Now and Next -
Empower

Empowering your people to take your business forward

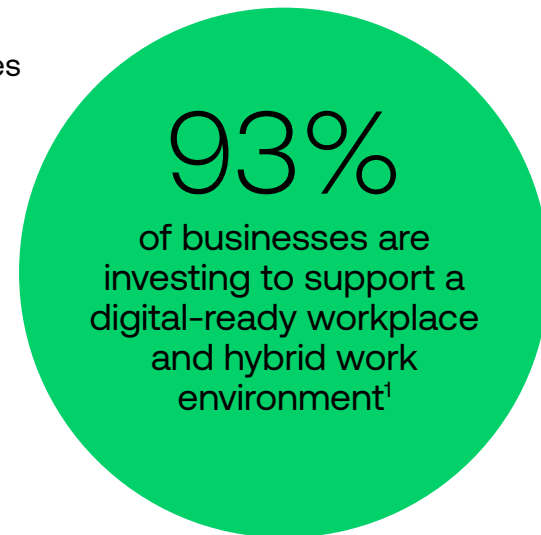Virgin media O2 Business

The future of collaboration

The pandemic forced many organisations to drastically change the way they work. It dramatically scaled the levels of remote and flexible working required to support business continuity.

By putting the right tools in people's hands, organisations are looking to empower their teams to challenge what's possible and achieve more whether working from home, in the office or on the go.

One clear lesson was that the choices that organisations made about physical workplaces had a knock-on effect on connectivity requirements, and vice versa.

It's critical that organisations think about all the factors that are impacting collaboration both now and in the future.

What factors need to be considered in supporting the future of collaboration and maintaining hybrid work? What is the impact of investing in the cloud? And what role does Unified Communications play? And emerging technologies?

93%
of businesses are investing to support a digital-ready workplace and hybrid work environment[1]

1. TechTarget, 2022 IT Priorities, 2021

Virgin Media O$_2$ Business

Remote and hybrid working: benefits and challenges

Remote and hybrid working patterns enabled by investing in collaboration technologies comes with both organisational **benefits**, but also **challenges**.

Benefits

Increased productivity:
Virgin Media O$_2$ Business research shows 48% of employees believe that remote and flexible work make them more productive.

Employment opportunities:
Flexible working provides more opportunities for disabled employees or those with caring commitments.

New working patterns:
Greater adoption of new working practices involving advanced technologies with improved processes.

Employee experience:
Improved employee experience for those who want more flexibility and choice in where and how they work.

Challenges

Sparking innovation:
Innovation is impacted, as employee networks have shrunk, particularly with distant connections.

Training and learning:
Skills fade is a distinct issue, especially for younger generations with a third of employees feeling they are missing out.

Employee wellbeing:
Wellbeing could be negatively impacted and it is harder for employers to notice and tackle stress or burnout.

Organisational culture:
Creating and nurturing a positive organisational, departmental and team culture can be harder with a remote workforce.

Cloud investments: what you need to consider

50% of enterprise businesses (1000+ employees) are going "Cloud First"[4]

Most organisations choose to invest in cloud-based technologies for collaboration and Unified Communications. This is attractive because it involves less hardware expenditure and more flexible subscription pricing models. Here are there are several key considerations.

Working environments and employee experience

Employee experiences of hybrid working: Employees will be working remotely as well as in the office; organisations must ensure there are positive and equitable experiences across all locations, with events like hybrid meetings providing real challenges

Effective use of office space: How to make effective use of office space to support hybrid working, productivity and collaboration, while also seizing opportunities to reduce building costs and meet sustainability goals?

Measuring success: Remote working and support resolution requires new approaches to success metrics; for example, KPIs such as the reduction in helpdesk calls.

The use of tech

Quality and reliability of work devices: Technology plays a huge role in the employee experience; Samsung reports[2] that 65% of office workers work with broken mobile devices, while Adobe says 49% of UK employees would leave their role thanks to poor technology[3]; so do employees have the right laptops and mobile devices to truly support remote working?

Migration from legacy tech: Shifting from non-cloud based legacy technologies requires different integration, data migration and procurement processes; organisations also need contingency plans for tackling the ISDN / PTSN switch-off by 2025

Communication versus collaboration: Are there key differences between the strategies for internal communication, external collaboration and team working; how should these be addressed through technology?

Security and connectivity

Network security: Infrastructure, tools, policies and ongoing governance processes need to be reconfigured for cloud-based operations so they are robust and fit-for-purpose; this is a focus area which is likely to require additional budget.

Endpoint Security: With workers using a wider range of devices, endpoint security should adapt to changing habits and workstyles. AI-powered, cloud-based endpoint security can keep you ahead of real-time threats, following the user rather than the network and applying a security blueprint anywhere on any device, enforcing a consistent security policy at all times.

Underlying connectivity is important: Secure, easy and high-performance connectivity will ensure a positive end user and customer experience; ethernet, fibre and 5G solutions can all play their part.

2. Samsung – Why every business needs rugged devices
3. Adobe research 2021
4. TechTarget, 2022 IT Priorities, 2021

The big switch-off: migration from legacy services required by 2025

A key issue that needs to be on the radar for all organisations is the switch-off of ISDN and PSTN services by 2025.

Historically, apps supporting collaboration have been separated from traditional voice services. But now the two are integrated, with voice forming just one element of collaboration. Traditional voice lines and infrastructure are on the way out as ISDN and PSTN are switched off by Openreach in the UK leading up to 2025. As a result, organisations are actively considering how they should migrate their voice and data products to all-IP services.

There are two main options:

Cloud-based IP telephony services

This approach allows you to change to a hosted system and incorporate new comms tools into your organisation, like Unified Communications (UC). UC supports increased remote working and collaboration. A VoIP phone or mobile can make and receive calls anywhere in the world, exactly as if the person was in the office.

SIP trunking

This is the natural successor to ISDN and PSTN. It's relatively easy to make the switch. You can retain existing, trusted numbers. You can operate an 'always-on' service. And you can benefit from call, data and maintenance savings.

An integrated approach: the benefits of Unified Communications as a Service

Unified Communications (UC) is not a new approach. However, with the ISDN and PSTN switch-off, there is a great opportunity to take an integrated, consistent and standard approach through 'Unified Communications as a Service' (UCaaS) which yields additional benefits for business.

More collaboration options
Opens up wider options for collaboration and communication, through messaging, chat, video, meetings and more – driving efficiency, producing better employee experiences and giving employees the familiar apps and devices that work when it matters.

Reduces use of risky tools
Helps reduce risks around using unauthorised and less secure tools (sometimes referred to as 'Shadow IT') that employees are using to communicate with colleagues and customers.

A more focused working experience
Offers flexibility to integrate existing enterprise solutions from Google, Microsoft and Salesforce into a more focused working experience, saving time and increasing productivity. It also offers the option of scaling up or down without disrupting day-to-day operations.

One platform
Allows you to have communication, collaboration and contact centre solutions alongside related analytics all on one platform. The transformation of customer experience and contact platforms in the cloud has introduced offerings such as Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS).
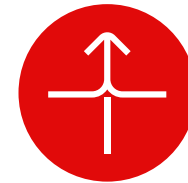
Taking a more integrated approach
Brings everything together through APIs and integrated development environments enabling you to simplify the integration of your collaboration tools (for example, voice, messaging and video) and ensure they are a part of, rather than separate from, your services or processes. With a less siloed approach to back office and front office comms there is a growing trend towards integrated platforms rather than point solutions.

Many vendors are starting to merge the functionality of UC, CCaaS and CPaaS solutions into a single platform, which has given rise to the term Experience Communications as a Service (XCaaS).

The future of communication: mixed reality and AI

Collaboration is a multi-faceted discipline. The technology that enables video calls or town hall style meetings is one thing. But there is also the need to consider the cultural and personal experiences of employees.

We've all been in a virtual meeting in which people talk over each other or when some are on mute or have their cameras off so it's hard to gauge their reactions. These experiences are made worse when the physical workplace is not equipped with the right tech to enable hybrid meetings so that remote and in-office participants cannot connect and collaborate effectively.

This is why the hybrid collaboration services we use over the coming years will need to be more immersive and make the experience more like being there in person.

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

There's huge potential to use Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) to deliver a better meeting experience. With VR you can view your meeting room in 360 degrees, allowing you to see and interact with everybody present.
Or you can build in curved screens around your meeting table so that remote workers appear as though they were seated together and everyone can participate as they would in person.

£62.5 billion by 2030

Projected growth of AR and VR tech in the UK[5]

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

There's no doubt that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has great potential to improve collaboration. Headsets, handsets and video conference devices already use elements of AI to improve end-user experiences. It's also being used by vendors to improve meetings and meeting room experiences.

At present, AI is restricted to specific tasks such as participant framing, active noise cancellation, or closed captioning with real-time translation. But with improvements in data storage, indexing techniques, computing and the technology itself, it's realistic to expect AI to make an integral and active contribution to meetings in the not-too-distant future.

5. UK Government Department for International Trade

Changing expectations

As these emerging collaboration technologies become more mainstream, expectations will grow. Organisations will be looking to their service providers for advice on the most appropriate apps and tools. They will want to consolidate vendors and integrate many of these tools so that collaboration is easier and richer for the people who use it every day.

And they are likely to want to assess performance of these tools using analytics based on internal and external sources to ensure what the organisation has is delivering the value for money it expects.

Want to talk?

By working with you, we can help you and your people achieve more – right now and well into the future. We'll go beyond being just your connectivity provider. Instead, we'll respond to what your organisation needs as your digital business partner.

Talk to your account manager today or call us on **0800 955 5590**

For more insight into how your business can leverage technology to solve problems now and into the future, discover more in the Now and Next series:

Now and Next – Connect →

Now and Next – Protect →