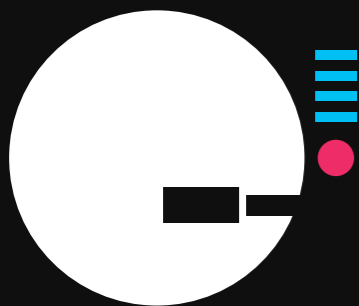# The Road to Enterprise Voice

A guide to Skype for Business deployment

Get started

Executive summary

A revolution is underway

Microsoft is disrupting the Intelligent Communications landscape. And not just because of improved work practices and collaboration. Recent announcements around Skype for Business and Teams has the entire industry talking.

Skype for Business becomes more attractive with increased integration, especially with the launch of Microsoft 365, that incorporates Office 365. Additionally, Office 365 Enterprise E5 suite licensing option offers two significant services: Cloud PBX enables the removal of separate PBX systems, enabling PSTN access thus eliminating local connectivity requirements, with calls managed directly from Skype for Business.

This guide has been designed to provide an overview of the key considerations an organization needs to take in to account when assessing or adopting Skype for Business.

What about Teams?

Teams is core to Microsoft's vision for intelligent communications which brings together conversations, meetings, files, Office apps, and third-party integrations with the aim of providing a single 'hub' for teamwork in Microsoft 365. Intelligent communications go beyond traditional unified communications to enable users to complete tasks more efficiently with minimal context switching, participate in more productive meetings that cover the entire meeting lifecycle and better manage their everyday communications demands. To help achieve this vision, Microsoft is bringing its comprehensive calling and meetings capabilities into Teams, and in the process, transitioning Skype for Business Online into Teams.

What kind of deployment is best?

Once you've decided to migrate, 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?

Adoption by end users is vital, otherwise the deployment can become stalled, and costly. Microsoft has taken significant steps in greatly improving and simplifying the user experience. This will help increase user adoption within your organization but there is still plenty to consider. We outline the steps 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 must orchestrate numerous components – often in a multi-vendor environment – to ensure they all work in unison. To support this complex environment, you need the right tools to see your entire environment, viewing each component in detail, and understanding the relationship between components as well as end users. The ability to anticipate and pro-actively resolve issues is also necessary. Another consideration is how to manage the migration from legacy, corporate dial-plans to those offered with Skype for Business.

Getting your Skype for Business on?

There is no doubt Skype for Business is changing the UC landscape. Whether organizations are using it purely for IM or embracing the power of the conferencing and collaboration 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.

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 compelling proposition, but is it right for every organization? 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? Does your staff want better integrated 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 LogMeIn'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 potential cost of upgrading to licenses that support telephony? 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? What is the cost of migrating to a new platform?

- **Develop a valid business case:** Skype for Business can be justified if your business is geographically dispersed, has several 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.

As of early 2018, 42.7% of Microsoft Skype for Business customers now use it for telephony globally, up from 21.8% last year. In addition, of the 58% of global companies consolidating all UC features onto a single vendor platform or ecosystem, 20% are doing so on Microsoft – second only to Cisco with 24.3%
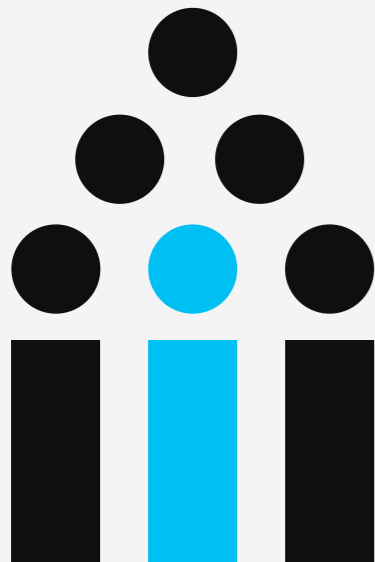
Nemertes Research

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:** Microsoft has notably improved its client for mobile devices, video and meeting capabilities, 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. Microsoft Teams will take the power of this collaboration to whole new level.

4. **Organizations with appropriate Microsoft licensing:** Skype for Business becomes 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, many businesses may have already invested in the required licenses to offer Microsoft's UC features such as IM, presence and conferencing. Taking a step further and migrating to Skype for Business is leveraging the assets already owned.

Microsoft offers different tiers of licensing, but essentially the basic capabilities are included in the Office 365 subscription.

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 Office 365 suite you need to think about and plan your cloud communication requirements and deployment options. With the introduction of Phone System and Calling Plans in Office 365, the traditional PBX can, potentially, be replaced.

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.

Skype for Business deployment options:

Phone System	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 be incapable 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, as well as increase productivity and collaboration can make it tempting for every company to jump in blindly and roll out Skype for Business. However, for some companies, 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.

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 management. You must 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 and video 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.

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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 goals and niches you are addressing.

To assist organizations with their move to Microsoft's suite of cloud products, including Office 365, they have the FastTrack program. Within this sits MyAdvisor, designed to manage and maintain cloud voice deployments.
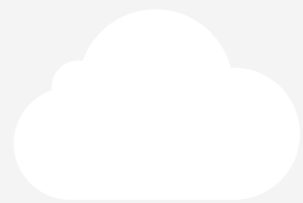
The road to enterprise voice

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 for midsize and large organizations 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 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. There's also the ability to preload meeting attachments when you set up an online meeting, so you can get started as soon as participants join. You can also give permission for attendees to be presenters, so if the original presenter leaves 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 must 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 partial 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 fully replaced their PBX.

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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.

Microsoft is aware of the adoption challenges around its technology and has made concerted efforts to improve the UI and functionality of Skype for Business. They also provide a number of materials and guidance to help organizations with their user adoption measures. It's never been easier to access the functionality of Skype for Business through integrations with other Microsoft products, like Outlook or as a core component in Office365.

However, there are critical steps organizations can take to further 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 web conferencing accounts like WebEx or GoToMeeting or eliminate stand-alone audioconferencing services

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 must use the capabilities but 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 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. Thankfully, Skype for Business received a significant visual facelift in 2016, designed to help make the experience more accessible for all users. However, like all new technology, it must be managed – you just can't throw it at people. A proactive user awareness and adoption strategy is a key pillar of success

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. These all 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.

A network assessment is therefore a must and is a requirement in Microsoft's FastTrack program for all deployments moving forwards. IR's UC Assessor was the first tool certified to perform this test. It is an automated network readiness assessment and testing solution for Skype for Business, which helps to ensure a positive user experience for voice, video and application sharing across your network and up to the cloud.

It provides the ability to evaluate, troubleshoot, and prepare the network for Skype for Business performance, aligned with Microsoft's FastTrack MyAdvisor, to ensure successful planning, delivery and operation of the solution. Its capabilities enable IT to identify and resolve network capacity and capability problems in the test environment prior to deployment at scale.

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 onboard

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. Assume 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.

HOME

Rising to the challenge

Microsoft's Intelligent Communications is an ever evolving UC solution that getting significant traction with enterprises globally. While a compelling concept, it can be a challenge in actual practice. Microsoft has been able to 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. It positions the technology less as a video conferencing tool and more as a vital part of its collaboration suite. 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 and achieving this interoperability 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 and a significant UI update, **employees still need to find value in the platform to press that Skype for Business meeting button.**

Employees must 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.
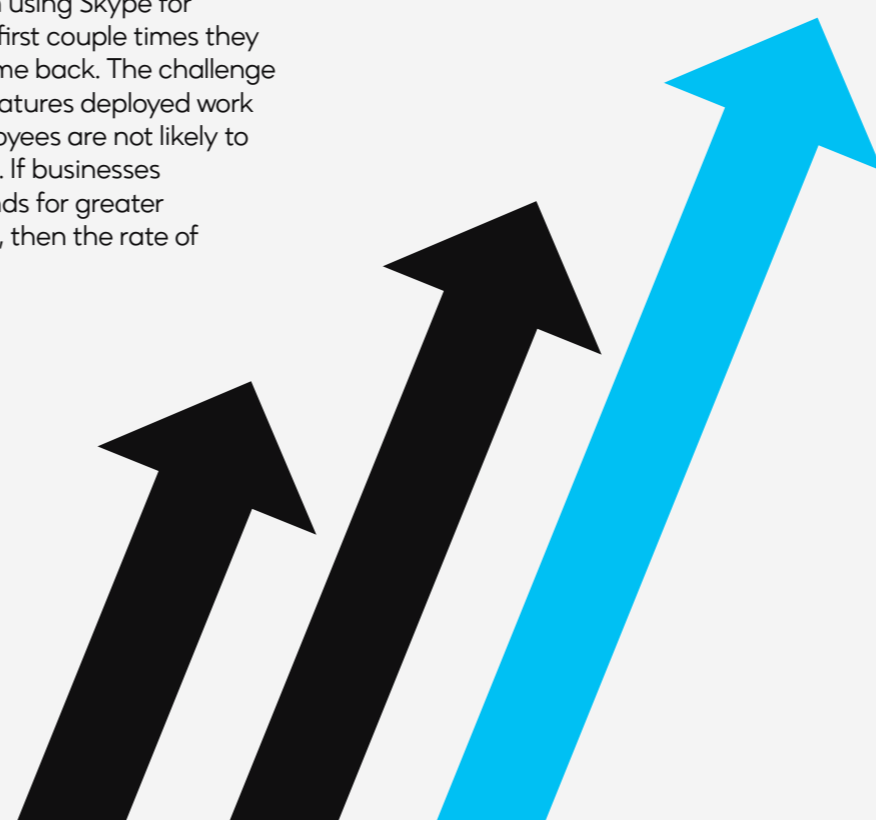
Skype for Business: plan carefully

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.
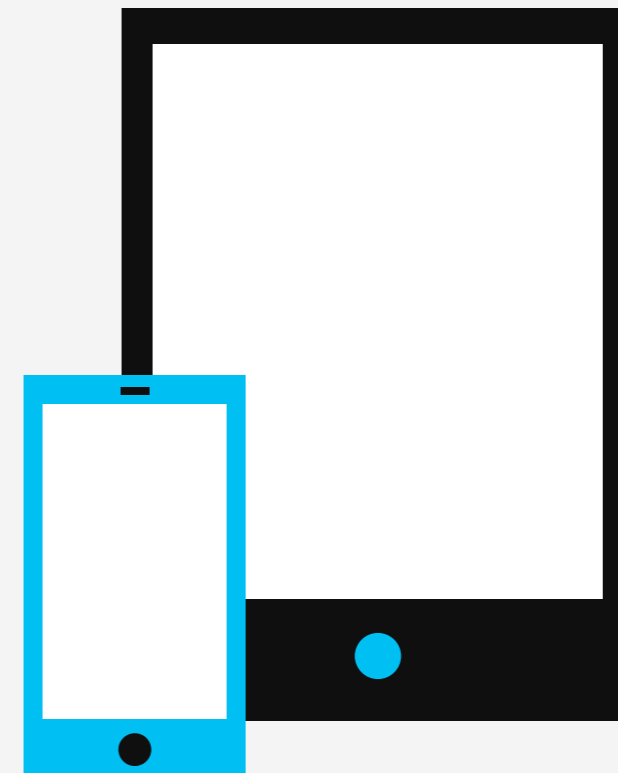
Reduce risk

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.**

Even once they have secure high availability during the initial adoption phase, the challenges don't stop there. As employees become more comfortable using the video capabilities of Skype for Business, bandwidth consumption will rapidly increase. If the increased load on the network then negatively impacts call quality, it won't take long for the IT department to be inundated with service complaints or detractors.

Microsoft's Intelligent Communications

Is time up for the PBX?

Microsoft's Intelligent 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 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 there's many complex technologies working in the background that can make or break how well Skype for Business actually works.
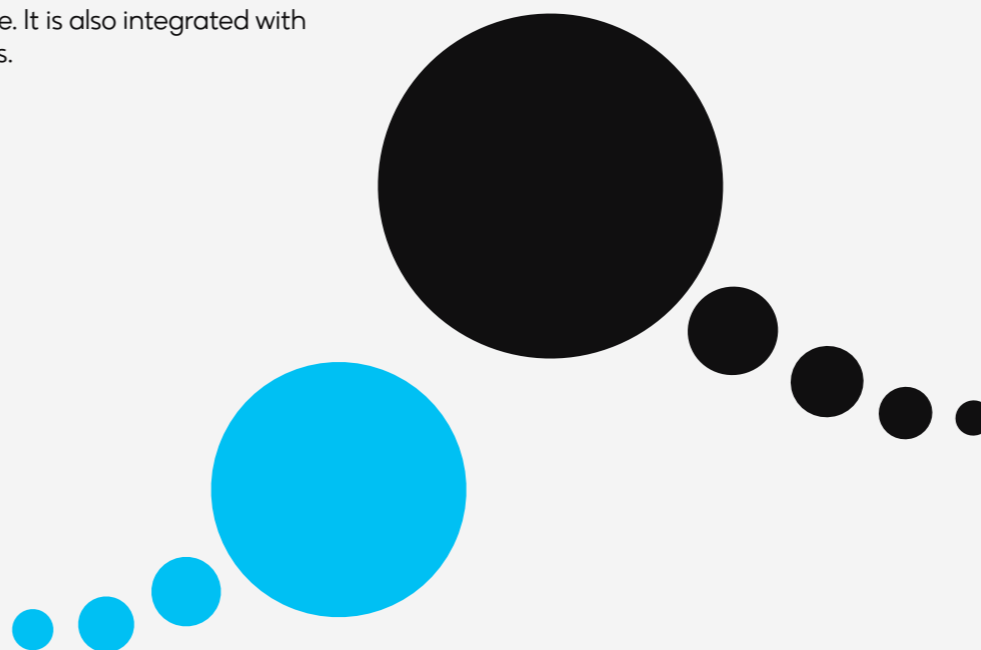
What's all this about Microsoft Teams?

With the addition of Teams, Microsoft has advanced its vision for Universal Communications to one of Intelligent Communications and Collaboration. This saw many predict the end to Skype for Business, however, at the very same conference Microsoft also announced a new Skype for Business server release for 2018.

Teams is designed as a collaboration tool, similar to Slack, it brings together people in workspaces where they can have conversations, share content and collaborate in real-time. It is also integrated with familiar Office applications.

What this means is employees will be able to start voice and video meetings, as well as work with Microsoft Office documents, directly within the Microsoft Teams workspace. It makes it easy to move naturally from one collaboration tool to another, preserving the context of the conversations and ability to share with others.

Working in collaborative spaces on projects can help drive productivity, it won't take away the underlying requirement for people to 'jump on a quick call'. While Teams can offer a different experience to Skype for Business, the Enterprise communications focus of Skype for Business will continue to drive its up-take and adoption for some time to come.

Optimizing user experience

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

Meet cost saving projections
9%

Managing performance in a multi-vendor environment
38%

Delivering excellent end-user experience
36%
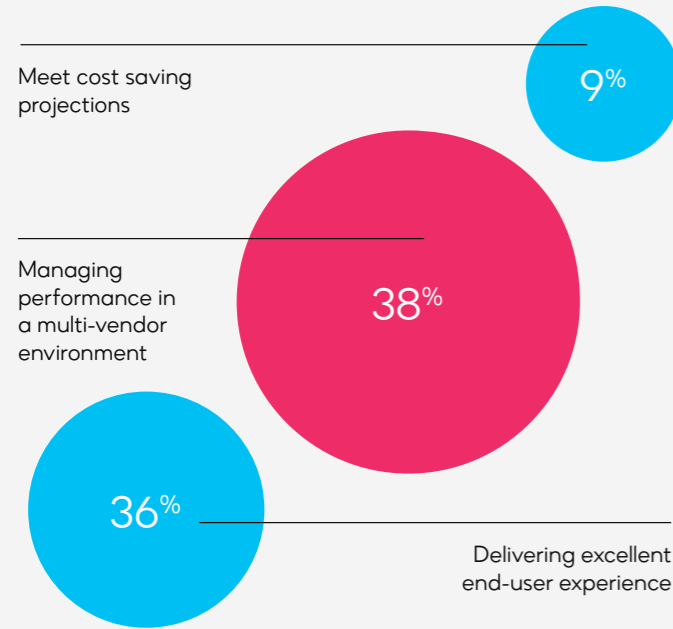
Source: a recent IR survey of 200 companies across 44 countries:
Skype for Business Survey Infographic

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. It meets all the requirements for essential and advanced assessment levels.

Without Prognosis, this experience can easily get hijacked by technical issues 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 – the first Microsoft certified tool that validates 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 pinpoint 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. Skype for Business 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?

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