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White Paper

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Modern Cloud Communication Services:
Supporting
the SMB Revolution

Accessing communication tools from anywhere with an internet connection has become increasingly popular as businesses seek efficient and integrated communication solutions to enhance productivity and collaboration. Cloud communication services provide scalable capabilities that enable organizations to communicate effectively across various channels and devices. For small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), this means operating more efficiently, competing effectively and providing a better experience to both customers and employees.

Cloud communication services often provide a unified platform that integrates various communication channels, such as voice calls, conferencing, instant messaging and email, to name a few. This integration, often referred to as Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS), allows employees to access and manage multiple channels of communication from a single interface, promoting efficiency and streamlining workflows. Further integration with features including auto-attendants, call routing, voicemail transcription and call analytics can dramatically improve internal processes and the customer experience.

These advanced communication services were once available only to large organizations that could afford the infrastructure, monthly service fees and IT professionals required to maintain a robust communications platform. However, cloud communication services, which negate the need for major infrastructure investments and IT support, have made it possible for SMBs to harness the efficiencies and insights that were once earmarked only for large businesses. With affordable access to advanced communication tools, increased flexibility, improved scalability, and enhanced customer service capabilities, cloud communication services give SMBs significant business advantages.

What is Cloud Communications?

Cloud communication services facilitate communication and collaboration and can be accessed anywhere with an internet connection. Purchased on an as-needed basis, often as part of a recurring subscription, cloud services avoid reliance on traditional on-premise communication systems that can require time-consuming updates and maintenance. Cloud communications enable organizations to select the tools and services that align with their needs, providing a flexible, scalable option to address modern communication challenges.

As mentioned above, UCaaS integrates various cloud communication services into a unified platform, such as conferencing, messaging, and voice. These services are hosted in the cloud rather than on-premise, allowing real-time collaboration and communication across multiple devices and locations. They can also integrate with other applications to improve efficiency and the customer experience.

For example:

- Cloud-based conferencing services enable virtual meetings and collaboration among individuals or teams in different locations. Features such as audio calls, screen sharing, file sharing and chat enhance remote collaboration and reduce the need for physical meetings.

- Cloud-based messaging services facilitate real-time text-based communication among individuals or groups. These services often include additional features such as file sharing, voice messaging and the ability to integrate with other business applications.

- Cloud-based SMS (Short Message Service) and MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) services enable businesses to send and receive text messages and multimedia messages over the internet. These services are often used for marketing campaigns, customer notifications and other communication needs.

- Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) provides cloud-based solutions that can improve customer service and support. Features such as call routing, interactive voice response (IVR), call recording, analytics and integration with customer relationship management (CRM) systems enable organizations to better manage their customer interactions.

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Traditional and on-premise phone systems dramatically limit communication capabilities for SMBs that cannot afford or are not yet ready for a more sophisticated, complex phone system. Cloud communication services have changed the communications landscape by eliminating the need for SMBs to invest in and maintain hardware and infrastructure, resulting in several quantifiable benefits.

What are the Benefits of Cloud Communications?

The recent proliferation of cloud-based communication services has been linked to tremendous growth in hybrid and remote workforces worldwide, with employees needing better, faster and more reliable forms of collaboration. According to Zippia, 66% of U.S. employees work in hybrid or fully remote environments, and 16% of companies have elected to operate as fully remote organizations. Today, 27% of Americans work remotely (see Figure B.) By 2024, 36.2 million Americans are expected to work remotely, a 417% increase from pre-pandemic data[1].

Consequently, the global cloud communications platform market is projected to reach $51.37 billion by 2030, accounting for nearly 20% compound annual growth according to Market Research Future[2]. A geographically dispersed workforce can use the cloud to communicate in newer and more effective ways compared to traditional business phone systems. Whether staff members are seated one workspace away or across the world, cloud communication services present SMBs with significant advantages:

• **Cost Savings** - Businesses can avoid the expenses associated with purchasing, maintaining and upgrading on-premise communication systems. Instead, they can opt for a subscription-based model, paying only for the services they use, which can result in significant cost savings. According to a recent study[3], on-premise deployments cost 57% more than UCaaS deployments. The survey found that organizations using UCaaS spend, on average, $1,153 per license annually, compared to $1,830 per on-premise license. (See Figure B)

• **Scalability** - SMBs can easily scale up or down their communication services based on their needs. Whether adding new phone lines, accommodating more users or expanding to new locations, cloud-based systems can quickly adjust to the changing requirements of business.

Figure A
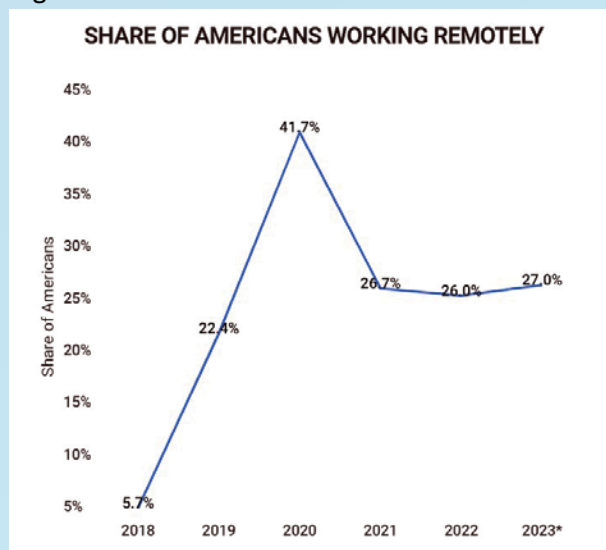
Source: Zippia

[1] Flynn, Jack. "25 Trending Remote Work Statistics [2023]: Facts, Trends, and Projections." Zippia. June 2023.
[2] Gupta, Ankit. "Cloud Computing Platform Market Research Report…" Market Research Future. April 2019.
[3] Gareiss, Robin. "Cost of moving to the cloud drops with time and experience." TechTarget. April 2020.

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- **Flexibility and Mobility** - SMBs can allow their employees to work from anywhere using various devices, such as laptops, smartphones, or tablets. This flexibility improves collaboration and productivity as employees can stay connected regardless of their physical location. It also enables remote work and supports virtual teams.

- **Reliability and Availability** - Cloud communication services are typically hosted in secure and redundant data centers, ensuring high availability and reliability. Service providers often offer robust backup and disaster recovery mechanisms to minimize downtime and ensure uninterrupted communication services.

Figure B
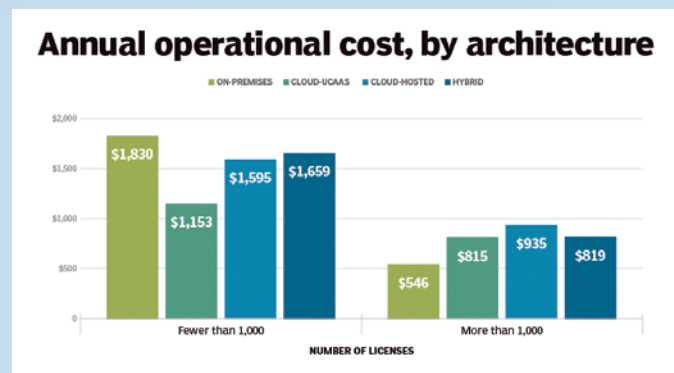
Source: Nemertes Research Via TechTarget

- **Global Reach** - Businesses can connect with customers, partners and employees globally, regardless of their geographical location. Leveraging the internet and various communication protocols, cloud services facilitate seamless communication across different devices and platforms.

- **Integration and Collaboration** - APIs and integrations allow businesses to connect their communication systems with other applications and workflows. This integration enables enhanced collaboration, automation and improved efficiency in various business processes.

- **Analytics and Insights** - Analytics and reporting capabilities offer valuable insights into communication patterns, call volumes, customer interactions, and more. These insights can help businesses make data-driven decisions, optimize their communication strategies and improve customer experiences.

- **Administrative Efficiencies** - Unlike on-premise services that typically require professional IT support, cloud communication services can be easily administered and managed by anyone in the office. Administrators can select new features or make changes via an easy-to-use web portal or mobile app. The intuitive nature of cloud services streamlines management, increases efficiencies and avoids IT support costs.

Cloud communication services offer SMBs a cost-effective, scalable, reliable and feature-rich solution to meet their communication needs, empowering them to adapt to the evolving digital landscape. These cloud services can even help SMBs stay competitive by supporting growth and expansion, all while enabling business owners to maintain the customization and control that fuels their entrepreneurial spirit.

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Expanding to Multiple Locations

Growth is a common business goal, whether the organization operates in a remote, hybrid or on-premise environment. When growth happens for organizations with brick-and-mortar office space, this can result in the need for more space or more locations. Cloud communication services make the process of extending communications capabilities across locations seamless.

Instead of managing separate phone systems for each location, SMBs can consolidate their communication infrastructure into a unified cloud-based solution. This allows for seamless communication between locations, enabling employees to make calls, hold conferences and seamlessly collaborate. By establishing a unified phone system across multiple locations, each has its local phone numbers. Calls can be routed easily between locations. This creates a cohesive communication experience for both internal and external stakeholders, regardless of their physical location.

Additionally, SMBs can centrally manage and administer their communication system, empowering them to quickly set up new phone lines and configure communication settings without the need for significant hardware or infrastructure investments. Instead of relying on on-site administrators at each location, businesses can assign one individual to manage user accounts, system configurations and updates. This simplifies administration tasks and ensures consistency across multiple sites.
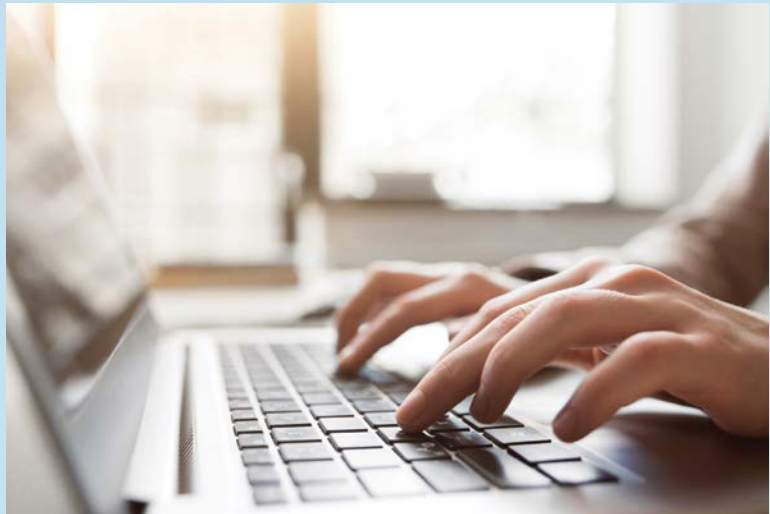
By eliminating the need for separate phone systems and hardware at each location, businesses can leverage a single cloud-based platform and reap cost savings on equipment, maintenance and support. Additionally, cloud communication services often operate on a subscription or pay-as-you-go model, allowing SMBs to manage cost more effectively as they expand.

With a centralized, scalable and flexible communication solution, SMBs expanding to multiple locations can streamline communication, reduce costs, enable collaboration and simplify administration, ultimately supporting the seamless operation and growth of the business.

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Accidental Call Center On-Demand

Although most organizations create strategic plans to foster expansion, sometimes growth can happen practically overnight. When a sudden influx of calls and an increased need for call capacity occurs, this is known as an "accidental call center." When customer demand spikes and either a sales team or a support team is needed almost immediately, cloud-based solutions can easily accommodate the additional call volume without requiring significant hardware or infrastructure upgrades.

Without this capability, callers' needs may go unanswered, causing frustration and resulting in organizations losing business opportunities. Cloud communication services are highly scalable, allowing businesses to quickly scale their call center operations as needed.

A virtual call center, where agents can handle calls from any location, is beneficial for businesses with remote or distributed teams. Agents can connect to the cloud-based call center system using their own devices, such as laptops or smartphones, allowing for seamless collaboration and ensuring customer calls are handled promptly. Advanced call routing capabilities and IVR systems allow businesses to route incoming calls to the appropriate agents or departments based on predefined rules or menu options. IVR systems can provide self-service options for callers, reducing the need for agent intervention for basic queries and freeing agents to handle more complex issues.

Additionally, cloud communication services often include call monitoring and analytics features. Supervisors or managers can monitor calls in real-time, listen to recorded calls for quality assurance purposes, and gain insight into call center performance through analytics and reporting tools. These features help businesses identify areas for improvement, track key metrics, and make data-driven decisions to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the call center.

Furthermore, many cloud communication platforms integrate with customer relationship management (CRM) systems, enabling agents to access customer information and interaction history during calls. This integration provides agents with relevant context and allows for personalized and efficient customer interactions. It also facilitates the logging of call details and outcomes within the CRM system, ensuring accurate and comprehensive customer records.

Cloud communication services enable businesses to quickly set up and scale their accidental call center on demand, optimize call routing and handling, monitor performance, and integrate with other systems to provide a seamless customer experience.

Customization and Control

Aside from the prospect of growth and prosperity, many entrepreneurs start a business because they believe they can offer a product or service that is better, faster, or less expensive. To realize their vision, they assume a position that provides guidance and control over how the organization evolves. Perhaps among the most profound benefits is that cloud communication services provide SMB owners a level of customization and control that empowers them to grow their businesses their way, rather than requiring them to fit within a particular size and scope that can limit their capabilities.

Cloud communication platforms typically provide easy-to-use administrative portals or dashboards that allow SMBs to manage their user accounts and settings. Business owners or administrators can easily add or remove users, assign permissions and roles, and control access to various features and functions. This level of control enables SMBs to customize user experiences based on their specific needs.

Some cloud services providers also offer a mobile admin app that enables administrators to make changes as needed from any device or location with an internet connection. Through a mobile admin app, administrators can switch call routing, receive real-time notifications on usage and devices, personalize call features, and more. Administrators maintain complete user management, even while on the go.

Additionally, analytics and reporting features can offer valuable insights into communication patterns and performance. SMBs can access data on call volumes, call durations, call quality and other metrics to make informed decisions and optimize their communication strategies. This level of control over analytics and reporting enables SMBs to monitor and customize their communication processes based on real-time data.

With cloud communication services, SMBs gain greater customization and control over their communication systems and can adapt them to meet the evolving needs of their business.

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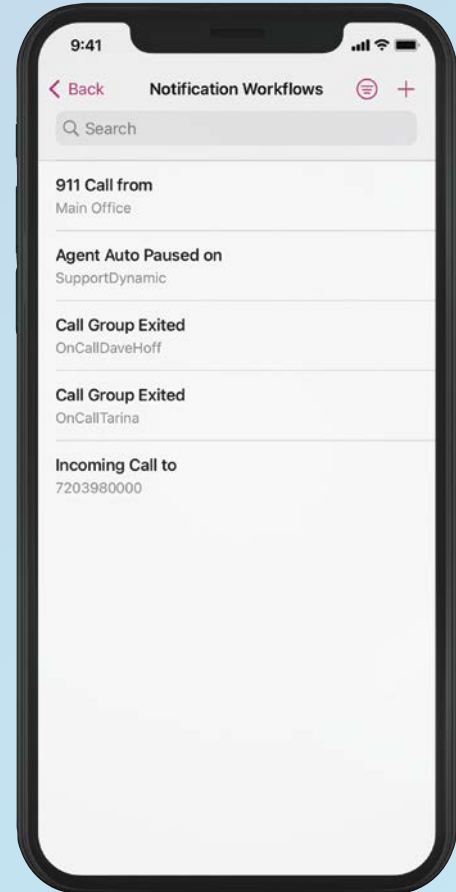
Conclusion

When considering traditional business phone systems, SMBs face significant capability limitations due to their size and scope of needs. Although they may want some services and not others, they are often restricted to the "small business" offerings, limiting what services they can access. Yet, today's SMBs face many of the same obstacles as large organizations - economic issues, the proliferation of remote work, integration-related concerns and security.

Cloud communication services dramatically improve what's possible for SMBs by providing scalability, reliability, and control coupled with tremendous flexibility and customization options. This empowers SMBs to operate their organizations from anywhere with an internet connection, using whatever device(s) they choose. This level of freedom can unlock unlimited potential and growth opportunities.

With cloud communication services, SMBs can offer employees a plethora of efficiency gains that ease their administrative workloads and provide for a more productive, collaborative work environment. SMBs also gain the ability to leverage cloud services to improve customer support and the user experience. The cumulative advantages cloud communication services provide are qualitative and quantitative and have a dramatic impact on bottom-line results.

About FluentStream

FluentStream is the preferred cloud communications provider by small and midsize organizations. Its cloud-based voice, text and conferencing communication services support on-premise, hybrid and remote work environments and offer customers more than 100 communications features. FluentStream's customizable communications platform can be managed from a convenient, easy-to-use web portal that empowers customers to enable services and set their preferences. FluentStream backs its services with 24/7, U.S.-based human support to ensure customers can access the functionality and assistance they need to continuously operate their businesses.

FluentStream operates an award-winning channel partner program, working with hundreds of affiliate, channel and strategic partners across the U.S. The company has been named to the Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America for six consecutive years. To learn more about FluentStream's customer-centric cloud communication services for SMBs, contact us at info@fluentstream.com.

To learn more about how FluentStream works with our valued partners, contact us at channel@fluentstream.com.

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