

Communication Your Way

A Unified Communications Buying Guide for Small-Medium Businesses



Any device. Anywhere. Any questions?



Of course you have questions. Even if you have already decided your business would benefit from Unified Communications (UC), it's not the end of the process, it's just the beginning.

Ensuring you choose the UC solution that best meets your needs and fits your budget means asking the right questions of the right people.

This eGuide has been put together by Three to raise – and help you resolve – the most frequently asked questions, to make your UC evaluation process shorter, quicker and more effective.

A brief definition of Unified Communications

It's important to be sure that your understanding of UC is the same as your provider's. UC is the integration of the communication services your business uses, including mobile, landline and internet-based communications. It encompasses real-time calls, conferencing, instant messaging and presence, and non-real-time communication such as voicemail, email and SMS.

What this means in practice is that communication is flexible and consistent. Messages sent in one way (such as by voicemail) can be received in another (by email, for example). It also means that every user has a consistent experience, on any device, anywhere.

What this means for your business is that processes are optimised and user productivity is increased, while your customer is met with professionalism and efficiency in all communications.

What can your UC do for you?

Quantifiably

Make your business more efficient and productive

Allow staff greater mobility

Save you money

Qualitatively

Make your business appear larger than it really is

Help you win business

Help you build stronger customer relationships

Physically, it can unify

Calls - voice, video and conference

Instant messaging / web chat

Collaboration

Messages - one inbox for emails, voicemails, faxes etc.

Communications across fixed phones, mobile phones, desktop PCs and mobile devices - laptops, tablets etc.

It can enable

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) - also known as "Auto Attendant" - automatic call answering, e.g. "Press 1 for Sales, 2 for Accounts" etc.

Automatic routing of unanswered calls to any device, anywhere. "Hunt groups" redirect unanswered calls to other extensions and mobiles, in a predefined sequence until answered.

Presence - informs users if a colleague is available, busy, in a meeting, or on a call.

Single incoming number calling - callers reach an individual by dialling one number, whether the call recipient is on their landline or mobile.

Single outgoing number - calls always display the business's main number, regardless of the location or device they are made from i.e. call a customer from your mobile but have it appear that you are calling from the office.

Extension dialling from all internal locations.

CRM integration capabilities - a pop-up window can appear on your screen with the customer information you need, while you're speaking to that customer.

Disaster recovery - calls can be automatically rerouted to alternative unaffected locations or designated mobiles.

Is your network up to the job?

UC is a long-term solution for your business communications, business efficiency and productivity, but it is not a solution to underperforming network connectivity.

In fact, making the most of the Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) features of UC demands a stable local network and broadband connection. For that reason it is essential you establish the suitability of your network and broadband before you invest in UC. A reputable provider will be able to offer an assessment of your infrastructure's suitability before progressing.

If not, then what?

If your network or broadband aren't up to the standards required, it's not the end of the line for UC for your business.

Contact Three to find out how we can help get your network up to speed.

Hints & Tips

Some businesses install UC only to discover at go-live that they receive absolutely no communications traffic at all. The reason? Their firewall has automatically blocked it. If you deploy UC, ensure your IT provider reconfigures your firewall to allow the traffic through.



On-premise or Cloud?

There are essentially two ways for your Unified Communications system to be set up.

On-premise



This is the traditional approach to setting-up a UC system and relies on physical hardware that is installed on your premises.

Advantages

- See what you are paying for - the physical hardware is installed at your location
- Pay one capital cost up-front
- No monthly hosting charges

Disadvantages

- You need to find space for the hardware
- You need to find additional space for a backup system, ideally in another location
- You pay one sizeable capital cost up-front
- You are responsible for undertaking and paying for:
 - maintenance
 - repair
 - backup

- In the event of a loss of power, customers may need to call a different phone number to access your backup system
- If you invest in a system which meets only your current needs, you will face additional costs in the future to scale up or add features as your business grows
- To be prepared for future business growth, you will need to over-specify and pay for features you don't currently need
- Expanding an on-premise UC system is not an instantaneous process
- Upgrades will incur additional investment
- If your requirements scale down, you will have invested in scale and features which become redundant
- If you are a small-medium size business, an on-premise solution is less likely to prove cost-effective

Cloud



The alternative to hosting your UC system on your premises is to have a provider host it in the cloud.

Advantages

- A “fit and forget” solution
- Minimal capital cost to pay up-front
- No physical infrastructure hardware on your premises other than your end-user devices
- No maintenance or repair responsibilities or costs
- Your backup system is hosted in the cloud
- Backing-up is the responsibility of your provider
- Greater system resilience thanks to hosting across more servers at more sites
- In the event of a disaster, even if you can't access your premises you can still access your communications

- You pay only for the features you need
- Upgrades will be included within the monthly fee
- When you need more scale or more features they can be switched on instantly

Disadvantages

- If you operate in a sector with strict compliance requirements for data, you will need to ensure your provider meets those requirements e.g. for hosting servers to be in Ireland or for traffic to be encrypted

Which is the right solution for your business?

This is a decision that is ultimately yours to make. However, key points to consider are:

- The cost of ownership - accounting for capital investment, maintenance, repair, IT staff and space costs, versus monthly payments
- The importance of business continuity in the event of disaster - a cloud solution eliminates the need for an additional backup location

Hints & Tips

If your business has only one location, consider where your backup will be located. Will you need to rent or buy more space? How secure will it be? Have you allowed for the additional costs of backup hardware and its maintenance and repair – as well as costs for the physical space it occupies?

End-to-end or “pick and mix”?

Some UC providers offer everything you need to get your UC system completely set up and running. Some don't. There are advantages to choosing an end-to-end provider, but there are also good reasons for choosing to source your solution from a number of different vendors.

End-to-end



An end-to-end UC solution from one provider will include all the elements required to get you set up and using all the UC features you have signed-up for, from day one.

Depending on whether you opt for an on-premise or cloud solution, it will usually comprise some or all of the following:

- IP phones
- Broadband / connectivity
- Network infrastructure, including switches, routers and firewalls
- UC server or hardware platform, including rack server and hardware appliances
- Applications or services, such as softphone, call manager server, instant messaging, presence server and contact centres

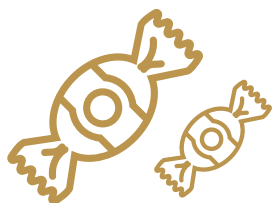
Advantages

- Potential savings on hardware, software and support services when negotiated with one supplier
- Greater likelihood of 100% compatibility and seamless connectivity between all system elements
- One point of contact for supply, service, support

Disadvantages

- All your eggs are in one basket, so it is important to choose a reliable, trustworthy provider with a proven track record

Pick and mix



It is possible to source your UC solution from a range of vendors, selecting different elements of the system from each.

Advantages

- Freedom to choose from a broader range of equipment and solutions
- Ability to switch between vendors when expanding, upgrading, or when new features become available

Disadvantages

- More complex sourcing and set-up process
- Potentially less opportunity to negotiate discounts on purchases
- Less likelihood of trouble-free compatibility and seamless connectivity between all system elements
- Multiple points of contact for supply, service, support

Which is right for your business?

The option you choose depends on which advantages you see as most valuable to your business and which disadvantages are of least concern. However, key points to consider are:

- Your budget
- The level of knowledge within your business to ensure you can specify and put together a system that meets your needs
- The resources within your business to facilitate supervision and coordination of sourcing and installation of an entire UC system
- Your likely future requirements e.g. increase in headcount, requirement for additional features

Hints & Tips

The more complex your requirements, the harder your task if you opt for a pick and mix system. However, an end-to-end solution will limit your vendor choices. Consider the range of devices, solutions and features you may need and whether you prefer the flexibility of choice or the ease of a one-stop shop.

Planning for the future

Like most successful business investments, the more future-proofed your Unified Communications system is, the better the return and the lower the total cost of ownership.

Before you decide which UC solution to adopt, you need to assess:

- **Your current communications needs**
- **Your likely communications needs in the medium- and long-term**

Your chosen provider can then help you develop a strategic UC plan that meets your current needs and has the potential to meet your future requirements too.

Two points to consider for future-proofing your UC solution are:

How will you use your new system?

Many users fail to take full advantage of the capabilities of their UC in the short-term. However, if they invested in an on-premise system, they will have paid for features they are not even using.

How agile do you need your system to be?

If your requirements are likely to change frequently, or if you have a clear growth plan, you need to consider the implications for your UC.

On-premise

You will need to either over-specify initially or invest in additional hardware and licences at a later date to meet your requirements as your business grows. If your business needs to scale down, you will be left with the excess hardware from your original investment. This could be outdated or unserviceable when / if you need to scale up again at a later date.

Cloud

You only ever pay for the features you need and use. Upgrading is virtually instantaneous - new features can simply be switched on as and when required, and switched off too. Some providers offer an “evergreen” solution: continuous upgrading takes place in the background and is included in the monthly fee.

Hints & Tips

Don't plan your UC in isolation. Talk to your colleagues to discover which communications tools they rely on and which ones they wish they had. Also, remember scalability is not a one-way street. It's important to be able to grow cost-effectively, but change can happen in the other direction too. Is the solution agile enough to make it easy and cost-effective to scale down?

Unified Communications the Three way

If you follow the advice and steps outlined in this guide, by the end of the process you should have a clear idea of:

- **What communications capabilities you want your UC solution to provide**
- **Which features and tools it needs to have to deliver those capabilities**
- **The key points to consider and the major pitfalls to avoid before making your choice**

You may find that **3Connect** – the cloud-hosted Unified Communications solution from Three – meets your requirements. If so, there are also some specific advantages to be gained by choosing Three as your UC provider.

Always current, always ahead

3Connect is a constantly evolving “evergreen” UC solution, continually making new features available to users.

To ensure the features are relevant and useful, Three works closely with their business customers in the development of the 3Connect product roadmap – listening to customer feedback and requirements, and tailoring new applications to suit them.

The result is a leading-edge UC system that meets your needs now and in the future, at an always affordable price. You can even pay per user, per month.

End-to-end, and beyond

As a mobile network operator, Three can provide a complete end-to-end UC solution, which goes further to deliver greater benefits to your business.

Three has an holistic approach to seamlessly integrate every aspect of your UC. For example, 3Connect incorporates a soft client on your Three mobiles, so that mobile users have all the features they would have on their desktop phone, wherever they are. In addition, if your broadband service fails, 3Connect is set up to automatically divert all calls to mobiles.

You won't lose business, because you won't miss a call – ever.

Moving from a PSDN landline to a cloud UC solution can save you money. Often, up to 70% of landline phone costs are line rental, with as little as 30% or less representing calls. Move to the cloud and 70% of your bill could be eliminated instantly.

Three's capabilities even extend to wireless and DECT handsets, enabling you to use them in areas of your site where wiring is impossible or prohibitively expensive.

It's your call

While the cloud-based 3Connect UC solution relieves you of the burdens of hosting, maintenance and backup, it still leaves you in control.

The 3Connect online user portal enables you to fully control, configure and adapt your entire UC system to suit your changing needs.

However, if you need expert help and support, Three has an award-winning customer care centre based in Limerick.

From broadband to mobiles, from landlines to LAN, from set-up to support - Three takes care of everything, leaving you to focus on your business.



Contact Three for a chat about how we can meet your UC needs – for any device, anywhere.

Any questions? We welcome them.



Three.ie