the old ones.
• **Reduced risk.** By building on your current infrastructure rather than replacing it entirely, you can reduce or avoid the potential risks of:

- Losing your current investment.
- Being locked into a single vendor, solution, and technology that may no longer fit your needs in a few years.
- Relying on a single partner who supplies your software—and requires you to procure, implement, and manage components from multiple third-party vendors.
- Moving your voicemail messages to a potentially less secure system (a particular concern for organizations required to comply with rules about discoverability and retention of voicemails related to HIPAA, Sarbanes-Oxley, the Federal Rules for Civil Procedures, and other regulations).

To fully realize these benefits, you need a multivendor solution that will work with what you have now, maintain the same look and feel your employees are familiar with, provide simplicity and ease of deployment, and be cost-effective in terms of IT staff hours and licensing costs. Here’s an example of how this can happen:

**High Tech Consultancy Lives High Tech with UC&C**

A global technology consulting company with about 7,000 employees (and growing) needed to reduce its cost for phone calls within individual countries, and for international calls. At the same time, it wanted a solution that enabled faster collaboration between consultants and teams around the world.

The solution included the Avaya Aura® Communication Manager, Session Manager, and media gateways. By choosing a UC&C solution from Avaya that started with a VoIP deployment and IP-PBX functionality in the branch offices, the company was able to reduce domestic telephony costs by 38% in the first year. The solution also allowed remote employees to call internationally through the domestic office PBX – reducing international calling costs and eliminating the need to account for and reimburse employees after the fact for business calls made from their home office or mobile device.

Collaboration was noticeably enhanced with the Aura features, observed in employee comments and satisfaction. As a result of the decreased costs and the collaboration improvements, the company plans to extend the architecture to its offices in other countries.

**CHALLENGE 4: NEED TO INCREASE ROI AND DECREASE TCO**

Enhancing your UC&C capabilities can drive ROI for your business. In addition to retaining your current IT/communications investments, adding on the features and capabilities you need, and selecting those with the optimal features and lowest cost and risk, enables you to put together the best combination to meet your specific needs in the most cost-effective way. You get the most from your investment, free up your budget for other important business objectives, and gain all the benefits of improved collaboration, too.

Decreasing TCO is an important consideration for any business. A 2014 report from Nemertes Research found that in the area of IP telephony, costs among vendors varied widely. To keep expenses down and reduce total cost of ownership over the long term, it’s important to consider both the size of your rollout and the operational expenses (including staff time, equipment maintenance costs, third-party managed services, training, and certification costs) associated with each endpoint.
Health Insurance Provider Solves Open Enrollment Demands

Every year, a large health insurance provider faces the “open enrollment” period, meeting the peak contact center demand as users change their plans or even move to a new provider. The company uses a two-step process: the first step consists of contact center agents focused on helping the client find the right plan and complete the paperwork, while the second step uses a “warm handoff” to match the customer with a licensed insurance agent / underwriter who can close the deal and set the policy rates.

Contact center agents are trained to help incoming inquiries using chat, e-mail, voice calls, or a mix of these communications media to help customers get through the enrollment process. Regulations like HIPAA require that customer privacy be protected, that transaction records are stored, and that proper security procedures are all part of the process. Standard contact center tools like skills-based routing and workload management tools are integral to the business process.

The company’s contact centers have been using Avaya’s solution and Microsoft’s Lync to manage desktop applications to enhance collaboration between agents and with clients. Avaya Aura systems manage the typical contact center features like IVR / speech recognition, call routing, workforce management tools and reports, and network reliability. Lync enables document collaboration, chat sessions, and secure records storage (e.g. e-mail, chat, and customer records.) Lync also manages “presence” in this collaboration environment, although Avaya Aura can also manage presence features if needed.

By enabling best-of-breed collaboration in the contact center, this hybrid solution is well suited to meet the insurance company’s cost objectives, accommodate the peak customer traffic flows, meet regulatory requirements, and provide excellent customer service.

78.9% of companies planned to increase their IP telephony endpoints moving into 2014 by a median of 25%; 80% of companies planned to increase their number of IPT mobile clients by a median of 130%, driven by telework support and user demand, according to a 2013 survey of IT decision-makers by Nemertes Research.⁵
Cleaning Up with Collaboration

A domestic company specializes in home and office clean-up following fires, floods, and other disasters. The company used Microsoft for e-mail and directory services, Polycom for room video conferencing, and Avaya for its phone systems and audio conferencing services. In connection with a strategic business decision to support BYOD for all employees, including field support technicians, the company wanted to offer a solution that integrated directories, provided presence management and click to call for desktop and mobile devices, and that enabled BYOD and desktop audio/video participation for all employees.

The company looked at three options: cloud services to replace its current infrastructure, a “rip and replace” premise-based option, and an upgrade to existing infrastructure. The selected option had the best return on investment when considering the capital investment because it protected most of the existing infrastructure, it was the least costly multi-vendor solution to integrate, it had the acceptable ongoing operations and maintenance costs, and it did not require significant employee training to implement—thus reducing total deployment costs when compared to other options.

CHALLENGE 5: NEED TO KEEP OPTIONS OPEN FOR THE FUTURE

Organizations of all sizes and types looking to improve collaboration and implement UC&C need a reliable, flexible deployment of a solution with performance, quality, and resiliency. If you are planning to enhance your UC&C capabilities through a multivendor model, working with key partners who can deliver best-of-breed solutions can give you a clear advantage. Here are some things to consider and look for when reviewing your options:

- Will this solution integrate easily with what I have today, with the flexibility to build on to it, and adapt it for my future needs?
- Will this solution deliver the UC&C clients and performance I expect?
- Can this partner provide endpoints with unique features to meet my employees’ needs?
- Can this partner support connectivity to virtually any multiparty conferencing system?
- Does this solution provide an open environment, allowing for developments and improvements over time, so that I can gain the full benefits?

The multivendor model gives you the freedom to make changes as your business needs evolve and enables you to benefit from the creativity, technical expertise, and resources of multiple partners. Here’s an example of how that can make a help your business succeed over the long term:
**SOLUTIONS FROM AVAYA**

Avaya stand-alone solutions enable extensive enterprise features with scalability, reliability, manageability, and security. When factoring in acquisition and support costs with the operating costs, Avaya also offers a lower total cost of ownership. Avaya support for BYOD and UC capabilities isn’t just the client software with features and user experiences - it’s also applications and security tools that allow IT to feel comfortable with deployments.

When customers prefer a multi-vendor solution, Avaya also offers industry-leading integration with other suppliers. For example, Avaya’s integration with Microsoft enables the user to have a Microsoft user interface on their PC with the Avaya quality of service and quality of voice and video underneath. Avaya’s platform is designed for interoperability to help customers evolve from what they’ve got today with the agility that’s required to address tomorrow’s requirements.

**ABOUT AVAYA**

Avaya is a global leader in enterprise communications systems. The company provides unified communications, contact centers, and related services directly and through its channel partners to leading businesses and organizations around the world. Enterprises of all sizes depend on Avaya for state-of-the-art communications that improve efficiency, collaboration, customer service, and competitiveness.

Visit [avaya.com](http://avaya.com) for more information.

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**SOURCES:**