



Thriving in the New Era of Hybrid Work With Cloud-Based Unified Communications

Most enterprises are going to have to deal with a hybrid work environment for quite some time—maybe forever. That means that technology tools such as cloud-based unified communications must be able to provide the same richly functional work experience for all employees, regardless of their work location at any time and for any use case.

Since the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic first made itself felt in enterprises around the world, organizations and employees fervently wished for a “return to normal.” Fortunately, the spread of the virus abated, vaccination rates climbed and economies enjoyed renewed growth, allowing many organizations to breathe a sigh of relief that their employees could finally come back to the office.

But something unusual happened: Many employees didn’t want to come back to the office, at least not full time. Some may have had lingering health-related concerns, while others may have developed a true affinity for remote work. And others may simply have made the decision to continue working from home based on personal values, such as striking the elusive work-life balance. Commercial real estate development giant Cushman & Wakefield noted that only 40% of global office workers had returned to the office as of September 2021,¹ while Gallup released eye-opening data about employees’ work environment preference: 51% of employees want a hybrid work environment for the future.²

The hard truth is that nearly all organizations—especially larger entities in both the private and public sector whose employees work from multiple locations—need to make accommodating hybrid work a standard part of their work process. Of course, that means organizations need a technology platform to support multiple communications and collaboration modes.

Unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) is hardly new, having helped numerous organizations become more efficient and effective in supporting diverse use cases and workflows. But UC&C solutions now must be designed, built, deployed and managed for an era of hybrid work, where employees can and do work from multiple locations, often at different times of the month, week or day.

Whatever an organization’s goal for UC&C—enhanced employee productivity, improved business functionality or a blend of both—solutions must address the overarching need to ensure that employees have the same, rich-function, frictionless user experience, as if they were all working in the same location at the same time. This paper provides a specific recommendation on how to make that happen.

¹ “Predicting the Return to the Office,” Cushman & Wakefield, September 2021

² “Create Your Hybrid Workplace Strategy With 7 Questions,” Gallup, July 2021

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Use Cases for Hybrid Work Today and in the Future

There are a wide range of use cases that are already being substantially affected by the movement toward hybrid work and that would benefit from a cloud-based UC&C solution.

Such use cases may help organizations improve their business processes by greatly facilitating anywhere-, anytime- and anyone-class collaboration, across devices and platforms. The very nature of changing how work gets done makes flexible, scalable and resilient business processes more essential than ever. Use cases such as contact management and call centers are great examples of how hybrid work is transforming business processes. Another apt example is identifying the right resource for problem resolution, such as accessing user manual libraries for what-if scenarios in real time and with customized responses.

Another set of use cases focuses on improving individual employees' productivity by seamlessly integrating voice, data, video and other communications media. Imagine an integrated platform linking email, voice calling, intelligent search and automated scenario response built upon machine learning algorithms.

Countless other use cases are relevant for hybrid work requirements. These include scenarios where organizations and their staffs:

- Need to move to a global, virtual, 24/7 workforce.
- Embark upon digital transformation initiatives that demand a more flexible and intelligent approach to collaboration.
- Prefer—or demand—to work the same way in a mobile setting as they do when sitting in their office (wherever that office may be).
- Need more bandwidth, more reliable performance and greater security to support decentralized work.

The other key aspect is what it takes for organizations to adapt their communications infrastructure to support these use cases in a hybrid work environment. Legacy systems, even with earlier generation UC&C solutions, were clearly not designed for the era of remote work and hybrid work. Legacy systems lack the scalability, resilience and security for this hybrid scenario, and the costs associated with adding, managing and maintaining new infrastructure can be daunting.



Defining the Ideal UC&C Solution for Hybrid Work

One of the first steps organizations should consider when transforming their UC&C platform—or installing their initial one—for this era of hybrid work is moving to a cloud-based solution. There are numerous advantages to a cloud-based UC&C system compared with an on-prem approach. These include:

- Moving from a Capex-based economic model to a consumption-based Opex model.
- Flexibility in scaling up or down bandwidth as needed without having to decommission or recommission hardware.
- Avoiding technology refresh costs, management and hassles associated with legacy on-premises infrastructure.
- Leveraging the extensive security functionality and expertise of a reliable cloud partner that is able to build and support a more robust security framework through the shared-responsibility model of cloud security, as well as a zero trust mindset and methodology.
- Ability to move as aggressively, or as slowly, to a cloud-first or cloud-only architecture as conditions and corporate goals demand.

Enterprise decision-makers also need a solution with customized levels of functionality and support, depending upon in-house expertise, budget and evolving business needs. Whether an organization simply needs core functionality or higher levels of service and support all the way to a fully managed service, it is wise to find a solution and a partner that can accommodate all levels over time.

As mentioned earlier, security is a major issue and is likely to be a major differentiator between different UC&C solutions and providers. Organizations need unshakable confidence that calling, collaborating and all forms of communications are properly protected by policies as well as by the underlying technology at the device, network and application level.

Naturally, all users will want to have the same experience whether they are accessing the system at an office desktop, using a home office notebook or working remotely on a tablet. Having a familiar look and feel, regardless of location or device, is essential to driving user productivity in a hybrid work model.

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Finally, systems must offer high performance at scale, meaning that as hybrid work demands grow and morph, users don't encounter a degraded experience simply because more applications are added to the system, more users are attempting to access it or richer bandwidth functionality is required to support voice, video and other integrated features.

Lumen Solutions for Cisco Unified Communications Manager Cloud

Designing, deploying and managing a cloud-based UC&C system is vitally important in the era of hybrid work—and it is very difficult to do well. To provide the value needed for business process improvement and enhanced employee productivity, organizations need to find the right technology solution and the ideal partner to ensure the system actually delivers on its promise.

Lumen, in collaboration with Cisco, provides a comprehensive cloud-based UC&C solution that ticks all the boxes:

- Enhanced ability.
- Reliable scalability.
- High performance.
- Robust security.
- Proven economic value and return on investment.
- World-class service and support.

Lumen Solutions for Cisco Unified Communications Manager Cloud (UCMC) is a proven approach that manages the expertise, experience and innovation of the two companies, all in a high-functionality package designed for hybrid work use cases—today's and tomorrow's.

As a single-sourced solution, it greatly facilitates deployment, management, and service and support, and offers access to Cisco's market-proven UC&C technology.

Cisco UCMC supports a wide range of functionality, including voice and video calling, multifaceted messaging, Webex integration, mobility support, emergency call handling, public switched telephone network access and much more.



Lumen, as the single source for the solution, provides extensive capabilities built up over years of successful implementations of a range of networking solutions, including UC&C. Among the many benefits Lumen offers are:

- Single-source solution.
- Global service and support.
- Managed service options to meet the customer's needs.
- Extensive real-world experience with hybrid work.
- World-class dedicated customer experience.
- Proven, reliable and secure technology base.

Together, the partnership of Lumen and Cisco offers a powerful, innovative approach to cloud-based UC&C supporting the rapidly evolving hybrid work model.

Conclusion

It is now clear that hybrid work is not simply a stopgap effort to keep businesses operating during challenging times like the pandemic. Hybrid work is now a standard feature of business processes and workflows that must be a core function and capability for large enterprises, midsized businesses and smaller entities.

While earlier generation UC&C systems provided excellent functionality upgrades for a wide range of use cases, those legacy systems were never designed for the extremely diverse and potentially complex issues shaping hybrid work today. Instead, organizations should look to move to a cloud-based UC&C solution, ideally one underpinned by superior technology and market-leading deployment, management and support skills.

Lumen Solutions for Cisco Unified Communications Manager Cloud represents a major step forward for organizations looking to support hybrid work not only today but for the long haul.

For more information on how Lumen and Cisco can help your organization become more effective and efficient with a cloud-based UC&C platform, please contact us today www.lumen.com.

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