

Unified collaboration across platform, cloud and system

Integrating company communications
in the new future



Liquid Intelligent Technologies White Paper
December 2021

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Introduction

Thriving in the multi-functional workplace

There is one word that every organisation is tired of hearing. Yet, that one word has reshaped the world of work, forcing organisations to adopt new operational frameworks and to invest into digital platforms, allowing them to redefine communication, collaboration, and productivity. A global shift from rigid to agile as companies have revised their technology, adapted their operations and redefined how they approach digital transformation.

“Making the shift from ‘survive to thrive’ depends on an organisation becoming distinctly human at its core – a different way of being that approaches every question, every issue, and every decisions from a human angle first.” – [Deloitte, The social enterprise in a world disrupted](#)

The successful workforce of the future is not one that’s stuck behind desks and labouring PBX systems, it’s one that’s nimble. It’s one that’s been given the tools and technologies it needs to fully realise potential and engage more effectively with roles and customers. This is perhaps one of the primary reasons why communications platforms have become one of the key enablers of both digital transformation and operational agility. These ubiquitous platforms allow users to leverage tools and communication devices from any location, a significant change from when the technology was bound to a physical structure - the office. It also aligns with reality – people don’t want to only work from the office. They want to choose the working model that best suits them. [Pew Research](#) found that 71% of workers are currently working from home while 54% will remain there once the outbreak has ended. The research also found that 87% believe that having the right technology and equipment makes it easier to do their job, while 80% found remote working to be far better suited to their meeting deadlines and completing projects on time. This sentiment is echoed by [the PwC US Remote Work Survey 2021](#) that revealed how successful remote working had been over the past 18 months. Therefore, it is important to focus on building systems that can handle the hybrid model of working going forward.

The challenge is to develop a culture and infrastructure that’s capable of handling the variables that come with hybrid and remote working environments, and to create digital and physical environments that meet changing needs, consistently.

In this whitepaper, we unpack the challenges facing organisations planning to build flexible, agile, and adaptive digital collaboration platforms and how they can overcome these to fully realise workforce and business potential.

“Hybrid work environments provide new ways for employees to collaborate productively, but leaders must intentionally create those opportunities.”
Gartner – [4 Modes of Collaboration are Key to Success in Hybrid Work](#)



The Hybrid Conversation

Gartner research found that 71% of human resources leaders were increasingly focused on employee collaboration in 2021. There's a driving need to ensure that collaboration and innovation remain central to the business and that tools and technologies are accessible to workforces that want greater flexibility when choosing where they work. This is critical, not just from the perspective of ensuring that talent can operate effectively within remote and hybrid frameworks, but to ensure that the business has a competitive advantage in an incredibly complex market.

In addition to the battle for customer attention, organisations are facing a skills crisis. Dubbed 'The Great Resignation', people are leaving their jobs in droves. According to the [Harvard Business Review](#), four million Americans left their jobs in July 2021 alone – a trend reflected in statistics across the UK and Europe, and that is [unlikely to bypass South Africa](#). There are multiple factors driving this exodus of skilled people from roles they've held for years, but some of the most common are: inflexible working conditions and a lack of support. People want to choose where they work and how they work, and they want the right tools to help them achieve their professional goals.



This introduces another layer to the hybrid conversation – building an infrastructure capable of handling the complexities that this approach introduces. On the surface, hybrid working is a neat blend of the office and the remote, allowing employees to choose the route that best services their key performance indicators and workstyles. But, a deeper dig into the depths of the framework reveals that it's not a simple lift and shift from traditional ways of working to new.

Gartner found that hybrid teams are more agile, psychologically safer, show more intent, and are more equal than traditional on-site teams. They come with a bundle of benefits that can only serve to add value to the business in the long term, but there have to be adjustments made to how these teams operate. There has to be a blend between synchronous and asynchronous work modes to reduce burnout and real-time stress, and access to tools that allow for employees to move between different workspaces so they can adapt work styles to suit specific requirements and projects.

Hybrid working asks that organisations invest into systems that allow them to explore the potential of their talent, be it within the office or on the road, and take advantage of an increasingly rich and global gig workforce. The Great Resignation may be putting a spotlight on internal processes and worker dissatisfaction and pressure on HR teams to find rare skills at speed, but it is equally creating a global pool of talent that any company can dip into. It just needs the right technology.

“There is incredible competition for talent, so more and more organisations are leveraging the gig economy where they can invest into talent by the hour, by the skill, and per project. They can hire specific talent that's required for a specific project from anywhere, without having to hire people in house. It's a talent consumption-based model that allows for both sides to thrive.”

Winston Ritson, Chief Business Development Officer at [Liquid Cloud and Cyber Security](#)





A Hybrid Analysis

While the hybrid model of working introduces its own fair share of challenges and complexities, it is equally opening the door for the organisation to revisit legacy ways of working and refine costs and capabilities. As companies refine how they engage with their human capital, they are also refining costs and efficiencies.

Whether a company is tapping into talent on a long- or short-term basis, it can see immediate cost benefits with the hybrid way of work. Companies can flex their costs in terms of reduced overheads, fewer staff costs, and adjusted real estate costs – electricity, water, and other utilities. Many companies have opted to move away from the traditional, large office space, instead opting for a smaller shared workspace that allows employees to move in and out as required. Some companies have opened up their offices to share with other organisations so they can reduce their overheads and make use of dead space.

Hybrid work has also allowed for increased efficiencies across multiple levels. The first is in improved management of physical workspaces and their associated costs. The other is allowing employees to adopt the workstyle that best suits their personality and capabilities. Hybrid offers the blend that suits the business, giving people the space they need to thrive and by not enforcing a six-minute in-person meeting on harried people who spent an hour in traffic to get there. It also recognises that some people, and some personality types, are not ideally suited to the remote way of work and offers them the same flexibility.

“Nearly three-fifths (59%) of UK business leaders believe that hybrid working makes companies more profitable. Businesses that successfully make the long-term transition to hybrid working will be the ones who adopt the infrastructure and workplace policies and will reap the benefits.”

[HR Magazine](#)

However, in spite of the fact that hybrid working is a rapidly growing trend – for very obvious reasons – there are multiple challenges that can inhibit its adoption and functionality. The first is to bring together multiple personality types and working behaviours in such a way as to ensure that everyone feels engaged and connected. This is a significant challenge for leadership as it's important to ensure that every person within the organisation feels that they are included and have a role to play, and this dynamic can shift if the hybrid framework isn't designed with all these elements in mind.

Another challenge is to ensure that business processes translate into the new working paradigm. Many companies have spent years building their process ecosystems to ensure things move smoothly, but these weren't built in the era of digital and remote working. A document may need two people to physically sign it, but those two people may not be in the office anymore. They may not even be in the same country anywhere. The processes aren't built around an agile, digital environment.

The next challenge is legacy technology. A company may be committed to the idea of hybrid, but without the right technology at its digital fingertips, this is unlikely to succeed. Many companies made significant investments into their telephony platforms. These are heavy, costly, and still sweating their value from within their vast rooms, surrounded by kilometres of cables. It's a difficult step for companies to make – to rip and replace their expensive PBX systems and install cloud-based technology that's capable of withstanding the demands of the hybrid environment.



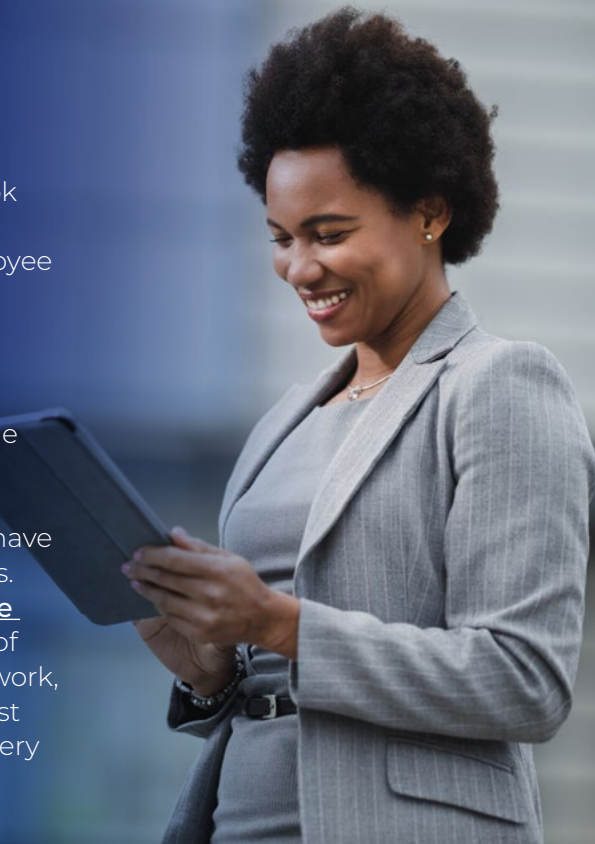
Many companies are locked into lengthy contracts with their PBX system providers. They had to find complex workarounds over the past 18 months that were limited in scope and scale and didn't deliver the quality they needed to fully deliver on their customer service, collaboration, mandates. Some companies have opted to wait it out – the shifts in pandemic lockdown requirements have made it easier for them to enforce a return to the office. However, this approach has a knock-on impact with regards to employee satisfaction and retention. Others have opted to simply tear out the old and introduce the new, taking the contract fees on the chin because the move to cloud made more sense both financially and structurally.

“Cloud-based unified communications platforms offer companies significant cost benefit, particularly in Africa. Compared to the heavy costs of traditional telephony systems, service providers and contract durations, cloud-based Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) is month-to-month, has a clear cost breakdown, doesn't demand extensive infrastructure investment.”

Winston Ritson, Chief Business Development Officer at Liquid Cloud and Cyber Security

The GitHub Example

Completely digital and designed to be as accessible as possible, [GitHub](#) has put its entire employee handbook on the internet for anyone to view. It highlights everything that any employee needs to know, no matter where they are in the world, and it ensures that they understand the processes, privileges, employee requirements, and expectations of the company. The company's approach is to be as open and collaborative as possible, using digital toolkits to ensure employees have what they need to achieve their goals. This aligns with [recent research done by the organisation](#) that found 85% of technologists were drawn to hybrid work, while 94% of the younger technologist thought of the hybrid workplace as very desirable.





The Move to UCaaS

Just as the pandemic boosted digital transformation and cloud adoption, so is hybrid working, adding turbo to the global market's investment into UCaaS innovation and solutions. Companies want better communications solutions. They want to engage more effectively with their customers, and they need technological advancements that align with these needs effectively.

The workforce has to be given the right tools for success in the remote and hybrid working environment. Microsoft Teams, with around [145 million active daily users](#), has rapidly evolved to become one of the top collaboration tools in the world. If an organisation taps into the Microsoft Teams ecosystem, employees are given effective and ubiquitous collaboration tools that extend from word processing through to virtual meetings to international calling. The widescale adoption of this ecosystem is a testament to how it fits within the cracks opened up by the rapid move to remote working in 2020 and the ongoing demands to embed hybrid working as of 2021.

Companies are not looking to reinvent the collaboration wheel. They want solutions that will integrate with their existing systems and enhance their capabilities. It's not about papering over any of the gaps that may appear within a communication ecosystem, it's about introducing new capabilities that can further support remote and on-site employee collaboration and communication. A robust UCaaS platform has to pull together multiple threads and functionalities to weave a fabric that fits the unique requirements of the organisation.

In addition, UCaaS is, at its core, designed to empower diversity and inclusion. Thanks to its ability to connect across multiple devices and systems, UCaaS is suitable for anyone to use. It's as accessible to those with disabilities as to those who are able bodied, and tears away the limitations often impacting on communication.

There is no such thing as one size fits all, but there is such a thing as customisable flexibility, which is precisely what UCaaS offers. This is not the time to invest in hardware on-site or lengthy cable installations – especially now as office space is less a priority and more a commodity. UCaaS platforms remove the need for hardware and extensive and expensive long-term contracts. It heralds the end of the era of five-year PBX service provision and ushers in the time of month-to-month services that can be customised and adapted on-demand.

The UCaaS Checklist

- A UCaaS platform has to tick multiple boxes, and these are just some of the most important:
- The ability to integrate traditional telephony calling within the Microsoft Teams ecosystem
- Immediate, real-time collaboration tools for both customer and employee
- Dynamic connections across both digital and physical environments with seamless voice calling and accessibility
- Automated Public Switched Telephony Network (PTSN) calling within the Microsoft Teams platform to allow for centralised access and control over traditional voice calling within the Microsoft 365 suite
- Straightforward communication and collaboration that bypasses bulky IT infrastructure requirements such as PBX and SBCs
- Reduced procurement and licensing costs while removing the need to purchase and install hardware



- Month-to-month payment terms that can be customised and adapted to suit the evolving needs of the business
- Reduced IT risks such as fraud and cybertheft by enabling end-to-end vetting and providing the business with increased control over the use of their voice minutes
- Access to, and insights into, call volumes to allow for improvements in call management and cost planning
- Data analytics and insights that can be used to improve customer engagements and experiences
- The ability to integrate with emerging technology solutions and platforms that leverage artificial intelligence (AI), business intelligence (BI), and machine learning
- A solution delivered by a cloud-based provider that has a long track record of success and that's heavily invested into the ecosystem. Companies do not want to invest into a new system, upscale teams, and ensure comprehensive training, only for the platform to collapse in a few years.
- Comprehensive system security that's regularly updated and maintained to ensure that all areas of the platform are compliant, secure, and up to date
- A built-in training system that allows for both company and employee to fully realise the potential of the platform and leverage it effectively
- A device-agnostic UCaaS platform that will work across any type of device, system, and toolkit. This will not only significantly reduce the cost of implementation but will ensure a lower barrier to entry across all systems and employees
- A solution that the customer is familiar with – if the business cannot communicate with its customers, then it won't matter how cost-effective it was to implement the UCaaS because it won't work properly
- It can offer insights into sentiment across both employees and customers that can allow for richer refinement of engagements and communication strategies

“With COVID-19, businesses have had to allow their staff to work remotely. Meaning the old system of the PBX is no longer relevant. Organisations are still dealing with numerous issues, such as staff working in isolation, and many suffered from bill shock as they were hit by the financial impact of sudden working and system cost changes. This change in working has resulted in the evolution of numerous collaboration tools and one of the most critical is UCaaS – a collaboration and UC tool that enables employees to remain connected, no matter where they are in the world.”

Winston Ritson, Chief Business Development Officer at Liquid Cloud and Cyber Security





The UCaaS Best Practice

A UCaaS system is often only as good as the methodology and approaches used by the business that implements it. There are several steps that every organisation should take to ensure that it gets the most out of its UCaaS platform over both the long and the short term.

Step One:


Ensure that all employees are familiarised with the system and know how to use it effectively. The tools themselves won't solve the collaboration problems that may be inhibiting effective communication within the business, so organisations need to be purposeful when it comes to the adoption of any solution.

Step Two:

Have a clear understanding of the business journey and how this aligns with the technology, staff expectations and education, and internal business processes. This will impact costs across devices, training, and processes. Companies need to think beyond the top-line cost view at the different layers of the implementation, so they approach integration with absolute clarity.

Step Three:

Teach people how to use the hammer. The solution may be glorious when in well-trained hands, but if you don't provide the training, it will never achieve its full potential. Organisations need to invest into training and education, so people are engaged with the toolkit from the outset and feel empowered to use it effectively. This will result in a happier workforce as individuals are empowered to work from anywhere, easily.



“Voices matter. People matter. In the world of hybrid, remote and digitally-diverse working, cloud telephony and communication tools have become increasingly important. People need all-inclusive, user-friendly tools that help them to work better, and strengthen connections with one another, and with customers.”

Winston Ritson, Chief Business Development Officer at Liquid Cloud and Cyber Security



OneVoice by Liquid Intelligent Technologies

OneVoice for Operator Connect is a new offering from Liquid Intelligent Technologies that aims to enhance collaboration in the remote/hybrid work environment by integrating traditional telephony calling within the Microsoft Teams ecosystem. Businesses in Africa can entrust Liquid to manage this contemporary integration solution as Liquid is Microsoft's only OneVoice for Operator Connect distributor on the continent. The offering is being piloted in Kenya, Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Human interaction and idea cohesion are at the core of business productivity. The in-office corridor chats, the desk to desk 'quick catch-ups' and informal customer conversations that we used to rely on to maintain person-to-person connections now need to happen digitally. What has become apparent as the world evolves is that communication is on the rise. People are talking now more than ever before, and the dynamics of these engagements will only improve as technology enhances. OneVoice has emerged as the modern solution to stimulate human connections in the new digital business world by seamlessly integrating voice calling on a ubiquitous collaboration platform.

One of the key benefits of OneVoice is better cost accountability for businesses. The offering gives businesses better control over voice minutes. With OneVoice, IT departments have unprecedented access to monitoring and managing calls according to their needs. What's more, as part of OneVoice, Liquid is offering a flat-rate calling for domestic plans and competitive rates for international plans that will give customers better budget management for their calls.

Customers' IT departments need not concern themselves with the service's administration as Liquid will provide a fully operational service team to assist with set up and maintenance. This will reduce the client's time, and effort spent internally administrating the service. Thus, businesses can focus on being viable and productive, and their IT departments' can repurpose resources to identifying revenue generation streams for their organisations, among other areas to explore.

Furthermore, because OneVoice is set up in the Cloud, it expands many business data analytic possibilities. For example, a call centre business can conduct Cloud-based call recording and analyse calls stored on the Cloud to improve customer engagement. The company can even apply AI learning to enhance client satisfaction.

OneVoice is ideal for any business looking to improve cohesion and collaboration, regardless of its size. Small businesses benefit by having a central system to manage file sharing, meetings, mail, and voice calling. Larger enterprises, who have likely already purchased the more extensive Microsoft E5 suite, have the added benefit of voice at no extra cost.

OneVoice is a step further in the digital transformation of voice infrastructure. It will keep businesses agile in a rapidly changing environment of flexible work arrangements. The offering is arguably one of the most secure ways of telephony, owing to the combined and extensive Cyber Security measures of Microsoft and Liquid. OneVoice will make companies more resilient to significant security threats associated with traditional telephony, such as fraud and hacking, while improving customer convenience. Liquid customers will benefit even more by maintaining existing contracts or negotiating new agreements depending on their budget and needs while enabling a modern, unified calling experience.

To find out more about what Liquid Intelligent Technologies can do for your business, visit us at

liquidcloud.africa

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