Top 4 Pitfalls of Choosing the Wrong Unified Communications Provider

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All too often, IT professionals focus too much on technology and cost when evaluating vendors for Unified Communications-as-a-Service (UCaaS). Getting the right tools and budget is critically important, but the vendor matters, too. The solution can have all the features you need and be at the right price, but if the vendor can't implement it, you'll spend more and not have what you require.

There are good UCaaS vendors, and there are good UCaaS vendors who aren't the right fit for your company. This can result in really great technology failing because it isn't implemented in the right way. It could end with tons of money spent, with little satisfaction. There are dozens of possible bad outcomes, which is why it's important to understand the vendor selection pitfalls that cause these issues.

Choosing a Unified Communications Provider

When it comes to successful unified communications, being on the same page with your vendor is critical.

In this blog post, we'll explore:

1. Understanding your unified communication vendor needs.
2. Aligning your needs with vendor experience.
3. Evaluating the right traits in potential vendors.

The Four Signs of a Bad Unified Communications Provider

1. A Lack of Vision

Your organization probably has some understanding of what you want unified communications to look like post-implementation. Chances are, you're hoping for some of the most common UCaaS benefits like streamlined communications, mobility, reliability, collaboration tools, and huge cost savings.

In addition to your vision about how UCaaS could impact your organization, you need some vision around your

vendor needs.

The following questions will help determine how complicated—or simple—your UCaaS implementation will be:

1. Is your business geographically distributed across multiple sites?
2. Do you have mobile users and/or full-time remote employees?
3. Are you migrating from a VoIP system that is already in place or starting from scratch?
4. If you are migrating, do you need to have both VoIP systems active for some period of time?
5. Are you integrating your new phone system with other systems such as CRM, time sheet, customer data, vendor data, or more options?

If you err on the side of complexity and the need for specialization on these five questions, vendor fit is especially important.

2. Poor Implementation Support

For some vendors, implementation support isn't part of their business model. Their focus is on initial selection, and you're left to basically get your UCaaS system installed and tested while training your users yourself.

Unless you specifically want to DIY, the time to start evaluating a vendor's record of implementation support is early in the process. Remember, this is not a "yes" or "no" question.

To evaluate just how much support they will provide and how it helped their clients, you should ask:

1. What was your implementation role in a project similar to ours?
2. What are your standards for a successful implementation?
3. What can we expect after we sign a contract?
4. Can you share a story of an implementation that didn't go as planned? What were the results?

3. Inexperience with YOUR Needs

Never assume that a vendor's decades of experience mean they now how to meet *your* needs. Maybe they do have dozens of thrilled clients, but you'd be their first test case in a highly-regulated industry. Carefully evaluate each of the following factors:

1. What type of customers do they have?

Do they primarily serve small businesses and startups? Larger enterprises? Local organizations? Clients nationwide?

One of the best ways to "test" that you're a good customer fit is to ask if the company representative can describe any successful projects that resemble your company in terms of size, technical needs, or industry.

Finally, make sure these successful customer examples represent long-term relationships, ideally two years or more.

2. Can They Do Integrations?

If you are hoping to integrate applications, be sure to ask if they have experience with projects similar to yours and what the results were.

3. Do They Staff Specialists?

A great UC vendor for your needs will have specialists on staff with knowledge in every area you're looking at. Depending on your vision, you may need individuals with expertise in fiber, data, VoIP, and other aspects of UCaaS.

4. Who Do They Specialize in?

Leading unified communications vendors know that they're not the right fit for every prospective client. They understand that alignment, cost, location, and prospect needs can all impact a relationship. By learning about the industries and business sizes that your prospective UCaaS vendor has worked most successfully with, you can evaluate possible fit.

4. A Lack of Caring

A final, important pitfall to look for is a vendor who lacks passion. Ultimately, it's a love of customer service that drives vendors to go above and beyond for their clients—even when that's not the cheapest or easiest thing for them to do. It's a passion for the business that drives a pursuit of knowledge and continual improvement.

Questions you can ask to determine whether your vendors really care about unified communications and their customers include:

1. How long have your customers been with you?
2. Can you provide any examples of a time when you went above and beyond to satisfy your clients?
3. Do you track support metrics? Are you willing to share your metrics and/or goals?
4. Do you track customer satisfaction? How?
5. How fast is your response time to customer service?

Some communication businesses are pretty good at faking passion. This is a major pitfall to avoid. A highly responsive sales team is not always an indicator of a culture of customer service. By digging a little below the surface and looking deeper than service level agreements and references from their happiest customers, you can gauge the extent of a vendor's commitment to being the best.

For an in-depth look at this topic, we recommend 7 Characteristics of Great VoIP Customer Service and Support.

Turning UC Pitfalls into Successful Vendor Relationships

One of the most important signs of an exceptional UC vendor is someone who's just as concerned about fit as you are. While the technology and cost are crucial factors, understanding your potential for a successful long-term relationship should be a goal of any vendor selection process.

Atlantech Online has decades of experience providing custom-built UC solutions and implementation support to organizations, including firms in highly-regulated industries. We specialize in a unique, no-pressure approach to helping our prospects find the company that is the best fit for their needs and vision. To learn more, contact us today!

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