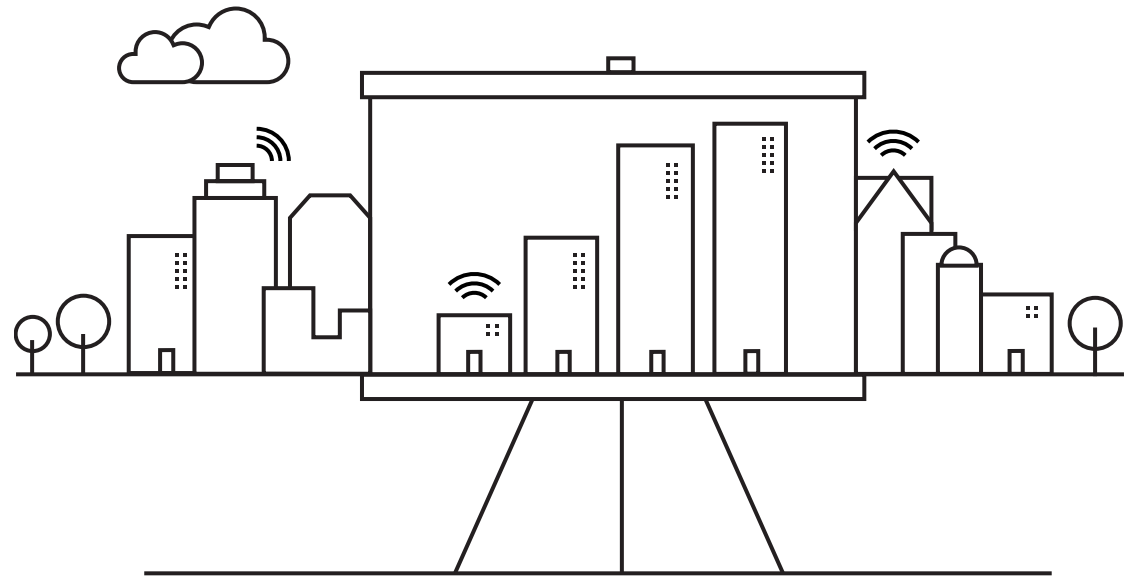# Six trends to know for better business communications

A new mindset—and the right tools —can help you grow.

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Overview

Communication is the backbone of every business. When you effectively communicate with customers and employees, everything else falls into place. But it's not always easy to connect with people, especially when the basic rules of engagement continue to evolve.

The amount and rate of change can be overwhelming. We've narrowed down six key trends that are impacting businesses like yours, along with tips for responding to each one. This guide should help you determine how to adapt and which tools you might use to get your company ready for success. You can preview all of the trends here and link to each chapter from this overview.

01 Rethinking productivity

Could workplace flexibility make your staff more effective?

>

02 Collaboration tools: Quality, not quantity

Budget-friendly software solutions are popular but they might cost you in the long run.

>

03 Keeping up with customers

Balance familiar and new technologies to improve customer service.

>

04 Embracing the cloud

It's more accessible than ever. Learn how to use it to your advantage.

>

05 IT as strategic partner

Imagine what IT can do with more bandwidth.

>

06 Preparing for natural disasters

How will you communicate during an outage?

>

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Rethinking productivity

Honing in on a single group's characteristics and preferences can be shortsighted for business owners. Yes, millennials grab headlines for their growing presence in the workplace — and now Generation Z is fast behind them. But the key to attracting and retaining talented employees is recognizing the many different ways that people of all ages prefer to work, then giving them the right tools to be efficient and productive.

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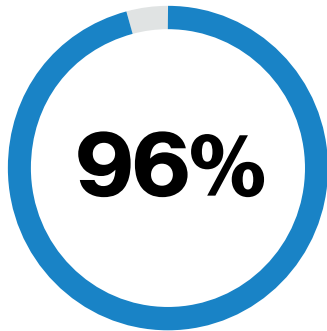
A recent Harvard Business Review survey indicates that 96% of employees want workplace flexibility,[1] including telecommuting options, unconventional work hours and superior mobile connectivity.

The key to attracting and retaining talented employees means understanding which tools empower them to do their best work.

They expect to collaborate with colleagues and customers the same way they do as consumers, meaning fluidly across devices and locations. Many of us can relate to starting a conference call from our mobile phone then switching to the office phone system (and vice versa), or chatting with a customer who prefers video 24/7, no matter where you are when they call.

Despite the demand, only 47% of employees[2] have access to the types of flexibility they need, a surprisingly low percentage when you consider the benefits to a company's bottom line. More than two-thirds of employers report increased productivity among their telecommuters.[3]

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[1] https://hbr.org/2018/06/96-of-u-s-professionals-say-they-need-flexibility-but-only-47-have-it
[2] https://hbr.org/2018/06/96-of-u-s-professionals-say-they-need-flexibility-but-only-47-have-it
[3] http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Mind%20the%20Workplace%20-%20MHA%20Workplace%20Health%20Survey%202017%20FINAL.pdf

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Rethinking productivity

Research also shows that flexible work arrangements can boost individual and team morale and commitment to employers.

By offering telework, part-time and other flexible work options, businesses can broaden their appeal to a wide range of talent.

Start by examining your workplace culture. Is it driven by traditional expectations — everyone at their desks from 9 to 5, and in a physical conference room for every meeting? If so, consider switching up the routine to strengthen employee recruitment and retention.

The bottom line

Voice, video and web collaboration tools can make workplace flexibility work to your advantage. With the right solutions, you can let employees hold meetings on their smartphones, computers, tablets, landlines or other devices to collaborate from virtually anywhere.

Up next: There's no shortage of collaboration tools on the market. When considering your options, think "less is more."

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Collaboration tools: Quality, not quantity

Ten to 20 years ago, workplace collaboration meant in-person conversations, emails and phone calls. Today, the collaboration software market is booming, with multiple solutions for just about every aspect of teamwork — from project management to file sharing and everything in between.

A growing number of small businesses are turning to free and low-cost solutions to boost productivity and build company culture. These tools are (seemingly) the answer to improving employee and customer interactions without stretching the budget. Beyond perceived cost savings, employers who favor consumer-friendly tools want to create an environment where team members don't feel they're sacrificing important parts of their identity for their day jobs.

Choose a platform that covers most — if not all — of your collaboration needs.
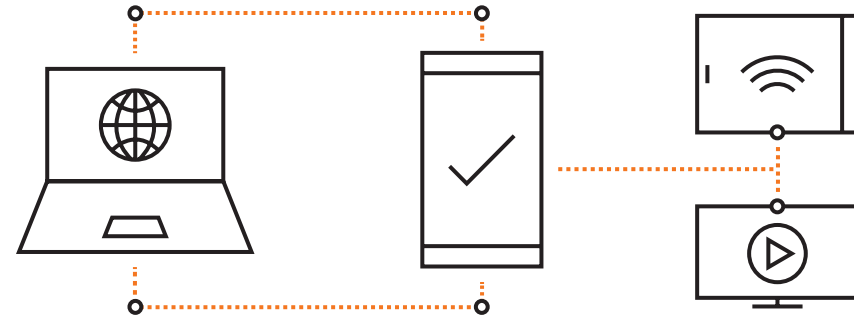
That is, they're welcome to use the same technologies (and the same language) in the office that they use at home. In doing so, they might be more inclined to share unique insights that help push the business forward. However, piecing together an array of disparate tools can lead to IT headaches and even cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

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Collaboration tools: Quality, not quantity

Integrating business software systems is critical, but can become complicated with limited tech resources. Ideally, you can lay a solid foundation for communication by choosing a platform that covers most — if not all — of your collaboration needs.

The bottom line

Consolidate your phone systems on a single Voice over IP (VoIP) network to drive better collaboration and customer service.

Many service providers now offer a wide variety of collaboration and communications tools to help connect employees and customers in different locations. But it's important to make sure these tools don't result in fragmented and siloed conversations.

A strong, integrated IP communications system can help increase productivity and control costs by bringing together phone and data communications into one plan. Such networks often come with minimal capital investment — pay only for what you use — and predictable billing.

Up next: Now that you've considered how to improve employee communication, let's focus on customer service. How can you raise the bar to exceed customer expectations?

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Keeping up with customers

Today's customers are no different from you — we all expect businesses to understand our every whim and respond accordingly. Big brands like Amazon and Netflix reinforce the seemingly instant personalization that drives our shopping and entertainment habits. But those companies are enterprise giants. They have what it takes to capture insights, track habits and respond accordingly. How can smaller businesses realistically deliver exceptional customer experiences with less time and fewer resources?

A cloud-based communications system can help you strike a balance of classic and contemporary — staying personal while your business stays future-ready.

Short of completely overhauling your tech infrastructure, there are a number of steps you can take to make customers feel appreciated and heard. With all the modern conveniences afforded by online communications, a surprising number of people still prefer to engage with a human when they need customer service. In fact, 48% of customers still want to use the phone.[1]

48%
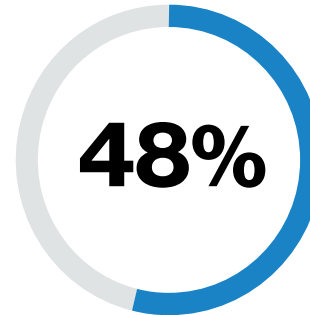
of customers across multiple age groups still prefer to contact companies by phone when they need customer service.

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Keeping up with customers

You don't need a landline to deliver that familiar human touch. Instead, consider adopting a cloud-based communications system to strike a balance of classic and contemporary — staying personal while your business stays future-ready. This communications system often combines audio and video conferencing, instant messaging, presence, desktop sharing, and call recording features into a single platform, giving you a holistic view of your customers so you can anticipate and meet their changing needs.

The bottom line

When you choose a feature-rich VoIP solution, you'll have access to many of the same tools that larger enterprises typically use. For example, hold music can add an extra layer of professionalism to your business, as can a virtual receptionist helping to direct customers to the appropriate contact to address their unique concerns.

Plus, with VoIP, virtual phone numbers can be assigned to multiple devices, helping you simplify telecommuting and remote working. Investing in VoIP service today is a first step toward moving your business forward.

Up next: Are you taking advantage of the cloud?

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Embracing the cloud

These days, "the cloud' is a ubiquitous term used to describe our personal and professional storage habits. For years, small and medium-sized businesses have leveraged cloud computing to compete with larger enterprises while keeping costs down.

Cloud-based software as a service has enabled companies to quickly and affordably adopt best-in-class solutions for everything from sales and marketing to finance and the customer experience.

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Cloud communications help businesses expand easily and strengthen customer relationships.

What does this massive trend mean for you? Businesses of all sizes are recognizing the benefits of cloud communications in supporting talent recruitment and retention, expanding to new locations, and better delighting customers with personalized service.

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Embracing the cloud

Cloud computing unlocks the potential of key technologies, from artificial intelligence to data analytics. Increasingly, organizations also acknowledge the benefits of cloud-based communications in effectively supporting key business initiatives without straining the budget.

For many businesses, cloud-based communications systems can serve as a strong jumping-off point for innovation. Such updates, specifically with a unified-communications-as-a-service (UCaaS) platform, can provide not only immediate value, but also a proper foundation for continued breakthroughs.

The bottom line

Cloud-based VoIP is a highly scalable option, designed to flex as you grow. With VoIP solutions, it's simple to move or add phones to new locations without having to reprogram or install new lines. That way, when you open another branch, you'll be ready to accommodate all of those new customers.

Up next: What if you could leverage IT to achieve bigger business goals?

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IT as strategic partner

As companies continue to evolve in the digital era, IT is increasingly seen as critical to helping organizations evolve. But when you're dealing with multiple departments and tight budgets, you need IT to simply keep things running. How can you realize the potential of strategic IT without compromising critical day-to-day operations?

You could reexamine your business communications system. It might not seem like an obvious first step, but the right solution can make or break your key initiatives. A modern IP communications system should be accessible by design, meaning it's both simple to implement and manage, and user friendly. That way, any employee can quickly take advantage of its many capabilities without relying on IT for support.

A modern IP communications system is user friendly and can require less IT support.

And in the event that IT is the one looking for assistance, a good IP communications provider also offers client training and ongoing support, which further frees up IT to partner with you on the next big idea.

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IT as strategic partner

With an IP communications network, IT can use a web portal on the internet to manage the company's needs from virtually anywhere. You can evaluate end-user requirements across the business and change services at any location with an internet connection. This flexibility helps improve productivity in day-to-day operations. For example, keeping up with today's increasingly mobile workforce and customer base requires responsive technology. The cloud can make it easier to deliver what people want from nearly anywhere, anytime.
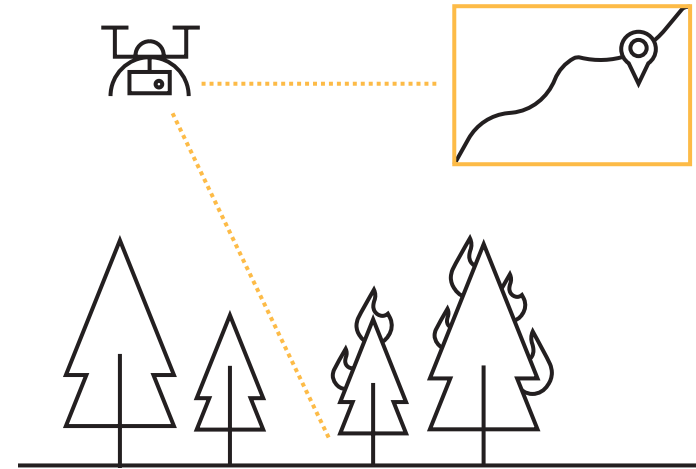
The bottom line

Choose technology solutions that don't require IT expertise so you can leverage IT for more strategic initiatives. Verizon's hosted VoIP system is simple to install over your existing broadband service and is equally easy to manage using a web-based portal. So you can achieve seamless communication and collaboration, control costs, and reach your biggest business goals.

Up next: Is your business ready for worst-case scenarios?

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Preparing for natural disasters

When you think of security, ransomware and phishing might come to mind. But hackers aren't the only threat to your business. Weather-related emergencies and other unexpected events can wreak havoc on your operations and reputation among customers. In recent years, natural disasters have increased in both severity and frequency, making it all the more important to take proactive steps to mitigate damage.

For example, stronger hurricanes and increased wildfires have made headlines for leaving a wake of devastation across the country. Severe weather has cost the U.S. nearly $500 billion since 2015. The number and cost of disasters are increasing over time due to a combination of increased exposure, vulnerability and the fact that climate change is increasing the frequency of some types of extremes that lead to billion-dollar disasters.[1]

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Preparing for natural disasters

To offset damages, companies of all sizes should proactively establish a solid communications plan to mitigate unexpected disruptions. First, make a list of key stakeholders and their concerns: who to contact, how you'll reach them, what you'll say. This might include customers who are worried about their information and investments in your business, employees who need continued access to critical data and tools, and friends and family who need to get in touch with their loved ones. Develop and document a strategy for relaying important messages across multiple channels.

When disaster strikes, an IP communications system can easily reroute calls to another location, to a mobile phone or to a third-party answering service so you can maintain business continuity. Some services let you move phones to alternate locations and continue working with any internet connection.

How your business handles any negative incident can make or break your reputation. By successfully weathering any storm (literally or otherwise), you gain customers' confidence in your ability to consistently meet their needs.

The bottom line

Your emergency communications plan starts with a reliable network and service provider. You need an end-to-end solution that manages, monitors and secures your IT environment 24 hours a day — including cloud, hosted and customer-premises elements. The right system can also troubleshoot network problems and maintain service uptime during times of crisis, helping you get back to business as usual.

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Conclusion

How you respond to today's communications trends will vary depending on your business size, immediate and long-term goals, current resources, and general attitude toward emerging technologies. Just keep in mind what you likely already know: Staying competitive means moving forward. To accelerate, choose the right partner to help guide you in the right direction.

Why Verizon?

Verizon is a global leader in technological innovation, with a broad portfolio of advanced communications and collaboration solutions. We offer America's largest and most reliable 4G LTE network, proven to be the best in overall performance, quality, reliability, speed and video streaming. It's also the best in data, call and text performance.

Discover how Verizon can help you with better business communications. Call us at 800.201.2860 to speak to a Verizon business specialist or visit verizon.com/business/solutions/strategic-communications/ to learn more.

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