

ZOHOCliq

A beginner's guide to

UCaaS



In an era of digital transformation, every second saved gives you an edge over your competitors. With people being the biggest drivers of this transformation, companies are constantly looking for the latest technology to best support their workforce. The search is typically for scalable technology that aids in seamless collaboration and is accessible at a reasonable cost. This has cemented the emergence of unified communications as a service (UCaaS).

What is UCaaS?

To put it simply,

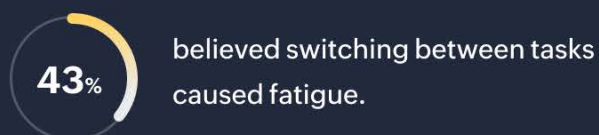
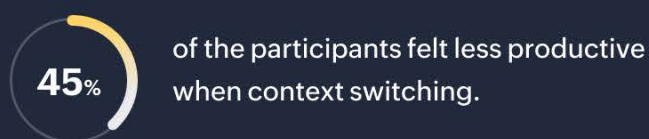
UCaaS is the convergence of various communication channels in one cloud-based interface. This makes the process of enterprise communication smooth and efficient.

According to Gartner, UCaaS includes enterprise telephony, meetings (audio, video, and web conferencing), unified messaging, instant messaging and presence (personal and team), mobility, and communications-enabled business processes.

Having all these features in one interface saves time, as users don't have to switch between multiple applications. Lately, this phenomenon of context switching has been linked to negative effects, such as fatigue and reduced productivity.

Considering the events that have transpired over the last few years, another important function of UCaaS is that it enables mobility. This effectively makes remote work easier. The findings of a recent study highlight the importance of this benefit.

The Workgeist 2021 report found that



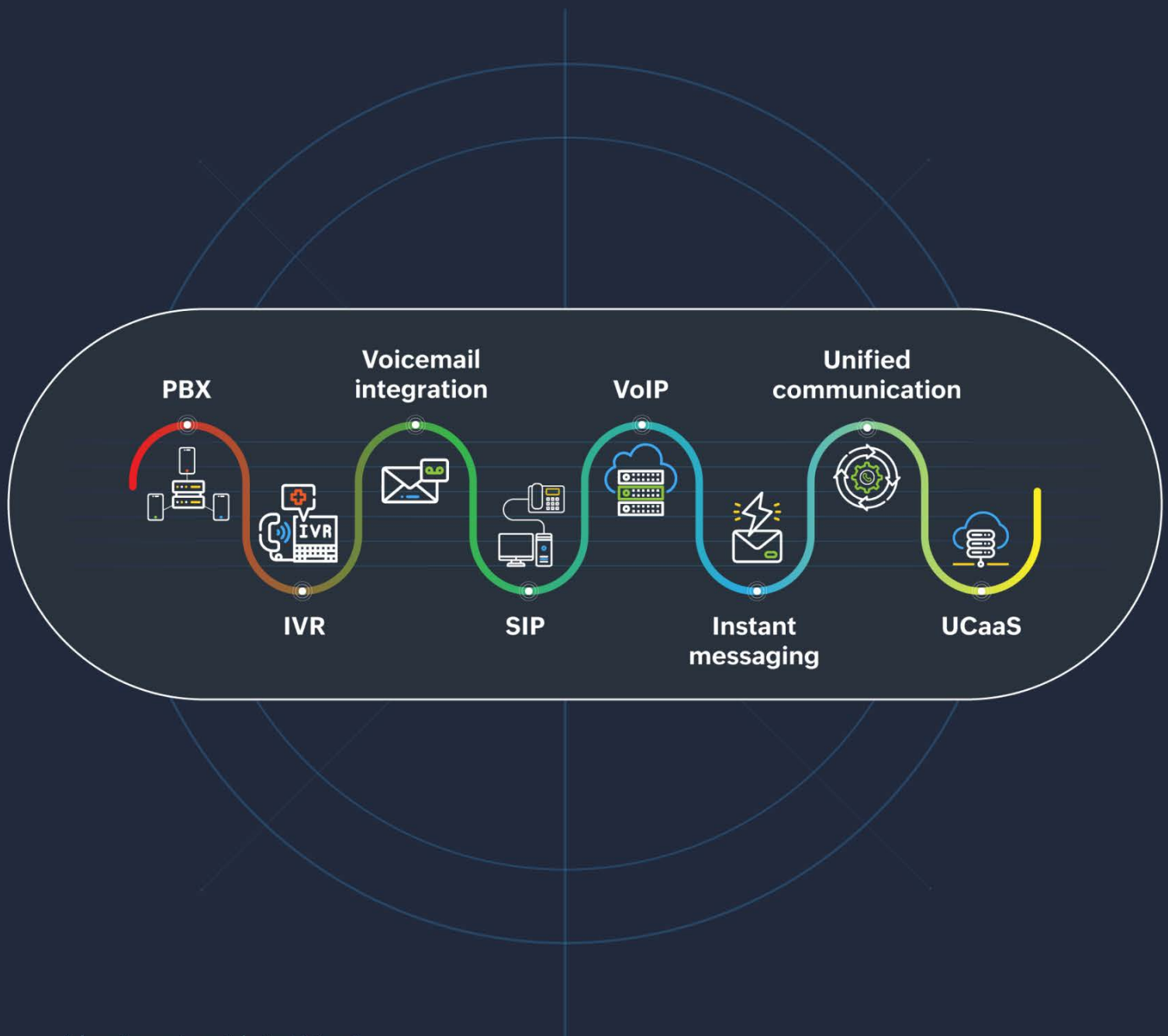
These are important considerations for companies choosing technology for their employees.



This is an indication of the shift in remote work preferences. UCaaS's ability to use a device with an active network connection from anywhere in the world ensures that geography is no longer a barrier.

The emergence of UCaaS

The evolution of communications technology over the years has changed how individuals in enterprises stay connected. Companies are shifting to UCaaS solutions for their communication needs, as it provides all the necessary communication channels in one interface. Additionally, since UCaaS functions through the cloud, companies have lower capital expenditures than with prior communication systems. These benefits, along with the reduced strain on the company's IT departments and improved remote work, have encouraged the growth of UCaaS. But it is crucial to understand how UCaaS has come into being to understand its significance and potential growth.





The very beginning

The basis of unified communication is, as the name suggests, communication. Delving into the history of communication could turn into a rabbit hole, starting with older technology like smoke signals and courier pigeons and advancing to concepts like the telegraph, Morse code, and the telephone. This series of solutions eventually led to the breakthrough technology we use today.



PBX

Private Branch Exchange, or PBX, was the crux of communication for companies in the 1960s. PBX effectively connected employees within an organization through limited physical phone lines and, at one point, required switchboard operators to facilitate communication. This was a strain on financial resources in terms of capital and personnel expenditure.

With the introduction of computer networks and functions such as email, there was growing concern over the time spent on context switching.



IVR

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) was the next step in the unified communication journey. Although it was already in existence, it gained popularity in the 70s. IVR technology utilized pre-recorded messages and text-to-speech functions to help companies interact with customers. This was a massive step in unified communication, eliminating the need for a live agent. It also improved customer experience to a great extent by reducing wait times and costs because of the decreased demand for the workforce. Additionally, IVR provided companies the option to receive customer feedback, thus aiding in improving business processes.



Voicemail integration

Voicemail is a system that stores voice messages that companies can access later. With the introduction of voicemail capabilities, by the end of the 90s, companies started integrating voicemail and email into their existing devices. Thus, unified communication was strengthened as employees began accessing these functions from one place.



SIP

Session Initiated Protocol, or SIP, was the next stage of Internet Protocol (IP) telephony. SIP is a signaling protocol that enables communication sessions between IP networks for instant messaging, voice calls, and video call applications.



VoIP

With the advent of SIP, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) was established. VoIP essentially uses SIP to facilitate efficient voice communication between devices. This communication could be through audio or video, further developing unified communication. The introduction of VoIP technology in the market changed the way people communicate. This gave rise to the era of cloud communication, which eliminated the need for physical lines that PBX networks demanded. By carrying out communication functions across devices, individuals could save time and resources using the same solution for different functions.



Instant messaging

Although instant messaging was established in the 1970s, it started gaining prominence in the late 90s and early 2000s. This was an essential addition to the unified communication arsenal, giving companies the benefit of real-time communication. With businesses needing to stay ahead of the curve, instant communication was required to solve problems in real time.



Unified communication

With the advancements in VoIP reliability, audio, and video conferencing technologies, and instant messaging, unified communication was made easier for enterprises. Using on-premise technology, companies opted for unified communication services. This came with the benefit of solid security and customization flexibility, since the technology was for the client company alone and not a shared service. Although these benefits were essential, they also came with many disadvantages. On-premise unified communication needed a higher financial and capital investment because of the hardware that came with it. It also strained company IT departments, as the technology required regular upkeep.



UCaaS

The rise of cloud computing, along with the downsides of capital expenditure and the rigidity of expansion in on-premise unified communication solutions, gave rise to UCaaS. As companies began providing unified communication services through the cloud, they eliminated the need for hefty on-premise hardware and accessed an array of additional benefits. These benefits included administrative capabilities, reduced costs, flexibility, and more. This ushered enterprises into a new era of communication, with UCaaS systems like Zoho Cliq coming into being.

Current trends and future of UCaaS

From how technology is evolving, it is clear that this is not the end. With advancements in areas such as artificial intelligence, there is vast potential for growth in the unified communication space. Through the years, UCaaS has gone beyond the confines of its widely accepted definition. Its evolution is based on the simple need to increase productivity and save time. This has given rise to the following current and projected trends in the UCaaS space.

Unified presence

One of the goals of a sound UCaaS system is a unified presence. This component is especially relevant with the rise of remote work, as siloed communication tools have led to disconnected teams.

For example, say John, a remote support representative, sets his status as "Available" in his online workspace. He then takes a customer support call through a third-party application not integrated with his company's internal communication system. His supervisor, Jill, tries calling him while he's on the phone with the customer. John understandably cannot respond, but as Jill isn't aware that he's already on another call, she sees this as negligence.

The disconnect observed in the case above is a small representation of a more significant issue. Optimizing a unified presence in UCaaS systems can help companies avoid miscommunication. UCaaS providers are constantly working towards optimizing their systems so that user presence is established across channels.





Calling

One of the central capabilities of a UCaaS system is calling. This could include calls between employees in an organization, calls to customers, or conference calls involving an employee and the customer. Although the base functionality of this feature has been established, there have been improvements and integrations to make the user experience more seamless. The first instance relates to the increase in demand for the inbound-outbound calling functionality. Generally, this function is offered on software not used for internal communication. This enables a loss in time owed to channel switching. If both these functionalities were on the same interface, customer-facing employees could easily switch between customer interactions and internal communication.



Advanced integrations

Context switching results in lost time across industries. While UCaaS already helps reduce context switching by providing all necessary communication in one interface, providers also offer companies the freedom to centralize all essential applications on the platform. Through custom tools built in the UCaaS system for both external and in-house applications, providers reduce the context switch for users and facilitate easy account maintenance for admins.

Additionally, when the provider offers a single sign-on (SSO) service through a business identity provider, the need to switch between several applications and sign in each time is eliminated. For example, if you create an integration in your UCaaS system that connects your system to your drive files, you can access and share files directly from your UCaaS screen. This reduces the time lost from switching between your communication screen and the drive screen. The future of UCaaS could potentially see even more advanced and efficient integrations.



Admin controls

Admin controls in UCaaS systems enable the administrator to manage the organization's resources from one place. Over time, UCaaS providers worldwide will allow admins to customize the system and set detailed security controls. This level of flexibility would give companies greater control over their security. Providers are also likely to work towards providing tools like e-discovery, data export, and data control policies to help with data management.



Usage reports and analytics

With usage reports and analytics, companies can streamline and optimize communication patterns using relevant data. UCaaS providers are continuously working towards making this information readily available. This aids companies in adopting a more metric-driven approach when analyzing results.



Process automation

Using technology to automate regular business processes has become a well-established practice. Low-code and no-code platform services have allowed businesses to automate workflows and improve productivity. This workflow automation can be triggered by various events, such as check-ins at work or even ending calls with a quick command. Good unified communication should not limit these workflows within the application, and it should allow them to function in external applications as well.



Open SDKs

A significant trend in UCaaS is the need for open software development kits (SDKs). This facilitates seamless integration of the UCaaS system into the company's applications. By providing open SDKs, UCaaS providers give users the choice of customization. The company can use the SDK to customize the solution so it fits their applications, rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach.



Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) has automated routine communication system processes. Apart from some of the processes mentioned above, AI could play a more significant role in elevating UCaaS systems. Recent advancements have been in the form of virtual assistants, priority-setting technology, and meeting aids. Providers have also been developing the technology to combine augmented reality (AR) and AI in communication to troubleshoot using remote teams. This effectively reduces the dependence on in-office teams. Although these developments are nascent for most providers, advancements in virtual communication using AI are inevitable.



Virtual meetings

The pandemic and the subsequent rise in remote work have encouraged companies to drive research and development in virtual meetings. The goal is simple: make virtual meetings and conferences as realistic as possible. Companies are now working on cutting-edge technology that can take virtual reality to the next level. This is bound to have positive implications for virtual meetings, as it improves the potential tools and technology required to make meetings more realistic and enhances the quality of remote work.



The way forward

With the trends and potential future of unified communication discussed, it's clear that UCaaS is constantly evolving. This is proof of the need for companies to keep up with these trends and engage in research and development. Through these, it is also crucial for companies to maintain sight of the significance of privacy and security in communication.

The importance of **secure communication**

In an age of digital transformation, it's safe to say that data is the new oil. Naturally, its protection and privacy have emerged at the forefront of business priorities. Security is critical in a company's communication system, where most business processes occur. With the emergence of UCaaS, it is essential to understand the associated safety and security protocols, especially when choosing a provider.



Encryption

Your UCaaS provider should maximize your privacy by keeping your conversations encrypted. This encryption is for the messages and voice data in transmission and at rest. This is to ensure that there are no hacks or leaks that would risk the company's data. Encryption is thus the basis for secure communication.



Role-based security

Your UCaaS provider can protect your company's data through role-based security. This feature restricts access and control to your data based on the employee's role and responsibility. Using this consent to access data and revoke access instantly ensures that sensitive data doesn't spread easily and remains available on a need-to-know basis.



Strong password policies

When your provider sets strong password policies for the company, it helps curb security risks. Password policies are conditions your provider sets that employees must adhere to when developing their passwords. Keeping these conditions strict ensures that all employees follow a consistent process when selecting a strong password. This, in turn, assures that third parties cannot access your company's data.



Data privacy for integrations

With UCaaS providers offering the option to customize the experience with integrations, ensuring security with each is essential. Consent-based data access for third-party extensions and integrations helps you take complete control of what each extension requires access to and how the data is utilized. By keeping track of this, it's easier to make decisions about the necessity of access.



Compliance

Regarding data privacy, there are standard guidelines and legislation to protect the company and personal data. A UCaaS provider's compliance with these guidelines is crucial and certifies that your communication is secure. One such necessary regulation is the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The GDPR is an EU data protection and privacy regulation that enforces strict handling and processing of EU resident data. Adherence to this and other guidelines is necessary for your provider to protect your data effectively.

Compliance is also important when it comes to developer extensions. All code developers submit for extensions should be reviewed before publishing to ensure that customer personal data is not misused.



Securing your future communication

These factors are essential considerations when opting for a UCaaS provider. It's also best to look for a provider with a reputation for providing robust security systems. Backed by Zoho's commitment to user privacy, Cliq is a UCaaS solution with several benefits. With Cliq, you'll always be in the know.

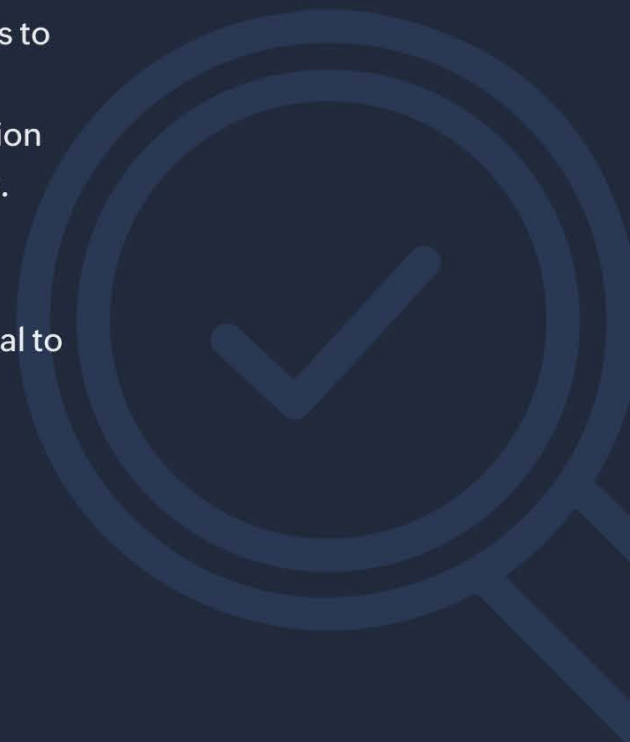
Finding the right UCaaS provider

UCaaS has become central to efficient, collaborative technology. On the journey towards seamless business processes, UCaaS keeps the wheels turning. It is an economical, time-saving solution that effectively reduces the strain on a company's workforce. These established benefits have sparked recent UCaaS growth and set companies on the path to finding the ideal UCaaS provider.

While the need for a secure system is common to all companies, each company has different requirements for their UCaaS provider depending on the nature of their work. These requirements vary based on factors like the number of employees in the company and the company's industry.

For example, a retail company could require call center and communication-integrated project management features to support customer care activities. On the other hand, a healthcare provider could require real-time communication and collaboration functions with robust security features.

There are some key considerations to look out for when opting for a UCaaS provider. These considerations are vital to ensure a smooth experience and to avoid the pitfalls of switching to a different provider if the shoe does not fit.





Scalability

Good technology grows with a company. Digital transformation has encouraged companies to grow at unprecedented rates. Often, companies need help predicting this growth rate and should be prepared with technology that can keep up. A UCaaS solution should adapt to a company's growth without putting strain on the IT department. For example, suppose a startup has just acquired its second round of funding and plans to expand the team. In that case, the company's UCaaS solution should accommodate the influx of new employees in minutes without putting pressure on the team.



Security and privacy

In this age of digital transformation, protecting your data is crucial. A UCaaS provider should be able to meet your data privacy needs. As discussed in the [previous chapter](#), some factors to look for are data encryption and protection from third-party attacks through strong privacy policies, role-based security, and access control.



Privacy compliance

Data privacy and security can also be monitored by ensuring that the UCaaS provider you consider is privacy compliant. As discussed in the [preceding chapter](#), the compliance guidelines they must follow affect how your company's data is handled. Apart from GDPR compliance, other factors include BSI guidelines for information security management, security controls for cloud services, HIPAA compliance, and AICPA SOC. Understanding if your provider adheres to region-specific data protection acts is also beneficial. This ensures that your data is in good hands.



Customer support

An important consideration when picking a provider is their availability to customers. Their ability to offer timely support and address customer concerns is crucial. Proper support will help you keep your business processes running smoothly.



Credibility

When considering a UCaaS provider, a long-standing positive reputation in the industry adds excellent value. A provider known to be reliable in terms of service delivery and data protection is ideal. This credibility is built on years of positive customer interactions and ensures you'll experience close to no downtime when working with the provider.



Cutting-edge offerings

Evaluating whether your UCaaS provider keeps up with market trends and spends time on research and development is critical. This dedication results in more useful features that make your processes as efficient as possible. The importance of staying ahead of the curve is especially relevant now when hybrid work models are more prevalent.



Integrating with other apps

An effective UCaaS solution should allow you to integrate with any required third-party software. This ensures that your chosen solution blends seamlessly into your company's existing ecosystem. The provider should also have the necessary resources to support your team in implementing your required integrations.

Narrowing your search

By keeping all the aforementioned factors in mind, you'll be well on your way to discovering the most appropriate UCaaS solution for your needs. Zoho Cliq is one solution that ticks all the above boxes and more. Plus, it allows you to tailor specific functionalities to fit your company's needs. The goal is simple: help you communicate seamlessly so you can focus on what you do best.



About the author



Aishwarya

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Aishwarya has always been intrigued by the convergence of language and marketing. This has set her on the path to explore marketing through storytelling. She loves lists, brevity and paradoxes. When she isn't working, she loves to travel, sing, and find the next best food joint.

