

# Transforming your business through flexible working

A BT Business report – 2020



# Foreword

There can't be an organisation in the UK that hasn't had to consider 'flexible working' in one way or another.

And yet c-suite appreciation of its growing importance to future success varies considerably, as does knowledge about how to make it a harder working reality for both employee and employer.

The following considers the challenges and opportunities of flexible working, and how to make the very most of the latter by embracing a surprisingly simple cloud-based solution. One that is destined to – quite literally – change the way the nation talks about business.

## The rise and rise of flexible working

**'Flexible working' is more than just a phrase – it's a growing phenomenon and businesses need to make sure they are agile enough to keep up.**

Because the entire workforce is now a mobile workforce. We're all becoming flexible workers in one way or another. Even those who don't leave the building are expected to be mobile and instantly contactable within the working environment.

Work has become bigger than the workplace. Businesses have got to be more time-flexible and more available than ever – meaning working hours are now more 'mobile' too. This isn't just because next generation employees expect flexibility but also because customers and clients expect it too.

In short, you need to be the business that everyone expects. It's now about the organisation itself being flexible. Not just the people in it.



# Understanding the challenge

## What is flexible working?

**‘Flexible working’ is harder to define than you might first think.**

A broad umbrella term that covers all working practices that vary from the ‘normal’ working pattern, “it is often seen by what it isn’t – not the nine-to-five, not the daily commute to a central workplace – as opposed to by what it is.” So says the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in its foreword to the insightful ‘Megatrends: Flexible Working 2019’ report.

**There are more flexible working practices than you might think**

Part-time working  
Term-time working  
Job-sharing  
Flexitime  
Compressed hours  
Annual hours  
Working from home on a regular basis  
Mobile working/teleworking  
Career breaks/sabbaticals  
Commissioned outcomes  
Zero-hours contracts

# What are the benefits?

In practical terms, flexible working can make a big difference on your business's bottom line. It's the difference between a valued employee taking maximum time off work after becoming a parent (and maybe never returning to work) or being able to work around their family commitments.

And it's the difference between employing the right person for the job despite their geographical location, or having the wrong person come in every day. Crucially, it's not just about individuals but how individuals work together as disparate teams across distance and time zones.

It's also about trust. About employees feeling positive that they're being treated like responsible adults – trusted to get the job done in their own way and in their own time.

It all adds to better morale, higher productivity and better quality of work.

And we're already seeing that flexible working is inevitable in several industries – where roles revolve around being agile and always on the move.

## Making management see the light

There are very different generational attitudes towards flexible working – and what it means. Some of the UK business community see it as something that they grudgingly have to offer. While other managers and employees see it as an exciting opportunity to be embraced – that will ultimately help them do better business.

The figures already show that generational changes in the workforce are driving the change in working practices. And baby boomers are a dwindling minority with a fading voice.

One point everyone agrees on: flexible working is here to stay. It cannot be ignored or wished away.

**Various reports  
have been predicting  
that millennials are  
projected to make up  
roughly 75 per cent  
of the workforce  
by 2025**

Deloitte Millennial Survey or CBRE 2019



# How to attract a new generation of talent

Millennials and all subsequent generations now expect to work flexibly. In fact, 74 per cent of millennials admit they want the values of the business to match their own.

And businesses need to take note. Showing that you're a business that has embraced flexibility shows you're an enlightened employer.

Put simply, if a business doesn't offer flexible working it will struggle to recruit and keep workers.

For business owners, attracting talent is only one challenge. The other is finding the right formula for successful employee management and consequent retention.

The figures are sobering. According to the Institute of Leadership and Management report 'Workforce 2020: Managing Millennials', 57 per cent of the millennial workforce expect to move job within two years, while 40 per cent will move within one year.

The institute recommends two key actions for retention:

**Empower millennial staff with greater autonomy**

**Embrace new technology and entrepreneurialism**

Flexible working is all about personal autonomy. And having the right technology is the enabler of that autonomy.

This is backed up by Robert Walters' whitepaper 'Attracting and retaining millennial professionals' which stated that millennials widely perceive technology to be at the root of workplace conflicts.

34 per cent reported that older workers not understanding new technology was the chief cause of these conflicts. And 33 per cent of these younger workers said they were frustrated at using outdated technology.



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## A new generation of flexible workers

Clearly, as an employer, talking about flexible working in the interview isn't enough. You've got to make it happen.

And make it happen well if you want to prevent your talent from walking out of the door.

**39 per cent**

of millennials would sacrifice some of their salary for the option to work flexibly.

Around 74 per cent of millennials, and 94 per cent of baby boomers, want a flexible schedule that works for them.

The popularity of the 'standard' nine-to-five appears to be on the decline as it looks as if most employees are interested in flexible hours and telecommuting.

Hot-desking and shared spaces appeal more to millennials than rows of desks and fixed computers, which baby boomers are more used to.

Office Spaces



# Recognising the opportunity

## The cost of inflexibility

**It's no surprise that the crux of both individual and organisational flexibility is communications.**

In business we rely on effective communication for just about everything – from keeping employees updated, to interacting with clients and partners.

Better business communication means better business and happier customers.

Consequently, the inability to always be there for customers when they need you, can jeopardise success.

The danger is that they will decide not to give you that extra slice of business or worse still, leave you for another business. One that has set up the working practices and the technology to take their call when it matters.



# Lost customers. Lost revenue.

£1,200

The average estimated  
price of a lost customer.

It varies by sector

£9,000

Decision-makers  
estimate the average  
cost of being  
uncontactable by phone  
for a full 24-hours.

In some cases it's as high as £20,000

£36.5m+

Lost revenue by 63,400  
companies with between  
20 and 49 workers  
between April 2013 and  
March 2014.



# Responsiveness equals **customer satisfaction**

It's also fair to mention, that the value of a call can also manifest itself in the form of happier and more satisfied customers.

We're in a world where online interactions dominate everything we do, to the point where we might overlook the fact that we all still want a bit of human interaction.

Especially given that customer service is intrinsic to every business, the priority in all cases is to ensure that a customer's experience with the company is the best it can be.

## Leaving customers waiting According to the 2018 UK Caller Satisfaction Survey:

The length of time it takes calls to be answered **is the leading cause of low customer service call satisfaction in the UK.**

On average, **7 out of 10** callers will **hang up after only three rings.**

The telephone is still a preferred method of contact amongst **18-30** year olds, with **43 per cent preferring this method.**

Over  
**50 per cent**  
of respondents spent over  
**10 minutes**  
**a week**  
waiting to speak to a business.



# Flexibility powered by communications

**The success of your communications depends on how effectively you connect people with each other and with the information they need. And, of course, whether you do that in a way that they're comfortable with. Employees are more effective if they're at ease with the technology. The more intuitive the better.**

There can be no doubt that communications technology has made flexible working a practical reality: emailing, conference calling, messaging etc. And of all that technology, it's the internet that's been the rising star – making so much of what we do possible remotely; working 'OOO' and on the move.

And yet there's one cloud-based area of communications technology where many businesses have remained stuck in the copper-wired past. Where they've ignored the more efficient and effective internet option. And that's 'voice'.

Of course, communication isn't just about voice calls. It covers messaging in all its forms, so choosing the right technology for the typed word is a crucial part of the package too.

However, the spoken word is an intrinsic part of the communications solution and, for some reason, has been left behind to eat the technological dust of accelerating messaging technology. Indeed, according to Aircall Inc., **UK businesses lose over £30 billion every year due to missed calls.**





# The mobility of calling in the cloud

When it comes to ‘Voice over Internet Protocol’ or VoIP for short, there are three things to remember:

1. Not all VoIP systems are the same – and there are a lot to choose from
2. Some VoIP systems are more mobile than others
3. Ease of installation varies considerably – from ‘plug-in-and-play’ to more complex offerings

With so many options and names - we’ll keep things simple by referring to it as ‘Voice in the Cloud’ or ViC from now on.

And whatever you call it, one thing is certain. If you’re looking for a solution that will deliver the service your people need to be truly flexible, then you require one that goes way beyond office telephony and connects all employees, irrespective of location.

## How does ‘Voice in the Cloud’ work?

It routes voice calls over an internet connection, rather than through a conventional phone line or private branch exchange hosted on a company’s premises.

It gives you everything (and more) that a traditional phone system does, but without the hassle – and expense – of major hardware to install and maintain.

Such a cloud-based phone system offers more flexibility because you can take and manage calls not just from your landline, but from your computer and your mobile. Which means you can use all the features of a fixed phone system wherever you are.



# Adoption with a deadline

Gartner forecasts that 90 per cent of all businesses worldwide will move from on-premise ISDN to cloud telephony by 2021. The remaining 10 per cent will not be far behind because there is now a deadline to help concentrate the business mind.

BT have announced that they will switch off the ISDN network in 2025, requiring all businesses to make the move into the cloud. And it would appear that they're taking the hint. According to the Cloud Industry Forum (CIF) research, the UK is adopting cloud-based systems faster than any of its European neighbours, apart from Scandinavia.

## UK Business and the cloud Research from the Cloud Industry Forum (CIF)

**Overall cloud adoption rate in the UK is 88 per cent.**

**67 per cent of surveyed users expect to increase their adoption of cloud services.**

Although organisations are clearly taking a cloud-first approach, the majority will be maintaining hybrid IT estates for some time to come.

The top three reasons for initially adopting cloud services are flexibility of delivery (74 per cent), operational cost savings (72 per cent) and scalability (65 per cent).

70 per cent of respondents either currently see, or anticipate seeing, their organisation as having a competitive advantage from using cloud services.



# Seizing the solution

## Liberating employees to work better

Both from a cultural and legal perspective, flexible working is now an intrinsic part of all organisations' operations, especially for those with offices dotted all over the place and staff who work on the hoof – such as estate agents, maintenance workers and retail staff. Therefore, it makes sense to fully support and nurture that culture because it also has a direct impact on how customers and clients are serviced.

The first step towards achieving that is by enshrining flexible working in corporate policy. This means going beyond legal necessity and making sure that management (and particularly HR) pays much more than lip service to liberating the way staff work. The second is by enabling it with the right technology.





# Moving towards unified communications

This is where the latest Voice in the Cloud (ViC) technology can help. It replaces your desk phone and mobile with one device that seamlessly switches between your office and mobile networks. Collaboration for all employees, not just the flexible workers, is made easier than ever. By unifying voice communications in this way, everyone is more flexible and therefore, more productive – all while portraying a unified front to their customers.

And that's just two of the benefits. Here are some more.

**Over 50 per cent of IT leaders think VoIP will be a critical component in their companies' business development**

Century Link

## Scalability that meets changing needs

Legacy systems don't scale up easily, so onboarding new employees can be a complex and costly process. Cloud-hosted calling is the opposite. The system can grow as business grows, scaling up without the installation of pricey new lines.

In fact, even the idea of new lines becomes redundant when you think about the needs of flexible

workers. Especially those who work in locations not owned by the business. So moving your calls into the cloud has to be the sensible way forward.

And although cloud-hosted calling isn't perfect (no system is), any communications problems are usually resolved remotely by the host in a matter of minutes. Old systems with old hardware are a very different story.

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**Businesses with 30 phones can save upwards of £1,000 a month by switching to VoIP**

PC World

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# Fully integrate with the digital environment

Landline-based voice calling exists in its own silo. It simply doesn't work with the new digital environment. With cloud-hosted calling it's possible to drag voice calling into the digital age and marry it with many other features, such as conference calling, call recording, presence management and intelligent routing. All of which are ideal for flexible working.

In short, if employees can connect to the internet, they can make voice calls and, thanks to a range of apps, do a whole lot more. Better still, it's easy to integrate analytics with your system. Just think of the CRM possibilities...

## Spend less time and money on management

You'd usually have to buy or lease expensive hardware and install new lines with Legacy hosted PBX systems. With ViC, system installation costs are minimal – plugging straight into your existing internet.

As a hosted service provided by an external contractor there's no need for IT troubleshooting. And call features can be turned on or off via intuitive web or app dashboards by users with no technical knowledge.

## Reduce business costs

ViC is cheaper to run than traditional landlines because it offers lower rates for local and international calls, plus free calls between employees – even when calling remotely. Add to that the reassuringly predictable monthly subscription model preferred by most providers, and expense/cashflow planning becomes a lot simpler.

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**VoIP saves employees an average of 32 minutes per day**

Unified Communications:  
The Layman's Guide, Ziff Davis

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# The future of voice is in the cloud

## Conclusion (and a word of advice)

If smart, flexible working is the future for business, then 'voice in the cloud' is one key way to get you there. Easy to install and configure, it can quickly revolutionise organisational efficiency, connectivity and productivity – not just in the office but anywhere you and your employees care to do business.

What's more, why would you continue to grapple with an old legacy system when a much more attractive alternative exists? An alternative that will soon become an imperative when ISDN is phased out in five years.

Just remember one thing when choosing your provider: your communication needs are as unique as your business and the people in it. So, make sure you opt for a flexible, scalable and mobile system that allows for customisation. That way you will get the very most out of it and so will your customers.

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