The road to Enterprise Voice

A guide to Skype for Business deployment

Executive Summary

A revolution is underway

Skype for Business is forcing organizations to rethink their whole approach to unified communications. And not just because of improved work practices. The fact it's a software-based system is making everyone sit up and take notice.

Skype for Business becomes even more attractive with the release of the Office 365 Enterprise E5 suite. This new enterprise licensing option offers two significant new services: Cloud PBX enables the removal of separate PBX systems, with calls managed directly from Skype for Business; and PSTN Conferencing allows people to dial into Skype meetings from virtually any device.

In the following pages, we discuss the key factors you need to consider when adopting Skype for Business.

Is it right for you?

This is a critical question. We assess what type of organization will gain the most benefit and why. We examine issues like the size and type of business operations, existing infrastructure and the stage in the technology life cycle. It also depends on whether you have existing Office 365 licenses, allowing you to take advantage of new capabilities for minimal extra investment.

What kind of deployment is best?

Once you've decided to migrate, you have to determine the best type of deployment: on-premises, cloud or hybrid. Many organizations' IT environments are already in a state of transition, so hybrid environments are popular. But this decision will ultimately need to fit in with your long term IT strategy.

How do you ensure user adoption?

Approval by end users is vital otherwise the deployment becomes pointless. We outline the steps that every organization can take to help ensure uptake, user satisfaction, and rapid return on investment. The major point here is that IT staff must plan well and be in control every step of the way.

Do you have the right tools for a seamless deployment?

Managing a communications system transition is always complex. IT has to orchestrate numerous components – often in a multi-vendor environment, so they all work in unison. For this to happen, you need the right tools to see your environment as a whole, view each component in detail, and understand the relationship between components as well as end users. The ability to anticipate and pro-actively resolve issues is also necessary.
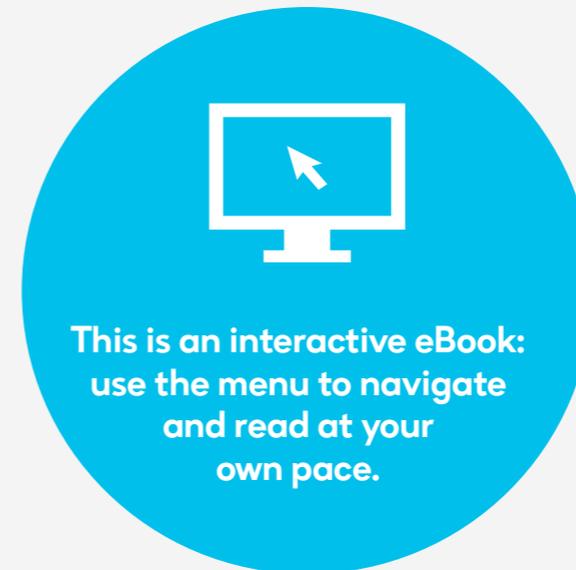
This is an interactive eBook: use the menu to navigate and read at your own pace.

Are you ready?

There is no doubt Skype for Business (formerly Lync) is changing the UC landscape. Whether organizations are using it purely for IM or embracing the power of the conferencing capabilities, Skype for Business allows firms to increase productivity and boost growth. Skype for Business effectively shortens the distance between communication wherever your employees are located, making work a thing you do rather than a place you go.

Gartner expects Microsoft Skype for Business as a telephony solution to continue its rapid adoption rate, earning Microsoft a coveted top-three position as a global telephony provider by 2016. **

The real benefits of the Skype for Business platform are the speed of business – instantaneous communications inside and outside your firewalls drive business growth, access to a multi-million customer base, especially for B2C businesses; and the potentially huge cost savings on communication solutions and executive travel.

These benefits alone make Skype for Business a must have for every company, across all industries. Or does it? There is no doubt Skype for Business makes it easier to connect people, and in the long term it is a viable alternative to the traditional PBX. Yet, like the introduction of any new technology, businesses must be fully prepared before considering deployment.

To answer this question, you need to:

- **Define and prioritize your specific business requirements:** Is the goal to deploy an enterprise voice alternative? Do your staff want greater conferencing and collaboration capabilities?

- **Have a complete understanding of and visibility into your existing infrastructure:** What is your legacy PBX system? Are employees using web conferencing facilities such as Cisco's WebEx or Citrix's GoToMeeting? Don't ignore the network and the capability to support advanced conferencing capabilities such as hi-definition video calls.

- **Understand the full range of IT costs for your business communications:** What is the cost of owning, managing, maintaining and integrating legacy telephony equipment? Do you already have the relevant Microsoft volume licensing or do you need to invest in separate Client Access Licenses (CALs)? What is the cost of getting the network ready to support Skype for Business? What portion of your budget should be devoted to meetings of distributed colleagues?

- **Develop a valid business case:** Skype for Business can be justified if your business is geographically dispersed, has a number of remote workers or maintains a large sales force. Deploying Skype for Business because you can, doesn't mean that you should. Companies need to evaluate the business outcomes to justify deploying the communications platform.

- **Consider the cultural impact:** In making an evaluation, companies must consider the people aspect. Do you have employees that are resistant to the introduction of new technology? How attached are your staff to other web conferencing facilities? How will the integration of Skype for Business affect the daily life of your employees?

- **Know what is needed for enterprise wide success:** Visibility and control capabilities of your UC traffic are essential to ensure high quality of user experience (QoE). Companies need to re-evaluate their monitoring solutions and performance management.

Failing to take into account the demands of managing such projects, and the time and effort required to assess your current situation and properly document a strategic UC direction, will significantly reduce the chances of success for your Skype for Business deployment.

*** Gartner "Microsoft Lync (Skype for Business): What Do Adoption Trends Mean for Your Organization?", by Megan Marek Fernandez, Bern Elliot, 10 January, 2015*

Not a case of one size fits all

Like any technology, it's not a case of one size fits all. A new UC platform must deliver on its promise to increase productivity, drive growth and slash business costs. Organizations need to understand the value in Skype for Business before rolling out the solution company-wide.

Who is the right company?

1. **Organizations that are highly mobile:** There is a mobile client which makes the technology interesting for companies whose employees roam the office or hot desk.

2. **Companies whose PBX and/or UC solutions are up for refresh:** It's not uncommon for organizations to refresh technology every couple of years. A technology refresh is the ideal time to consider Skype for Business. You can make decisions as to whether you refresh the technology for everyone, only some users or even rip and replace your existing PBX. The questions to ask are: Is your equipment out of maintenance? Are you having problems? Can you replace it with an alternative solution?

3. **Businesses with employees that are geographically dispersed:** Workers scattered around the country or the globe need to meet and collaborate, forcing travel budgets to rise dramatically. Skype for Business allows employees wherever they are to connect instantaneously, share screens and collaborate on projects.

4. **Organizations with appropriate Microsoft licensing:** Skype for Business becomes really compelling when companies have an Office license for their employees' desktops. Investing in server roles for IM, presence and conferencing capabilities are not that expensive – costing thousands of dollars as opposed to tens of thousands, for viable alternatives.

5. **Businesses who want to deepen their relationship with partners and the supply chain:** With Skype for Business you chat as if you're in the room together. Partners become closer through real-time connections, which can help businesses make better and faster decisions and enhance collaboration.

6. **Medium to large enterprises:** Microsoft's software solution delivers more value to businesses with bigger head counts. That is not to say the technology is not available nor of value to a smaller company if you can build a business case. In this instance the cheaper end-to-end alternative for many small companies who don't have a significant number of users with phones on their desk may be to deploy Skype for Business as a managed service.

Don't forget about business application integration: We all know applications and communications are migrating to the cloud, but in most cases it is only the deployment model that has changed. However, moving to cloud UC will allow companies to realize the value of integrating voice communications with business applications. Even better, as part of Office 365, Skype for Business features like presence, IM, voice and video calls and online meetings are integrated with the productivity tools people use every day, increasing adoption and consumption.
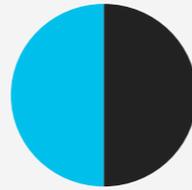
What are my choices?

The need for greater collaboration and sharing via powerful conferencing facilities will further drive adoption in medium to large enterprises. The ability to have video calls and work together on documents not only drives productivity but is more efficient than gathering around a dusty phone in a boardroom and then heading back to your desk to make appropriate changes, insertions etc. to a file.

Employees who often work remotely can collaborate on a project via a Skype for Business call. Documents as well as control can be passed back and forth enabling work to be completed in real time as if your co-workers are sitting next to you. Productivity increases and you don't have to delay the project until your colleague is next in the office.

Many of the alternative UC solutions are prohibitive in price. CEOs cannot justify the costs to implement solutions (such as Cisco's Telepresence) in all the boardrooms across the country and around the globe. If all you do is conferencing there's enough value in turning off your other web conferencing accounts and maybe saving a few flights here and there.

Also most businesses will have already invested in the required licenses to offer Microsoft's UC features such as IM, presence and conferencing. A good argument is: we've already paid – let's take advantage of the assets we own.

Microsoft offers different tiers of licensing, but essentially the lower level capabilities are included in the Office license. Microsoft wants businesses to have the relevant licenses even though not all the available features may yet

be fully deployed. The proper Microsoft license enables organizations to use what was Lync, now Skype for Business.

Offering the additional services doesn't affect the costs required to keep existing web conferencing accounts, maintenance costs or refreshing hardware, including desktop phones etc. for employees. Businesses can expect costs in the order of a couple of thousand dollars for server role licenses to enable unified messaging features.

Finally, there are additional cost savings to be had if you can replace your existing PBX. The way to do this is to adopt a phased approach to deployment starting with IM, presence or conferencing. If the experience is good and it's easy to use, employees are more likely to consume additional services such as external conferencing and eventually give up their desk phone. A big portion of many companies' budgets is tied up in equipment that is little used. It's an easy decision to replace a PBX in this scenario. Even if you decide to keep your PBX, you can replace it with a smaller one and buy fewer phones for it.

Choices?

With Microsoft's launch of the new Office 365 Enterprise E5 suite on December 1, 2015 you need to think about and plan your cloud communication requirements and deployment options. E5 is a new enterprise-wide license with Cloud PBX as well as PSTN calling options.

Now is the time to decide which deployment scenario makes the most sense for your company. You need to think about the interests of your various teams, how you will manage the environment and your network infrastructure.

Organizations can choose to deploy Skype for Business:

- In the cloud: As part of the Office 365 platform, Skype for Business will deliver enterprise-grade reliability and controls.

- Hybrid: Some services offered on-premises, and others via the cloud. Some global companies might want to have a Town Hall meeting with 10,000 employees. Your on-premises service may not be capable of running the meeting so you can conduct it in the cloud. Microsoft has made this easy to entice more companies to adopt a hybrid model.

- On-premises: Skype for Business Server is deployed on site to manage communications.

Some critical issues to consider are:

Can your company manage your communications internally? What UC features are better suited to an on-premises or cloud solution? Which offering is better for your users to encourage adoption?

Making the right choice

The opportunity to slash budgets and increase productivity can make it tempting for every company to jump in blindly and roll out Skype for Business. For some companies however, it may be wiser to delay the investment until you have assessed your options and ensured the organization is fully prepared.

Skype for Business may not be suitable for everyone. Smaller companies might wish to consider lower cost or even free options, such as the consumer version of Skype. The collaboration/conferencing capabilities are not as powerful but it might still be a viable alternative.

Ultimately, if every employee is in the same building the business case may be harder to justify. The value and indeed the cost savings only come into their own with geographically dispersed teams or when you have people that work from home. When employees are based in the same office – whether on the same floor or on a number of floors – it is just as easy to visit a colleague for a chat than make a Skype call and set up a meeting. Presence and IM in this scenario has some value. You can check presence to see if your colleague is available and for a quick question you could ping them using IM. If, however, it's going to be more of a conversation, five to 10 minutes or longer, it's easier to go and talk to them.

Why the CEO needs to care

As the IT manager you've done the groundwork – ticked all the boxes and have a valid business case. Now it's time to sell Skype for Business to your management. You have to present a compelling vision for what the technology is and what it's going to do to get budget approval. A good idea is to first demonstrate the economic benefits for the business. Management is far more likely to give the green light to projects which reduce costs and drive productivity – key benefits of Skype for Business.

For large enterprises with employees scattered across the country and around the globe, the cost justification alone can be enough to win managerial support.

It's not unheard of for big companies to have large travel budgets or huge investments in conferencing facilities like WebEx for employees to collaborate, share ideas and make informed decisions. Skype for Business gives employees IM, internal conferencing and voice communications for access to people inside and outside their walls. Adoption and the question of is it going to work aside, the possible savings are huge compared to what businesses are paying now. Organizations can drastically reduce spending on third party web conferencing facilities and flights for executives to conduct meetings, training etc.

SKYPE FOR BUSINESS
CONVINCING THE CEO

Deployment

The green light to roll out Skype for Business is only the first step

To realize promised returns on investment users must not only consume the service but be satisfied with the experience. Disgruntled employees are hesitant to use technology if the quality doesn't meet expectations, or it doesn't work. And for communications – an important asset to any company, voice quality is very high profile and critical, so understandably the bar is set very high.

The one common thing with all successful deployments (or indeed any large project) is that each is broken down into phases, with lessons learned from one phase applied iteratively to the next. The approach and names of phases can vary from company to company, depending on the particular goals and niches you are addressing. Typically they align to the critical areas of the project: considerations before you begin, during installation, and perhaps most importantly (and often overlooked) during sustained activity and normal usage.

Skype for Business deployment, like any major technology project, can be broken down in to a number of steps:

1. **Scope**
   It's important for companies to define their business outcomes. You may have already listed some critical elements in evaluating whether Skype for Business is right for your organization. Things to consider include: which business scenarios will most benefit from Skype for Business? Are there specific groups, sites or regions that would benefit from early access to Skype for Business? Which Skype for Business features will your organization deploy, and in which order?

   Will your organization use Skype for Business for audio and web conferencing or video? Or will you connect Skype for Business to existing UC/VoIP/PBX/room-based video conferencing systems?

2. **Proof of Concept (PoC)**
   Armed with the desired business outcomes, companies need to evaluate whether they are ready to deploy Skype for Business by testing the network infrastructure. Important questions to answer are: do you have the tools and resources to set up a test environment? Is the test environment scalable to test larger or more complex deployments? What will the success criteria be for the PoC? How will these criteria need to be expanded for the pilot and subsequent roll out phases?

3. **Pilot**
   Validate Skype for Business, resources and rollout plans with users in preparation for broad rollout ie. client loaded on actual desktop. Are your users ready for the testing phase? Have you put in place a system (and timeline) for iterative feedback/user satisfaction surveys?

4. **Enterprise roll out (Phased)**
   Launch of Skype for Business across initial locations, departments and/or user groups: Have the lessons learned in the pilot been applied? Is the rollout plan scalable for an enterprise-wide implementation?

5. **Run state**
   At this stage it is important to focus on user experience to drive consumption across the business. Have your users been properly trained and prepared for sustainability? When problems arise, do you have the tools to quickly pinpoint and resolve them?

The road to Enterprise Voice

The key to a successful Skype for Business deployment is to roll out features in phases, making sure consumption is at a peak business-wide and ROIs are being met before giving users access to new features. The path from IM/presence to fully cloud-delivered Enterprise Voice is likely to be a three to five year journey because of the inertia of existing systems and resistance to new technologies.

The starting point for companies who make the decision to roll out Skype for Business are basic features such as IM and presence. Businesses should choose a contingent group to use IM and presence initially – you could begin with the IT department for example. If adoption meets the desired level then businesses can roll it out further across the company.

IM is one of those capabilities that if companies don't provide to employees, they will find other ways to message colleagues. It is better to administer IM through Skype for Business rather than having a mix of messaging solutions IT departments don't have the time or resources to maintain.

After successful adoption of the more basic features, it is best to introduce internal conferencing and person-to-person calls in a similar timeframe. With Skype for Business a peer-to-peer call is just a two person conference.

The conferencing capabilities in Skype for Business are quite powerful. A new whiteboard feature lets users add text, drawings, images etc. to a blank canvas visible to all participants, opening the door to discussing ideas and brainstorming. You can also give permission for attendees to be presenters, so if the original presenter has to leave the conference one of the other attendees can take over the meeting.

The next step is to look at external conferencing, firstly through Skype for Business and secondly through dial-in numbers. The first type is a conference call with partners or your supply chain who have deployed Skype for Business as well. Organizations can create a federated link through which the call is routed, depending on how companies have their Skype for Business set up.

The second scenario is dial-in capabilities where attendees are connected via the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) and can join a call. For example if a colleague is mobile and needs to join a call they can use dial-in numbers and a conference code just as you would with GoToMeeting. In this scenario the user would get the audio but not be able to see the screen or collaborate on any documents shown.

However, if you used the Skype for Business mobile client you would be able to see the shared screen. Skype for Business is integrated with Outlook, so scheduling a meeting is as simple as pressing Skype meeting and all the relevant details including dial-in numbers and the link are automatically created. With alternative web conferencing solutions you have to copy and paste the details.

Both external conferencing capabilities can be deployed at the same time. The setup, configuration and management of these features are different but can be implemented concurrently. The dial-in is probably more work because you have to hook it up to your existing PBX.

Next on the road map for businesses who have successfully implemented IM and conferencing/ collaboration features, is limited and then full PBX replacement. While ripping and replacing their PBX may be a goal for companies, it's still very much a long term goal. Skype for Business is a viable replacement for your PBX.

Companies using an aging telephone structure can improve the way they communicate, replacing their PBX completely for a better price than current market offerings. Fact: There are few companies today that have actually replaced their PBX.
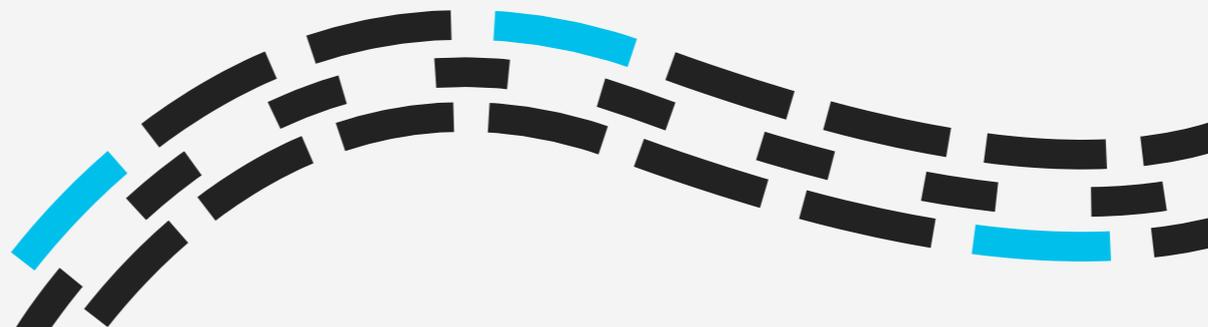
Adoption and consumption

Adoption > Consumption > Success

For a communications tool to be widely adopted it needs to be part of the communications' culture within an organization. A successful project is one which is embraced company-wide, where the technology melds in the foreground. What stands out are the business outcomes – greater reach, deeper relationships with partners and supply chain, and achieving its ROI.

There are critical steps organizations can take to enhance consumption and get the widespread adoption that is the hallmark of a successful project. IT departments need to understand how the Skype for Business platform and network architecture inter-operate, not only to enhance consumption but drive the adoption required to unlock cost savings, and turn off expensive UC accounts like WebEx or GoToMeeting.

Monitoring drives adoption

A key to a successful Skype for Business deployment is proactively managing its performance in a multi-vendor ecosystem. Making UC features available does not mean your project is going to be a success. Employees have to use the capabilities, and if they are not satisfied with the experience, you won't get the adoption you expect. You've decided to adopt Skype for Business: you need it to work. A risk mitigation strategy is a must have with a software approach to telecommunications.

The cost savings are absolutely there, the collaboration will make people more efficient and they can do a better job. However, if employees are fighting with technology for the first 20 minutes of every one-hour meeting, the waste is immense. Yes, the technology can improve

productivity, but like all new technology, it has to be managed – you just can't throw it at people.

To ensure quality of service you need to monitor the environment and get real visibility into not just network performance, but importantly the user experience. What is the voice quality like? Is there a delay or are calls dropping out?

Monitoring end-to-end enables the IT department to see what the user is experiencing and provide insight into whether the experience is good or bad. It can pinpoint problems quickly for faster resolution. IT can spend its energy on solving the problem rather than identifying where it is. After all, it's too late when a disgruntled user rings IT to say they've had a bad experience. In many cases the employee will abandon the platform and be resistant to further change.

To get it right you need to deploy Skype for Business well, and you need to have a good monitoring and management strategy in place. There are many moving parts – not all owned by Microsoft – that can potentially go wrong. There are different versions of the client, different things happening on the PCs, there's a mobile client, there are things going on with the network and Wi-Fi is often unpredictable. All of these have an impact on the experience of the user.

Network assessment

Ignore the network at your own peril. Companies who roll out Skype for Business conferencing capabilities may quickly find network capacity is a problem. If a lot of employees start using high definition (HD) video conferencing then you need to consider what it will do to your network and thus your call quality. HD video conferencing takes up a lot of bandwidth, and it can impact the quality of service of people making Skype for Business calls at the same time. If you get five or six people conducting HD video calls even a pretty big network is going to come to a grinding halt.

Choose wisely

Identify and select a contingent pilot group carefully. This is the group that determines whether you will achieve the adoption you require to achieve your goals. The makeup of the pilot group can vary depending on the industry your company is in, the size of your business or even office locations. In one company it could be the marketing team, in another the IT department, and in another, the sales group. The group should include a mix of tech savvy users, luddites, employees most likely to benefit from being early adopters and mobile and remote workers to get honest feedback on the pilot. If you choose a group, and then three months later they've made zero Skype for Business calls then you've got an adoption issue. Seek feedback on why they aren't using Skype for Business and apply the lessons learned when you roll out the feature wider.

Bring influencers on board

In the early stages of the roll out, focus on identifying champions to promote Skype for Business, and who will become evangelists for adoption in your company. You need to leverage the power users to coach other employees how to use the platform to their benefit. If employees can see value in the platform, and how it can help them be more efficient, then they are more likely to adopt the technology. It's vital you get the group of influencers to talk with laggards or those resistant to change to manage their negative perceptions and achieve desired business outcomes. Getting influencers on board early is critical to achieving widespread adoption.

The power of education

Employees have come to expect high availability and exceptional performance from their communications systems. They expect no less from Skype for Business. They don't care about the technology, they want to be able to connect anytime and enjoy a superior experience. Any delays, drop outs or degradation in call quality, and users are quick to complain to IT. A bad experience leads to a disgruntled employee who will be hesitant to use Skype for Business in the future. To overcome this and drive adoption you need to understand how Skype for Business is being used in the company, and then educate employees on what to expect. If an employee is participating in a meeting using a mobile connected to a public Wi-Fi system, they need to know there could be problems with call quality.

Plan, plan, plan

A good plan is essential when introducing new technology to any business. The adage if you fail to plan, you plan to fail is certainly true in the UC environment. When rolling out Skype for Business plan for explosive growth, even at the pilot stage. Believe the feature you're deploying, whether it's peer-to-peer calling or external conferencing, is going to be successful and take off. Then plan accordingly. A small pilot can grow organically and if you haven't planned for this growth the infrastructure may not be able to manage it. The result has a knock-on effect: Quality of Service (QoS) decreases, users have a bad experience and adoption slows down. Worse still, disgruntled users may become detractors.

Rising to the challenge

Microsoft's Universal Communications while a compelling concept, can become a challenge in actual practice. Microsoft has been able to come in and fundamentally disrupt the market with its software solution. Traditionally, UC solutions from vendors like Cisco and Avaya are essentially hardware-based solutions. Cisco for example can give you a complete end-to-end solution. You can have your whole communications environment where it doesn't touch any piece of non-Cisco equipment.

In the Microsoft world, Skype for Business is a complimentary add-on component to Office and Outlook. Additionally there's a bunch of different server roles all needed to make the platform work, so you've got all these different pieces. As it is a software solution it touches lots of different servers – at a minimum an SQL Server, three or four Skype for Business Server roles, the Exchange Server – then maybe links back to the existing PBX. Often handsets aren't homogenized; people will bring in their own device – not certified – plug it in and wonder why it doesn't work.

The complexity of UC can give IT departments nightmares if not properly planned and managed. Skype for Business relies on the underlying systems and infrastructure and managing performance in a multi-vendor environment is a major hurdle for companies today. Huge cost savings factored in are not realized for many reasons. Employees expectations are not met, companies don't have the tools to adequately manage the platform or the many parts (including those out of Microsoft's control) that don't inter-operate well.

These factors all impact consumption, meaning cost savings don't meet expectations, which doesn't bode well for the approval of new features.

Achieving ROI depends on adoption. Skype for Business will come crashing to a halt if you don't get the adoption. Despite Microsoft enhancing the ease of use via integration with Office, employees still need to find value in the platform to press that Skype for Business meeting button.

Employees have to benefit from using Skype for Business, it's got to work the first couple times they use it for them to want to come back. The challenge for companies is to ensure features deployed work the first time otherwise employees are not likely to use Skype for Business again. If businesses can meet employees' demands for greater availability and performance, then the rate of adoption will rise rapidly.

Power to the people

The introduction of Skype for Business impacts the way a company's employees work and communicate. This can have both a positive and negative effect on staff and the business.

Despite Microsoft owning the desktop, it is not unheard of for end-users to be unfamiliar with features like IM. Ping them on IM and they don't know how to respond to the message. They are uncomfortable and can't take advantage of the new ways to communicate. The challenge for a company is to educate to communicate. Companies need to invest in education and training or identify power users to help people get the benefit from Skype for Business.
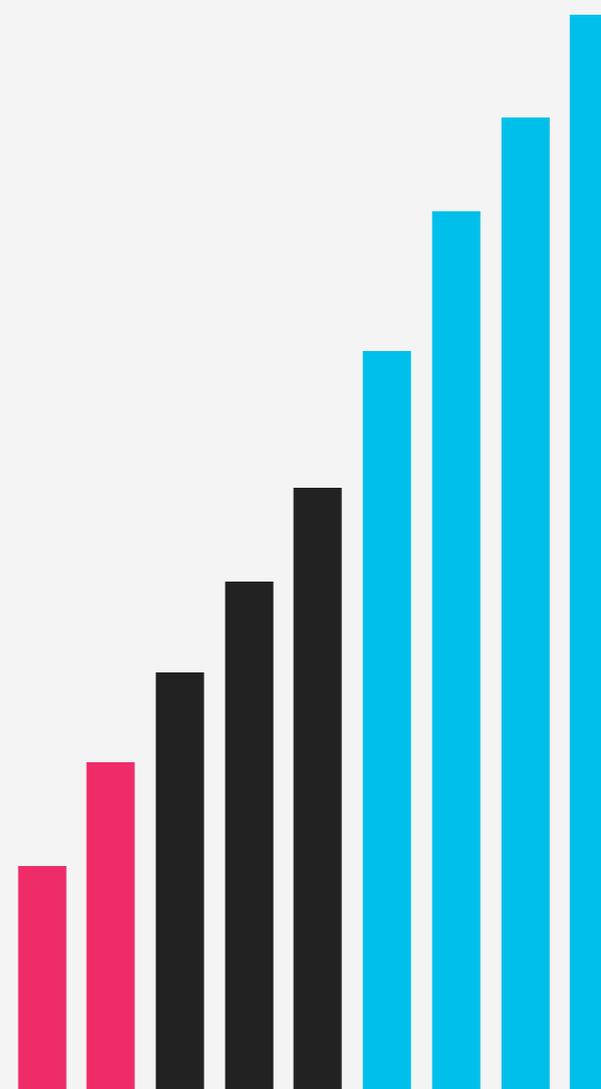
Skype for Business – plan carefully

Companies who adopt the build it and they will come approach to Skype for Business deployments are bound to fail. Just because you can deploy Skype for Business doesn't guarantee success.

You need to have a valid business case and a thorough understanding of how Skype for Business will be deployed in your organization, as well as how it will be managed.
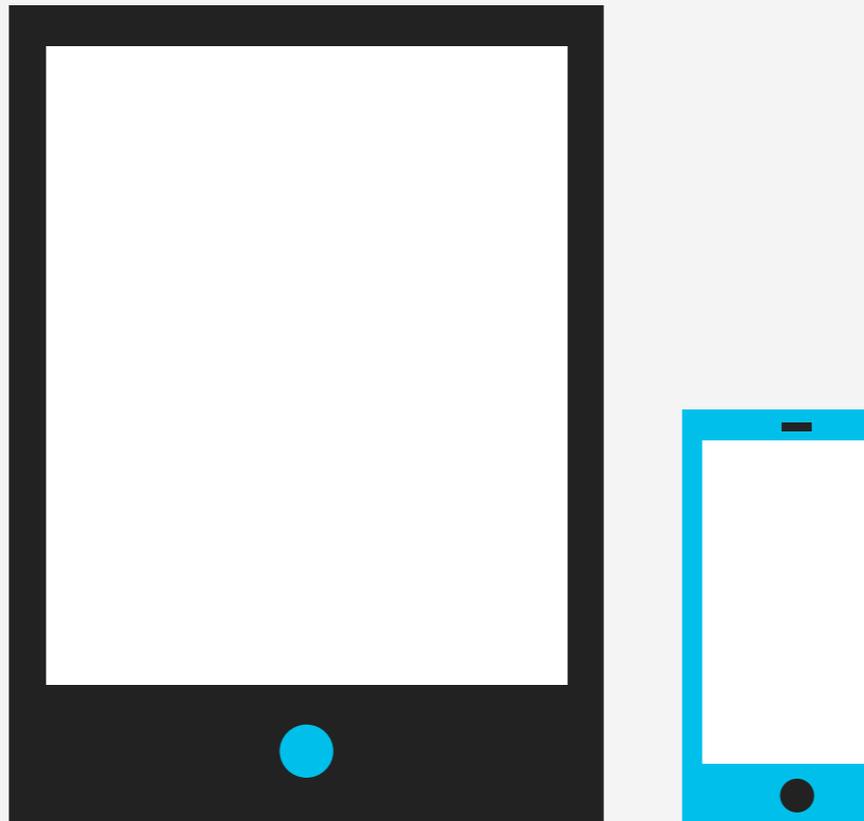
Reduce risk

Many existing telephony solutions have been in place for a long time and while not feature rich, are considered reliable.

Employees who are accustomed to the reliability and robustness of their traditional PBX are reluctant or hesitant to make a change. People have higher expectations for communications systems that generate revenue for the business.

Sales teams expect high call quality and availability when they are speaking to potential prospects. Delays, poor Quality of Service (QoS) and dropped calls can be a deal breaker when employees are trying to close a sale.

The challenge for companies is to ensure high availability and performance when making a Skype for Business call. Otherwise people may revert to previous means of communicating, and potentially huge cost savings will never be realized. Or even worse, expenditure goes up as two parallel systems need to be maintained indefinitely.

Universal Communications..
PBX on notice

Is time up for the PBX?

Microsoft's Universal Communications concept is certainly very compelling. Being able to communicate with anyone, anywhere and on a device of your choosing is Nirvana to businesses. Skype for Business extends your office beyond your walls to connect and collaborate.

The reality is more challenging, it's not as simple as deploying Skype for Business and replacing your PBX. No doubt in the future we will see more companies replacing their PBX and adopting Microsoft's full Enterprise Voice capabilities. The potential cost savings on maintenance, hardware refreshes and web conferencing capabilities like WebEx are huge. This alone is enough to justify a proper evaluation of whether Skype for Business is right for your organization.

The likely scenario is that companies will continue to adopt Skype for Business features that are right for them and maintain their PBX. At least while concerns about quality, stability and reliability, and managing performance in multi-vendor environments remain. Companies that meet the greater demands on availability and performance will see rates of adoption rise rapidly, and are more likely to achieve desired business outcomes. It is these companies that will lead the way in the adoption of Enterprise Voice. Performance drives adoption which drives ROI, but achieving adoption is one of the biggest hurdles facing businesses today.

You can learn plenty from the consumption phase. You'll know if users are using the infrastructure you've invested in.

Despite the user experience being 'simple', the fact is that there's a number of complex things going on beneath the surface that can make or break how well Skype for Business actually works.

What's next?

Microsoft continues to expand on its Universal Communications vision, creating new ways to communicate and collaborate with geographically dispersed teams. HoloLens is a yet be released product that will potentially help people do their job better. It is essentially a holographic computer built into a headset that lets you see, hear and interact with holograms within your office for example.

Bringing illustrations, images, 3D models to life as full-scale holograms will transform the way you create with colleagues. You'll be able to collaborate in real time via a Skype for Business video call on a building project for example, and interact with your creation. Participants will be able to see how the building will look, and things can be physically moved around, enabling the team to solve problems faster.
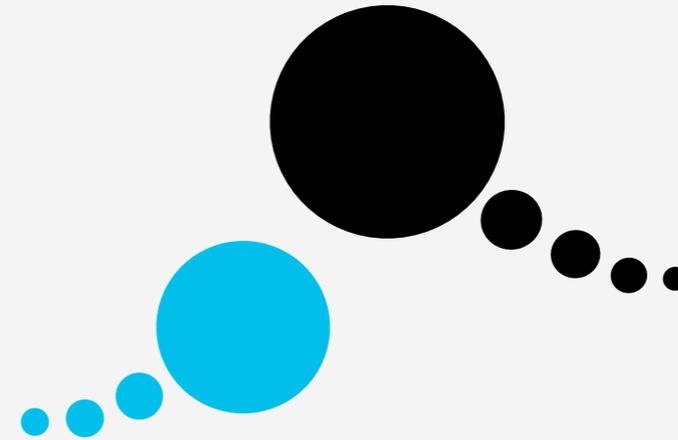
Optimizing user experience

Top 3 biggest challenges when deploying or managing Skype for Business:

Source: a recent IR survey of 200 companies across 44 countries:
Skype for Business Survey Infographic

Because Skype for Business is frequently used in a multi-vendor environment that includes Cisco, Avaya, Acme Packet, Sonus, AudioCodes and/or other vendors, the ability to manage the complete user experience, end-to-end across all technologies and vendors, is a top concern for IT Operations.

Companies that do not prioritize this will experience lengthy downtime and quality issues, while the operations department tries to find the root cause of an issue. This can significantly slow adoption, lead to lost or disgruntled customers, and impact the initial deployment ROI. In addition, as a real-time communications tool, Skype for Business requires real-time performance management.

Organizations need to undertake pre-production testing and be prepared to manage the ongoing user experience to provide the best service possible.

Prognosis for UC from IR is a performance management solution that helps staff keep the focus where it should be, on delivering a simple and collaborative end user experience.

Without Prognosis, this experience can easily get hijacked by technical issues that most users don't understand and don't care about, but are heavily frustrated by.

Favored but incompatible devices can have a big impact on the user experience. Identifying and resolving user issues rapidly is a vital part of delivering an excellent user experience.

Prognosis gives you everything you need to identify and eradicate problems before they impact the user experience from pre-deployment network assessments – validating if you are ready for production – through to ongoing post-deployment testing. Prognosis enables you to understand your full application environment as well as the network impact. It has no reliance on probes or taps or anything you'd consider intrusive on the network.

You'll have full application and network visibility with hop by hop call information, including any network-related degradation. This lets you quickly pin point the devices that are involved in the impairment.

To further reduce the time it takes to get to the heart of the problem you can filter by user, region, IP address range, and subnet.

This can be correlated with devices like headsets, speaker phones and bluetooth devices and compared to voice quality information.

Extending this to conferences with dynamic correlation and visualization lets you monitor the quality of a call as it's happening.

Prognosis provides end to end user experience metrics regardless of the number of systems, path or vendor. With respect to Skype for Business, it seamlessly combines historical information from the SQL data store, CDR and QoE databases with real-time information from the Skype for Business SDN API so you can get to the root cause of problems fast

Support for the Microsoft SDN API gives IT operation teams the confidence that they can meet tough user demands by managing their experience using a fully tested and compliant solution.

What now?

Connect with us

ABOUT US: Since 1988, IR has been a leading global provider of proactive performance management software for critical IT infrastructure, payments and communications ecosystems. More than 1000 organizations in over 60 countries – including some of the world's largest banks, airlines and telecommunication companies – rely on IR Prognosis software to provide business-critical insights and ensure continuity-critical systems deliver high availability and performance for millions of their customers across the globe.