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Managing UC in the Age of Cloud, Hybrid, and Multi-Vendor Deployments

*Achieving efficiency and operational cost reduction
via a proactive management strategy*



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Q4 2023

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Executive Summary

For many companies, the choice in deploying Unified Communications & Collaboration (UC&C) platforms isn't just cloud or on-prem, nor is it just office vs remote workers. Rather, it is, "Which mix of applications and services minimizes operational costs and maximizes productivity?" A hybrid assortment of platforms enables companies to support users where they work (fully remote, hybrid, or full-time in-office) with a much broader range of UC&C capabilities while minimizing operational costs. This hybrid UC&C ecosystem creates its own challenges, though—primarily how to best manage multiple platforms, both on-premises and cloud, and how to effectively support employees regardless of their work location. Organizations can achieve quantifiable benefit via the automation of complex workflows that are location, technology, and vendor agnostic using specialized tools for UC administration management.

Metrigy research data, collected from more than 1,400 global participants for our *Workplace Collaboration MetriCast 2023* study, shows that successful companies, using specialized UC administration management tools, achieve the following benefits:

- 36.9% reduction in operational management costs for their UC and contact center environments
- 46.4% reduction in initial user provisioning time
- 40.4% reduction in ongoing user management time

Therefore, Metrigy recommends that business and IT leaders evaluate UC&C administration platforms to reduce IT Infrastructure operating costs, improve speed of deployment, and streamline ongoing provisioning and management activities. Specifically, they should:

- Select a platform that is future-proof. This means one that natively supports current and planned UC&C platforms.
- Select a platform that is extensible; supporting integration with HR information systems, IT service management platforms, and enterprise directories, and that offers SDKs and APIs for greater operational functionality.
- Select a platform that is secure. Management platforms must support granular delegation of worker, task, and feature management by team members with different roles, including a self-service portal for the end user.
- Select a platform that saves time and money. Evaluate the impact of deployment to determine cost savings through optimized IT resource utilization and reduction of time spent on provisioning and ongoing management.

The World Is Hybrid

Despite the great deal of attention that cloud-based communications services have received over the last few years, the reality is that the majority of companies, especially those in the midsize and large market segments, still operate on-premises or custom-built, privately hosted platforms for their calling and collaboration needs. As shown in the figure to the right, Metrigy's *Workplace Collaboration MetriCast 2023* global study of 1,418 organizations found that more than 52% of companies rely on these platforms to meet their UC needs.

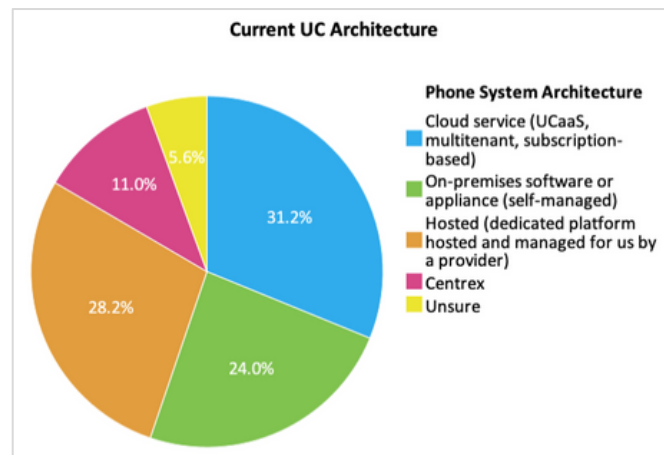


Figure 1: Current UC Architecture

The reasons for continuing to maintain on-premises or hosted platforms are numerous. Companies may find it cheaper to continue to depreciate existing calling platforms as they slowly transition to cloud. They may have obtained cloud services for part of their company as part of a merger or acquisition. Or, they may have complex integration and security requirements that are not easily replicated in the cloud. Or there are security reasons. Among those using on-premises platforms, just 37.6% plan to decommission them in the next several years.

In addition, almost 32% use more than one calling system, often having a mix of on-premises, hosted, and UCaaS. Often cloud services are used in conjunction with on-premises platforms during time of transition, or when the cloud services were acquired through merger or acquisition.

The hybrid world doesn't just include phone systems. Among our research participants, nearly 62% use different vendors for UC&C and contact center (CC) today, often with a mix of on-premises and cloud, as well.

Even for those companies that have moved or are planning to move to cloud, hybrid is often the norm. For example, the majority of companies that have Teams Phone deployments use separate PSTN connectivity services in the form of Direct Routing- or Operator Connect-certified providers. Other UCaaS providers, including Cisco and Zoom, are expanding their support for "bring your own carrier" PSTN connectivity services.

These data points lead us to two realities of the modern UC&C environment.

The first, is that for most mid-size and large enterprises, hybrid is the default architecture. Companies do, and will, maintain a mix of on-premises and cloud services, and usually separate PSTN connectivity (network) from call control (UC&C hardware and software technology). This

maximizes flexibility, which, in turn, allows multiple vendors for network and technology and therefore optimizes the choice of the best technology for each location, team, or required functionality.

The second reality of the modern UC environment is that it is one in flux. As noted, nearly 38% of those with on-premises platforms plan to replace them, with most moving to the cloud. Even those that maintain on-premises PBXs for their calling needs may also have cloud-based applications for meetings and team messaging.

Key Challenges in Managing Hybrid UC Solutions

With so many enterprises using hybrid UC&C solutions, there are significant strains for those responsible for managing communications and collaboration applications. Absent a single, unified means of provisioning and supporting the ongoing management of users and endpoints, IT is burdened by having to rely on multiple different applications, each with their own unique user interfaces, to set up new users, and to manage moves, adds, changes, and deletions.

Concerns include:

1. Prohibitive operational costs due to additional demands on IT staff time needed for provisioning and user management platforms, and from the need to train IT staff to support multiple tools
2. Potential lack of visibility of help desk personnel into configuration details, history, and settings, creating longer response times for employee service requests
3. Inability to ensure consistent security and compliance settings across one or multiple systems. This includes an inability to easily define, and enforce custom, enterprise-wide policies and business rules
4. Missing integrations between IT UC management systems and the “sources of truth” for user information such as directories, IT service management platforms, and HR information management platforms, limiting the ability to automate user provisioning and minimize turn-up time
5. Complexity of native interfaces, often with the requirement for IT support personnel to become proficient in custom scripting languages such as PowerShell
6. Complication and frustration for end users who lack a simple, consistent means to self-manage features and functions ranging from password resets to voicemail configurations, to other feature settings

In the current global operating environment where companies are focused on optimizing costs, the lack of a unified management approach across on-premises and cloud ultimately results in higher management costs, reduced employee productivity, and frustration for both those responsible for managing UC platforms and the end users of communications applications and services.

The Need: Centralized UC&C Administration Management

In an ideal world, IT administrators would use a single UC&C management tool to manage users regardless of the underlying platform. For example, setting up a new user on an on-premises PBX would look no different from an administrative perspective than setting them up on a cloud-based service. The administration platform would extend to end users as well, allowing them the ability to manage their settings, preferences, and profile information across all their communications and collaboration applications.

Specific UC&C management goals include:

1. Providing a single interface to provision users and associated services, including phone numbers and extensions, and meeting and messaging application identities and profiles, all in sync with company directories and HR management platforms
2. Automated, zero-touch provisioning such that users can be configured as they are onboarded, and assigned to proper departments, teams, and/or workgroups, with permissions granted based on predefined role
3. Leveraging the same administrative interface regardless of whether a user is assigned to an on-premises or cloud platform, or even as a user is migrated from one to the other
4. Delegation of management tasks as necessary so administrators within individual business units or teams can self-manage their users, reducing the workload on IT
5. Providing a single end-user interface to allow for self-service management of identity information as well as tasks such as setting out-of-office messages or resetting passwords PINs, for all UC and contact center platforms
6. Ensuring integration between administration management and IT service management platforms to provide IT personnel with accurate, real-time configuration information and recent changes to improve troubleshooting efficiency

In addition to improving user productivity by increasing speed of provisioning, a unified UC&C management platform also reduces IT workload and allows for automation of repeatable tasks, freeing valuable resources to focus on higher leverage tasks.

All these goals are achievable via the deployment of a specialized tool for UC&C administration management.

Business Benefits of Administrative Management Tools

Among Metrigy's *Workplace Collaboration MetriCast* participants, 43% currently use an administration management platform. As shown in Figure 2 on the next page, on average, about 32-38% have measured benefit from the use of their administrative management tools. Those that have not seen a change typically have not gone through the process to identify before-and-after changes from their implementation, or have smaller, less complex environments that do not benefit as much from the adoption of administrative management tools.

UC Administration Management Business Metric Changes, 2023						
Change	Costs		Provisioning		On-Going Management	
	How many?	Mean change	How many?	Mean change	How many?	Mean change
Improved	31. 7%	-25.8%	36. 6%	-24.8%	38. 3%	-25.4%
Made worse	2.7%	12. 5%	2.7%	34. 8%	2.2%	50. 0%
No change	62. 3%	0.0%	57. 9%	0.0%	56. 3%	0.0%
Success Group ≥ overall mean change	- 36. 9%		- 46. 4%		- 40. 4%	
Unsure responses may result in columns totaling < 100%						

Figure 2: UC Administration Management Business Metric Changes, 2023

Highlighted in the above are the benefits achieved by our success group, defined as those that measured an above-average ROI for their collaboration investments. Our success group for this study included 18 companies. Success group members typically focus on implementing processes and metrics that allow them to identify quantitative benefits of collaboration application adoption. Average improvements from the use of administrative management tools among these include an almost 37% reduction in OpEx, more than a 46% reduction in initial provisioning time, and approximately a 40% reduction in ongoing management time.

Companies are increasingly realizing the need to invest in administrative management tools as operating environments increase in complexity while companies face growing pressure to minimize operational costs. As a result, Metrigy forecasts that more than 35% of companies will increase their spend on UC administration management tools over the next three years, with overall spending growing in the market by 4.7% in 2024 and 5.4% in 2025.

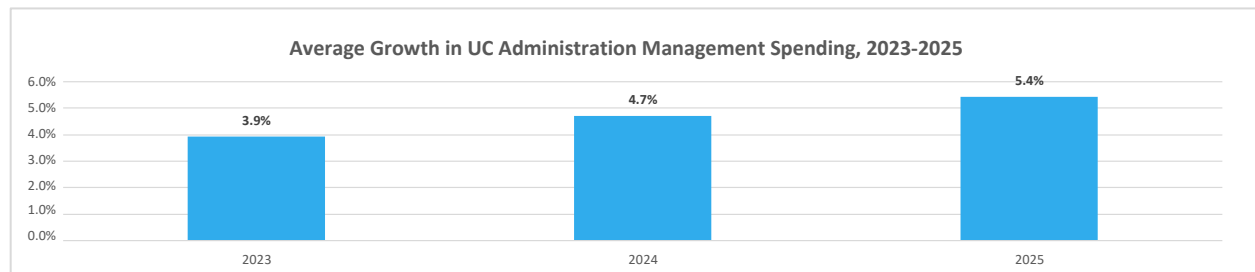


Figure 3: Average Growth in UC Administration Management Spending: 2023-2025

Picking the Right UC Administrative Management Tool

When it comes to picking a UC administration management tool, IT and business leaders have a number of choices in the market. These range from the capabilities native to a UC and/or contact center platform provider, to third-party specialty tools designed to support multiple UC and CC platforms, as well as allow for advanced features including initial provisioning and on-going management automation, delegation, self-service, and advanced reporting and analytics.

Perhaps the most important criterion for selecting a provider is ensuring that the administration tool supports the current and anticipated future mix of on-premises and cloud UC&C platforms.

For example, a company using on-premises platforms from Avaya or Cisco today, but migrating to Microsoft Teams in the cloud, will want to ensure that their administration management platform can provide a unified management capability for both their existing on-premises platform as well as Teams.

Beyond platform support, additional key features include:

- Support for implementing company provisioning, security, and delegation policies and workflows
- Zero-touch automated initial provisioning through integration with LDAP-enabled or Microsoft Active Directory, or through integration with IT service management or HR information systems to assign phone numbers and extensions automatically
- Delegation of management tasks to business unit or department administrators
- Support self-service for users to manage their own information and to perform tasks such as profile updates, password resets, and policy changes without IT involvement
- Allow for a variety of implementation approaches, including on-premises and cloud, based on customer needs and information security and localization requirements
- Provide the ability to log all changes and roll-back configuration updates if necessary
- Support feature provisioning by role, including security policy configuration

Conclusions and Recommendations

Those responsible for UC&C management face an increasingly complex environment as on-premises and custom-hosted platforms shift to, or are integrated with, cloud-based services. Even those moving to the cloud may often retain responsibility for managing PSTN access as well as user provisioning and management.

To minimize OpEx and provide flexible end-user support, a specialized UC administration management tool is a requirement for business success. Implementing a unified administration management platform that provides a single view into all UC and CC applications, automates configuration, enables delegation of on-going management tasks, and supports self-service to reduce IT help desk workloads offers the potential for quantifiable benefit.

IT and business leaders should select a platform that supports current and planned UC and CC platforms and integrates with HR information systems, IT service management platforms, and enterprise directories, as well as supports the ability to implement provisioning in accordance with operational goals and requirements.

ABOUT METRIGY: Metrigy is an innovative research and advisory firm focusing on the rapidly changing areas of workplace collaboration, digital workplace, digital transformation, customer experience and employee experience—along with several related technologies. Metrigy delivers strategic guidance and informative content, backed by primary research metrics and analysis, for technology providers and enterprise organizations.



About the Sponsor: Kurmi

Kurmi Software provides an award-winning unified management platform for enterprise communication and collaboration infrastructures that simplifies user provisioning, facilitates migrations, and enables day-to-day administration, while offering the best UC administrator and end-user experience. With its advanced automation and integration capabilities, Kurmi Software reduces the administration cost and provisioning time of Unified Communications and Contact Center platforms (telephony, videoconferencing, email and messaging, plus other collaboration applications), delivering significant productivity gains and ROI.

Kurmi's offers highly customizable, and ultra-scalable management of the market's leading Unified Communications platforms: Avaya, Cisco, Microsoft, Zoom, and others. Founded in 2011, with offices in New York, Montreal, Berlin, Rennes, Paris and Dubai, Kurmi Software supports global enterprises and managed service providers through a network of certified partners around the world.

For more information visit kurmi-software.com.