Gartner

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Planning, Selecting and Deploying Unified Communications and Collaboration Primer for 2018

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UCC solutions support the needs of whole enterprises, workgroups, individual users, customers and partners. Application leaders responsible for UCC must balance offerings from strategic megavendors with best-of-breed "point" solutions to gain agility and competitive differentiation.

Scope

This initiative concerns premises- and cloud-based unified communications and collaboration (UCC) solutions, which enable individuals, teams and customers to interact via relevant, convenient methods.

It covers:

- **Unified communications,** including telephony; unified messaging; presence and IM; thick, thin and mobile client apps; communications-enabled applications.
- **Meeting solutions,** including conferencing tools and meeting support applications.
- **Contact centers,** including voice and omnichannel routing; voice and web self-service; integration with CRM and other enterprise databases and applications, and with workforce engagement management solutions.

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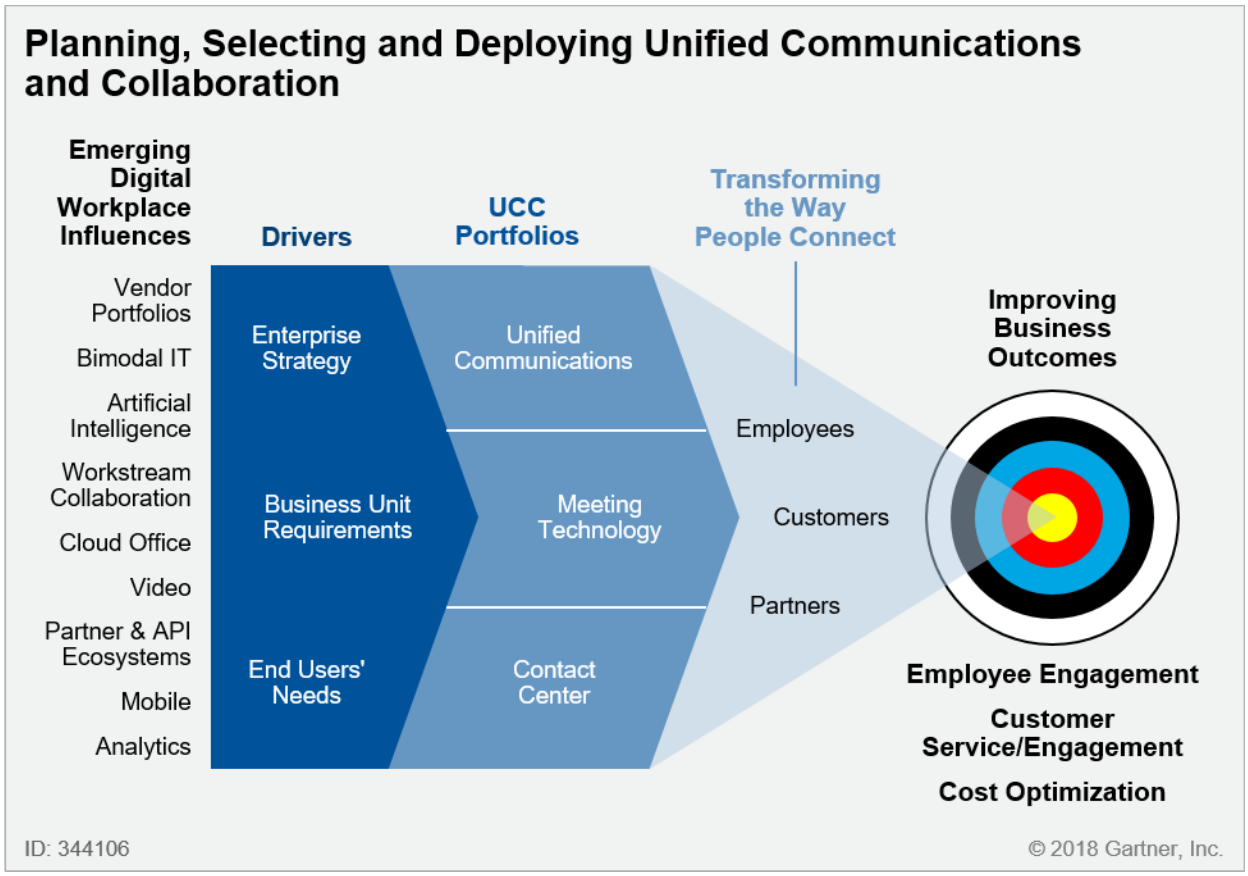
Analysis

Figure 1. Planning, Selecting and Deploying Unified Communications and Collaboration Overview



Source: Gartner (January 2018)

Evolving digital workplace expectations challenge today's aging UCC infrastructure to support the growing influence of a mobile workforce. These employees often favor nonroutine work styles and want to collaborate with colleagues, partners and customers in more engaging multimedia conversations — both real-time and asynchronous. This often means juggling an array of solution suites from major vendors, along with point solutions to meet special needs. It also means balancing individual user, workgroup and regional needs against the desire for global consistency, and evaluating a variety of solution delivery models, including premises-based, private cloud and public cloud.

Many organizations view UCC solutions — particularly voice-focused ones — as tactical "infrastructure" investments that can be deprioritized, even though this may hamper their ability to deliver dynamic and responsive solutions using a cohesive set of applications and tools. As the digital workplace evolves, many application leaders therefore find themselves tasked with managing a seemingly chaotic mix of vendors, solutions and delivery models — one that introduces productivity inefficiencies, end-user confusion and redundant features that lead to unnecessary expenses. Other such leaders find individual business units "going rogue" by making their own

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"shadow IT" purchases, only later to ask the corporate UCC team to support them. Either situation can make it hard to meet bandwidth requirements, comply with security regulations and adhere to multinational standards, among other issues.

A robust digital workplace requires an agile and responsive "bimodal" UCC strategy, one that balances traditional communication and collaboration needs (Mode 1) with those of rapidly evolving UCC dynamics (Mode 2). Gartner's UCC agenda for 2018 includes models, roadmaps and tools to help application leaders devise, articulate and execute a UCC strategy to fulfill their enterprise's broader vision for the digital workplace.

Top Challenges and How Gartner Can Help

Gartner's research in 2018 will provide models, roadmaps and tools to help application leaders responsible for UCC plan, select and deploy solutions that engage employees and customers, while optimizing costs.

If application leaders address the questions outlined below with regard to their unified communications, meeting solutions and contact center decisions, they will be able to do four key things. First, engage key influencers in their organization to help align communication and collaboration with their company's business strategy and objectives. Second, create a technology ecosystem that both supports and leverages established UCC investments, while enabling innovative approaches. Third, develop a roadmap and business case for evolving UCC systems and for selecting offerings to align with the business strategy. Fourth, provide best practices for operating and evolving UCC solutions to maximize their value to the organization.

How do we develop a UCC strategy and roadmap driven by business priorities, together with business partners?

Application leaders must develop a UCC strategy in cooperation with representatives from lines of business, digital workplace transformation leaders, and end-user computing and communications specialists. Such cooperation enables consideration of a wide range of needs and assets, with a view to encouraging the use of new and emerging technologies — in other words, improving "digital dexterity" —in pursuit of better business outcomes. It also helps integrate communication and collaboration functionality into current and future designs of employee and customer experience. The scope of UCC deployment is better defined to fit within a broader enterprise collaboration portfolio to achieve business goals and satisfy end users. Already, UCC decisions and investments are aligning with corporatewide IT initiatives and cost considerations. This is apparent from leading organizations' selection of broad megavendor suites, such as cloud office solutions from Microsoft and Google, that contain UCC capabilities sufficient for their needs.

When pursuing this approach, differences of opinion are likely to arise, due to differing organizational requirements, cultural dynamics and budget constraints. It is therefore important to remain focused on key business outcomes, including employee engagement, customer engagement and cost optimization — three pillars of a UCC strategy.

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Done correctly, UCC projects encourage better communication. This, in turn, improves organizational engagement, increases trust between teams, accommodates "workplace of the future" initiatives, and ultimately raises productivity. Furthermore, now that UCC technologies are simpler to use and extensible to outside parties through web services and mobile apps, the same benefits can extend to B2B and B2C use cases, such as customer service and selling engagements.

Planned Research

- Selecting Unified Communications and Workstream Megavendors From a Single Provider
- How to Accelerate UC Adoption in the Digital Workplace
- Hype Cycle for Unified Communications, 2018
- Hype Cycle for Contact Center Infrastructure, 2018

(These titles are subject to change.)

How do we select and deploy UCC technologies from the many vendor portfolios and best-of-breed offerings?

Most UCC deployments have accumulated over time, due to a strategy of bringing in the best vendor or service provider for a particular part of the UCC portfolio. It is typical to use one vendor for voice, another for video, another for IM and presence, another for web conferencing, and still others for customer service. Although this approach can be satisfactory, it often increases the burden on the IT department, which has to manage the integration of these disparate systems. It can also be burdensome for end users, who have to juggle multiple clients and devices, depending on their chosen communication modality.

Many application leaders are therefore considering a different approach, namely using a single primary vendor — sometimes a megavendor like Cisco or Microsoft — to deliver more consistent user experiences, lower complexity, deepen integration with digital business initiatives, and reduce operating costs. A single-vendor solution can come from a provider of premises- or cloud-based solutions, or from a provider of both; it can come from a provider of telephony-centric UCC portfolios, a cloud office provider or another type of provider. A single-vendor approach may necessitate compromises on functionality and feature sets, because no one vendor is the best across the full spectrum of UCC capabilities. It is important, however, that these potential compromises are limited to temporary inconveniences for end users, and do not impact business processes and workflows.

Depending on business objectives and end-user requirements, a multivendor approach may still be the best way forward. Some best-of-breed solutions are adapted and customized over time to suit the needs of the business, so that they become indispensable in specific functional areas.

Whether developing a portfolio based on megavendor suites, best-of-breed solutions or a combination of the two, application leaders must develop a deployment roadmap with business continuity in mind. It is acceptable to adopt tactical approaches for short-term needs, as long as

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they maintain a longer-term strategy of consolidating vendors, eliminating redundancies and reducing costs.

A good way to draw up a deployment roadmap is to consider how cloud delivery models can smooth the transition. When delivered from a public cloud, UCC solutions can be consumed at the rate of adoption that is suitable at a particular time, according to site, feature set, budget or something else. Providers are creating bundled UCC solutions for public cloud deployment to satisfy the specific communication and collaboration requirements of organizations ranging from small businesses to very large enterprises.

Planned Research

- Magic Quadrant for Unified Communications
- Market Guide for Workstream Collaboration
- Market Guide for Unified Communications Managed Services
- Toolkit: Is UCaaS a Good Fit for Your Enterprise?
- Toolkit: RFP Template for Unified Communications and Unified Communications as a Service Applications

(These titles are subject to change.)

How do we account for key emerging technologies, such as AI, mobile and cloud, as part of our UCC strategy?

The UCC landscape has evolved rapidly in the past few years, due to market trends such as the consumerization of IT, "bring your own device," web-service-based consumption and "mobile first" expectations. These trends have converged to create an opportunity for companies to enable their employees and customers to engage and collaborate in new ways, from any place, at any time, using any device.

Vendors in the UCC space have reacted to these digital business trends by creating mobile-device-sensitive designs that focus on end-user expectations for ease of use, borderless application and context availability. These mobile-focused designs typically support both multimedia and asynchronous communication models.

Relevant emerging technologies — such as artificial intelligence (AI), cloud, mobile, video and consumer technologies — are generally available in cloud-based unified communications as a service (UCaaS) and contact center as a service (CCaaS) offerings. These come as "over the top" (OTT) services on fixed and mobile WANs. Vendors are looking to integrate these OTT offerings with existing UCC portfolios, which will enable voice and video calling between endpoints, common virtual meeting spaces, message interworking and federation with other businesses that share a similar communication strategy. As new offerings are architected as web services, they offer a rich set of APIs and software development kits, which enable consumption from favored business applications, other web-based services and mobile apps.

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Planned Research

- Magic Quadrant for Unified Communications as a Service
- Use AI to Amplify Your Meeting Effectiveness and Experience
- Five Ways to Use AI in Contact Centers
- Select From Different Contact Center "Cloud" Archetypes

(These titles are subject to change.)

How do we enable innovation within business units and workgroups, while keeping crucial UCC functions running?

New technologies are rapidly filling the enterprise UCC solution space. Opportunities are emerging to supplement existing solutions with communication platforms and applications that can help business units improve employee and team productivity, adapt to changing customer communication preferences, and create more effective business processes.

With innovation on the rise, application leaders face a challenge. On the one hand, they must maintain UCC systems that are working well and that serve most business needs. On the other, they must at the same time allow innovations wanted by end users to enter the workplace communications landscape in a siloed, but controlled, manner. They require a bimodal IT approach, which is becoming necessary for all areas of IT as businesses come to recognize the importance of developing digital workplaces for an increasingly agile workforce. "Mode 1" is a top-down approach emphasizing reliability, quality, ubiquity and security. "Mode 2" is a bottom-up, exploratory approach emphasizing agility and responsiveness to the needs of employees and workgroups.

Bimodal IT needs support services that formalize and guide development projects without making them the direct responsibility of the IT department. Even in heavily regulated industries, application leaders must be able to help define where any legal boundaries may lie and advise how to work within them. It also pays to acknowledge and leverage end-user-led or business-unit-led IT — shadow IT — to expand UCC capabilities within the enterprise. In addition, application leaders should use digital workplace and work process integration concepts to guide the direction of UCC in their enterprise.

Planned Research

- Magic Quadrant for Meeting Solutions
- Apply Digital Dexterity to Unified Communications
- How to Evaluate Managed Videoconferencing Services
- Optmize Your WAN Architecture for UCaaS
- UCaaS Access: Which Onramp Should You Take to the Cloud?

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How do we evolve our contact center to support changing interaction preferences and better business processes?

Over the years, many organizations have expanded their customer service capabilities from telephony-centric "call centers" to multichannel "contact centers." They have done so by adding digital communications channels, such as email, web chat, SMS and social media, as a series of best-of-breed point solutions. These investments have often been made across a range of departments, such as customer service, CRM, e-commerce, marketing and mobile app development, which has frequently led to a disjointed customer experience and inefficient use of staff.

Application leaders must engage with key stakeholders early to define a roadmap for how initiatives are likely to unfold over time and how communications and collaboration capabilities must evolve to support them. Established application stacks, whether premises- or cloud-based, or hosted and managed services (also known as "private cloud" services), may be available to support some contact center initiatives. For example, they could be used to provide proactive customer service through digital channels using emerging technologies like AI, natural-language processing and chatbots, facilitate self- and assisted-service interactions, launch new customer communication campaigns, and improve operational efficiencies. Where required functionality is not supported, application leaders may consider using vendors' web service APIs and communications platform as a service (cPaaS) architectures. These enable application developers to access APIs from third-party providers that pull discrete capabilities from UCC solutions and expose them in other business applications, websites and mobile apps.

Planned Research

- Magic Quadrant for Contact Center Infrastructure
- Magic Quadrant for Contact Center as a Service, North America
- Magic Quadrant for Contact Center as a Service, Western Europe
- Toolkit: Is CCaaS a Good Fit for Your Contact Center?
- Toolkit: RFP Template for Contact Center Infrastructure and Contact Center as a Service Applications

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Related Priorities

Table 1. Related Priorities

Priority	Focus
Customer Experience Design and Execution	Customer experience management is the practice of designing and reacting to customer interactions to meet or exceed their expectations, leading to greater customer satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy.
Application Development Strategies for Digital Business	Application development strategies shape the people, process and technology investments that drive the modernization and creation of innovative app experiences for digital business transformation.
Digital Workplace Program	A digital workplace program is a business strategy to boost workforce digital dexterity through an engaging and intuitive work environment.
Office 365, G Suite or Other Cloud Office Initiatives	This initiative concerns how to evaluate, execute, manage and increase the value of moving collaboration and communication tools to a cloud office system such as Office 365 or G Suite.

Source: Gartner

Suggested First Steps

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

IT Leader Coverage

- "Toolkit: Is UCaaS a Good Fit for Your Enterprise?"
- "Reimagine Workplace UCC by Leveraging Digital and Physical Convergence"
- "How to Successfully Navigate CRM and CCI Procurement on the Route to Omnichannel Success"

Technical Professional Coverage

- "Comparing Cisco, Microsoft and Combined Dual-Vendor UC Implementations"
- "Cloud Office: Comparing Google Apps for Work and Microsoft Office 365"
- "Determine Your MAM Policy Requirements Prior to Deploying Office 365 Mobile Apps"
- "Solution Path for Implementing Unified Communications"

Essential Reading

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IT Leader Coverage

- "Magic Quadrant for Unified Communications"
- "Magic Quadrant for Unified Communications as a Service, Worldwide"
- "Magic Quadrant for Meeting Solutions"
- "Magic Quadrant for Contact Center Infrastructure, Worldwide"
- "Magic Quadrant for Contact Center as a Service, North America"
- "Magic Quadrant for Contact Center as a Service, Western Europe"
- "Market Guide for Midmarket Unified Communications as a Service, North America"
- "How to Evaluate Managed Video Conferencing Services"

Technical Professional Coverage

- A Technical Professional's Field Guide to Team Collaboration
- "2017 Planning Guide for Collaboration and Content"
- "Office 365: Plot Your Course and Prepare for the Challenges"
- "Apply the Mobile Productivity Framework to Extract More Value From Mobility"
- "2017 Planning Guide for Mobility and Unified Workspaces"

Tools and Toolkits

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

IT Leader Coverage

- "Toolkit: Is UCaaS a Good Fit for Your Enterprise?"
- "Toolkit: RFP Template for Contact Center Infrastructure and Contact Center as a Service Applications"

Technical Professional Coverage

- "10 Steps to Develop a Practical Network Performance Strategy for Office 365"
- "Blueprint for Implementing Exchange Online (Office 365) With Support for Managed Mobile Devices"
- "Decision Point for Choosing Between Exchange Online, Exchange Server, Hybrid and Hosted Exchange Services"

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Evidence

We gathered information on market trends from analysis of Gartner's client interactions, an online survey of the Gartner Research Circle (a panel of IT and business leaders), and direct conversations with Gartner clients and other individuals.

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