



Hybrid Cloud—the New Playbook for Unified Communications and Collaboration

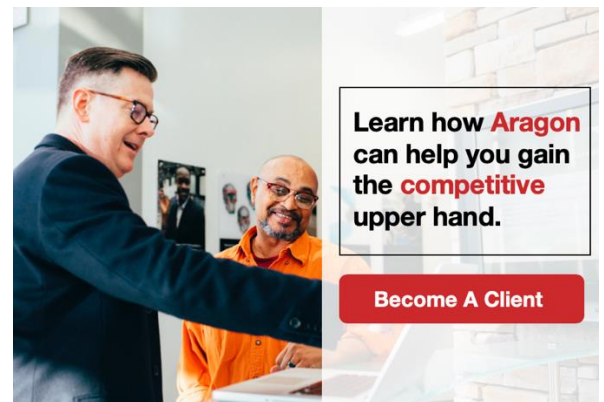
Hybrid Work Requires a Full Voice, Video, and Messaging Platform

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Issue: Who are the unified communications and collaboration providers, and how will they evolve?

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SUMMARY

While cloud has been a compelling reason to modernize communications infrastructure, today, due to the maturity of cloud technology, there are more ways to deploy unified communications and collaboration platforms than just public cloud. Hybrid cloud, which includes public cloud connected with on-premise private cloud deployments, offers new secure options to enterprises without sacrificing the benefits of cloud. This Research Note reviews the emergence of hybrid cloud for UCC.

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Introduction

Many new organizations who have aging PBXs have been naturally drawn to public clouds by the lure of pay-as-you-go operating costs, seemingly limitless elasticity, significantly less up-front capital costs, reduced operational complexity, and most importantly, levels of security that are exceedingly difficult to achieve in most self-managed on-premise deployments. However, despite the success of Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) there are still large numbers of on-premise users of communications—in fact, estimates go as high as 884 Million users in 2021 (see Figure 1).

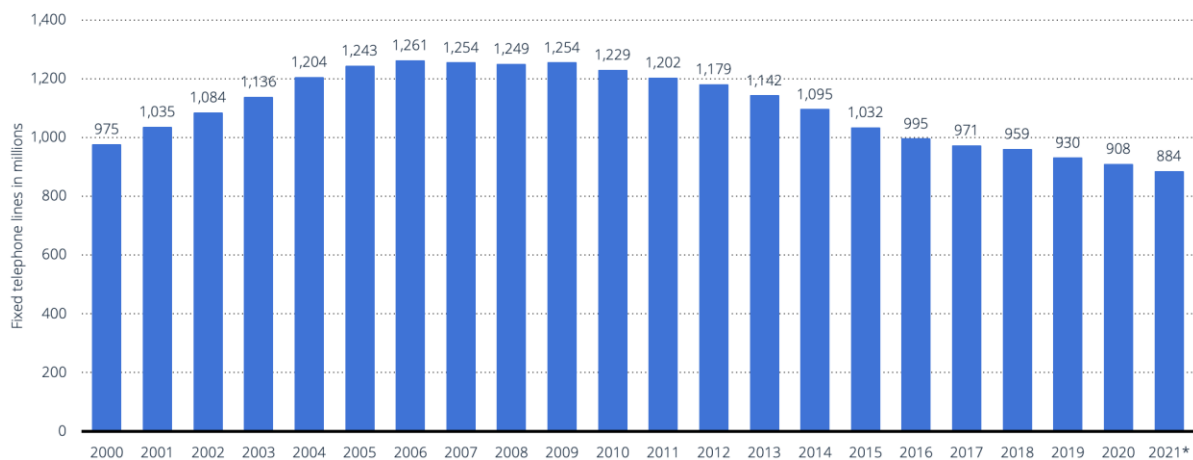


Figure 1: The number of desk phone users worldwide 2000-2021. Source Statista.

Today, cloud technology has improved significantly, so much so that cloud has really become a set of deployment options. In UCC, large providers can now offer public and private cloud options, which is referred to as hybrid cloud. This research note details why hybrid cloud is worth evaluating for large enterprises.

Understanding the Cloud Options

The cloud options for enterprises to leverage for UCC vary with nuances and reasons for each. The quick take away is that public SaaS cloud is not the only option in 2022. Here is a snapshot of the options:

- Full SaaS cloud
- Full private cloud
- Hybrid cloud, which combines elements of SaaS and private cloud into a unique offering.

Full SaaS Public Cloud

To date, this has been one of the most popular options for small and medium enterprises. In this model, the enterprise subscribes to the UCC services of the provider. It might be telephony, meetings, team collaboration, or the full platform. We would note that in collaboration, large enterprises have moved their email to the cloud years ago, but in communications, many large enterprises are still on-premise.

Full Private Cloud—On-Premise

Today, on-premise and managed on-premise offerings (called private cloud) of unified communications (UC) continue to be popular even though they are not discussed that often in the press. Although there is tremendous interest in UC as a Service via public cloud, there are three reasons to stay with a private cloud or on-premise instance:

Full Feature Sets—some UC providers offer fewer features in their cloud edition as compared to private cloud (on-premise).

Security and Data Governance—in many cases, security and data governance are viewed as vital, as communications has become a risk vector, particularly for large enterprises.

Data Residency—enterprises want to maintain full control of their data.

What the enterprise needs to evaluate is shifting from traditional IT managed servers and devices to what providers will offer as managed services.

Hybrid Cloud

There are a number of ways that hybrid cloud can be leveraged in a UCC environment. This generally involves mixing applications that may run in a private cloud with ones that run in a public cloud environment. Two examples include:

- **Integrate existing telephony into new cloud meetings / team collaboration**

One of the ways to leverage an existing telephony infrastructure is to integrate it with a newly planned public cloud deployment of meetings or team collaboration. In cases where team collaboration (e.g. Avaya Spaces, Microsoft Teams, or Slack) is purchased separately from unified communications, there is often a realization that telephony is still needed with a best of breed deployment.

- **Adding telephony to existing meetings / team collaboration**

Another way to add new capabilities and leverage existing telephony is to add an integration where team collaboration is enhanced with telephony. While this is a popular option in a SaaS cloud configuration, where two vendors offerings are integrated, it is also becoming a playbook option for leveraging a private cloud telephony infrastructure with an already deployed public cloud based team collaboration offering.

Both of these examples enable organizations to take advantage of the benefits of hybrid deployments while providing users with integrated experiences. For example, a single browser pane or mobile app can transparently present meetings capabilities from the cloud, with telephony from a private cloud or on-premise deployment.

Is Hybrid Cloud the Right Choice for Your Organization?

Organizations that have workloads that don't naturally fit within the constraints of a public cloud should consider embracing a hybrid cloud strategy. A hybrid cloud can be created by deploying these public cloud unfriendly workloads into a private cloud that are then linked to your existing public cloud infrastructure.

Deploying these workloads to a private cloud can provide much of the benefits inherent to a public cloud on a platform where your organization's IT team can have more direct control over the infrastructure, customization, security, and resource availability due to the non-shared nature of a private cloud.

What the Hybrid Methodology Is and Why It Makes Sense for Some

There are several factors that come into play when deciding to leverage a hybrid deployment. Feature sets of applications will vary and, often, telephony has a richer feature set to support features of legacy and newer phone handsets. Also, video conferencing often also has the advantage of managing live meetings and recordings. Video conferencing infrastructure for meeting hosting can be complicated to deploy on-premise, with challenges emerging with servers, gateways, scalability, and more. Cloud deployments can help eliminate this complexity.

The hybrid methodology is about looking at a combination of offerings between SaaS, a service run in the public cloud, and a private cloud offering. Combinations of these, particularly for telephony and meetings, makes sense often due to security and compliance needs. In some cases, advanced telephony and data governance is only possible with a private cloud instance.

Understanding Differences in Public vs. Hybrid Cloud

It is important to fully understand what UCC providers offer when it comes to cloud vs. hybrid cloud options. There are differences in data governance, overall manageability and features that all will play a role in selecting the right deployment scenario.

Table 1 below should provide a starting point for your assessment of where best to place your workloads that don't easily fit in the public cloud.

Table 1—Cloud Characteristics			
	SaaS	Hybrid Cloud	
		Public Cloud	Private Cloud
Full Support for Telephony Features	Limited Features	Varies	Full Features
Video Conferencing	Full Features	Full Features	Full Features, AND full control
Infrastructure	Shared	Shared	Dedicated
Data Governance	Very Limited	Limited	Full Control
Infrastructure Access	None	None	Full Control
Security	Inherited	Inherited	Full Control
Regulatory Compliance	Inherited	Inherited	Full Control
Control	Limited	Limited	Full Control
Resource Access	Shared	Shared	Dedicated

Table 1: Key characteristics to consider when evaluating UCC cloud options.

Features Matter in Telephony—Loss of Capabilities when Moving to Public Cloud

In many cases, the need to migrate to cloud needs to be balanced with the features that users want and need. The reality is that when some providers migrated their communications offering to the cloud, features were often not migrated. This results in user dissatisfaction and also means lost productivity.

While there are many relatively new providers that have never had a private cloud/on-premise offering, there are many that have had to migrate. In the case of one provider, Microsoft, over 200 features in Skype for Business were not migrated to Microsoft Teams, which is the cloud version of the old Skype for Business (SfB).

So the advice for enterprises is to carefully evaluate providers feature sets and compare them to what the enterprise currently has. This issue—of feature limits—has not been discussed that much publicly, but it remains and can frustrate users.

The Need for a Unified Experience Starts with Team Collaboration

The vision of people-centric collaboration involves putting the user first. An integrated client has become a standard capability for UCC platforms. Aragon views chat, also called team collaboration, as the new dial-tone for the integrated collaboration and communication experience. Similar to the old directory, chat offers the users the ability to find people, see if they are online, and then connect with them in the right way, based on the type of meeting or type of interaction that needs to occur.

While many vendors now offer a single unified client—including Avaya, Cisco, Fuze, Microsoft, RingCentral, Vonage, and Zoom—now the challenge is to offer a unified experience. Use cases are helping to drive this, as will the addition of intelligence through predictive and prescriptive analytics.

At its core, people-centric collaboration is about enabling seamless communications and collaboration. It allows for calls that are both voice-based and video-based; it enables meetings with users and rooms; it is about the shift from instant messaging to mobile messaging, a shift that we have termed mobile collaboration. However, not all have been quick to recognize these changes in the market, particularly the impact of mobile messaging.

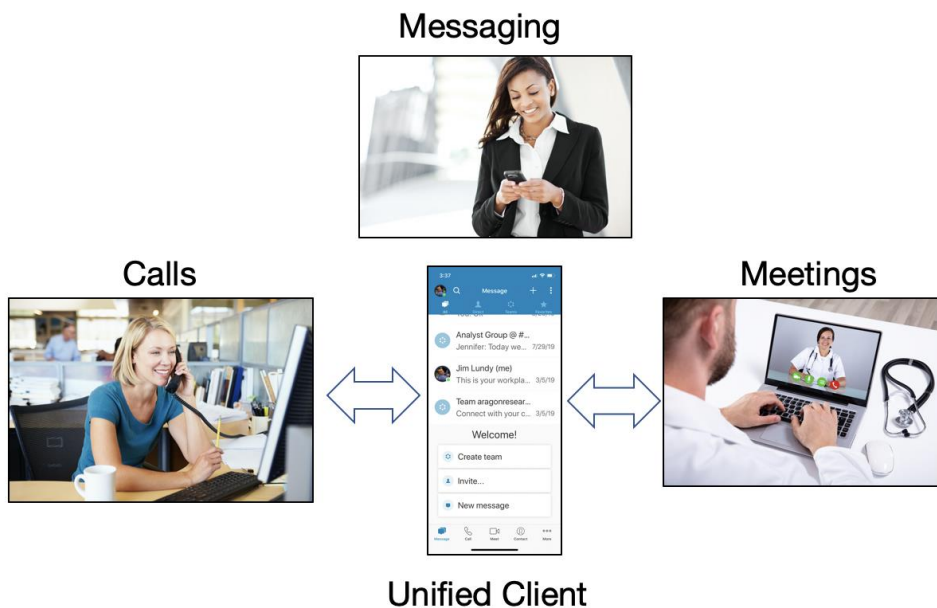


Figure 2: Unified clients make the communications and collaboration experience more seamless.

Benefits for Users and for IT

The benefits to users are many, including the simplicity of one platform. It is all about productivity and, in the case of telephony, advanced features. Users want the experience to be seamless, and even for hybrid cloud, this is possible. With hybrid cloud, users get the seamless experience and the added benefits of security and data protection.

The benefits for IT start with one provider to manage and end with one vendor platform to validate for security and simplicity of IT oversight. It has many of the managed cloud benefits that a SaaS offering has, but with increased data governance and data residency peace of mind. From a pure overhead perspective, best of breed offerings mean that IT has to onboard users for 2-3 platforms. They also have to maintain the instance, whether it is public or private cloud.

While it has become a highly competitive market, the benefits of both user experience and IT simplicity means a lot. That combined with the need for hybrid cloud means that there are fewer providers available who can meet the need. One of those is Avaya (see Note 1).

Note 1: Avaya OneCloud UCaaS at a Glance

Avaya OneCloud UCaaS is an all-in-one communications solution designed to support a hybrid working environment with always-on continuous collaboration. The core capabilities include:

- Persistent virtual workspaces
- Video meetings for up to 1,000 participants
- Team collaboration (chat)
- Calling with hundreds of features
- File sharing and content management
- Task management
- AI augmented capabilities
- Browser and mobile app UX
- Composability to enable custom workflows and vertical use cases
- Hybrid, public, and private cloud deployment

Note: For more information on Avaya's solution, [click here](#).

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- The hybrid cloud era is here for unified communications and collaboration. Private cloud is emerging as an option for enterprises particularly for those with large telephony deployments. Organizations should leverage hybrid clouds for those workloads that can't or shouldn't be moved to the public cloud.
- Before making a complete public cloud migration, enterprises should evaluate the benefits of hybrid cloud.
- Enterprises should ask their providers if they offer a hybrid cloud offering for communications and collaboration.

Bottom Line

While enterprises are under the impression that moving all UCC services to the public cloud is the strategic end goal, a detailed assessment of each workload may reveal that a hybrid cloud is a much better solution for them, particularly for unified communications. There are benefits of hybrid cloud including data privacy and security that along with enhanced features, may outweigh the all-out race to an all public cloud UCC migration. The evolution of deployments has enabled public clouds and private clouds to be more seamlessly combined and named with a common toolset, making the creation and administration of a hybrid cloud much easier and more cost effective.