Dynamic Businesses Require Dynamic Communications and Collaboration:

Research Shows the Cloud Can Help

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INTRODUCTION

The pace of change at most companies today is dramatic. Businesses of all sizes are increasingly making the cloud the center of their operations, serving up applications to a larger and more distributed workforce that's conducting business across multiple locations.

However, many of these companies still rely on legacy communications systems—and it's getting harder to ignore the pain caused by using aging PBX phones.

Companies placing a priority on growth and optimizing their workforces can no longer afford to stick with technology that hampers corporate expansion, impedes employee mobility, disrupts productivity and hurts the bottom line.

> **96 percent of IT professionals agree that legacy business phone systems are unable to keep pace with a global, mobile workforce.**

In fact, in a survey of 130 IT professionals conducted by BizTechInsights from December 2016 to February 2017 for cloud communications provider 8x8, 96 percent of respondents agree that legacy business phone systems are unable to keep pace with the constantly evolving needs of today's global and mobile workforce. Fortunately, there's no need for

them to continue to use outdated, on-premises PBX systems that are costly and difficult to maintain, highly inflexible, innovation-resistant and unable to scale to meet their needs.
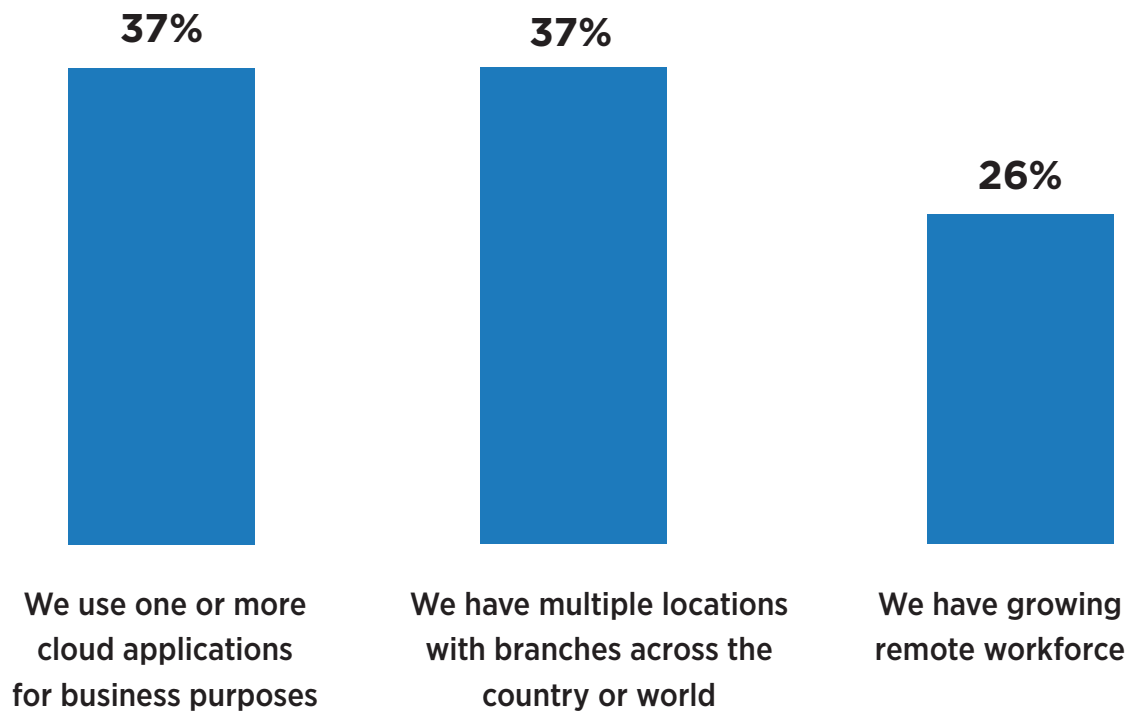
A cloud communications and collaboration solution provides an effective response to today's challenges. And the cloud approach is an increasingly familiar option for businesses of all sizes. More than one-third of survey respondents say it is most appropriate to characterize their organizations as being knowledgeable cloud - they're currently using one or more cloud applications for business purposes. Only 8 percent of respondents report having any discomfort using cloud solutions for critical business needs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: How does your company regard the use of cloud solutions for critical applications?
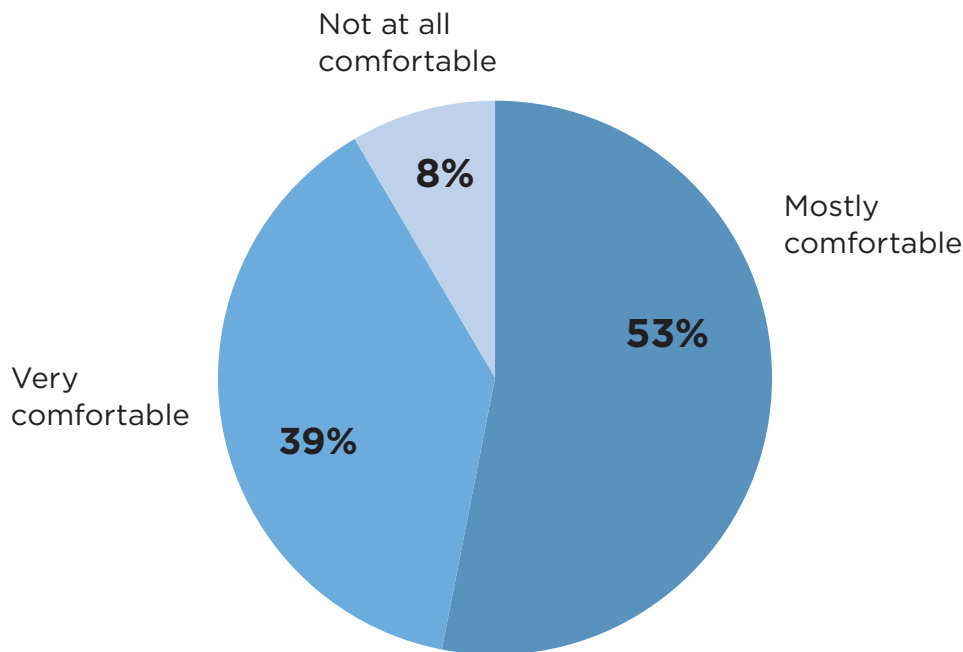
Additionally, more than one-third of respondents say that their businesses operate in multiple regions around the country or the world, and so likely are highly motivated to explore cloud communications to effectively and easily engage with customers and with employee talent wherever those parties are located. The same also can be said for the 26 percent of respondents who noted that their remote workforces are growing (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Which statement best describes your business?

37% — We use one or more cloud applications for business purposes

37% — We have multiple locations with branches across the country or world

26% — We have growing remote workforce

Top Pain Points

When it comes to the major limitations companies are facing with their current phone systems, four issues take the lead in the survey:

1. **Lack of integration to back-office applications.** Business stakeholders are eager for new capabilities that influence how much value they'll get out of the software they already rely upon every day. But legacy PBX vendors no longer update their offerings to include options such as seamless CRM integration to improve customer service with automatic communications-logging capabilities, or email integration to consolidate directories for easier collaboration with contacts.

2. **End-of-life products or vendor-discontinued support.** The traditional enterprise PBX market has been in decline for some time, and the trend is accelerating. Many major vendors have already taken what once were best-selling systems off the market. That leaves businesses in a perilous state when problems rear up that can't be addressed because critical components can't be replaced or bug fixes haven't been issued. Equally problematic is that they're left in the lurch when new communications features—such as application integration and other capabilities—are required to stay competitive.

3. **Lack of appropriate IT or telecom staff support.** With legacy PBX systems, it's never been easy to update servers to stay current or to extend services to new locations and countries without significant IT time and effort. That problem becomes an even bigger issue if in-house IT expertise is lacking on this front (as is likely given that, as time goes on, fewer IT employees or outside consultants have the skill sets to support older phone systems), or if the limited staff resources that are available need to be deployed in the service of revenue-producing endeavors.

4. **High maintenance and upgrade costs for a legacy PBX.** Even if a PBX vendor still offers support and develops new features, maintenance renewal on PBX hardware is costly. Depending on the IT staff's knowledge or availability, the business might wind up having to regularly foot bills for specialists to come in to handle updates, maintenance, customizations or other services.

Also included among the top concerns of respondents are a failure to support business continuity/disaster recovery capabilities, and the associated productivity losses that typically occur with the downtime that accompanies communications system outages. After all, if a business loses power, an onsite PBX is as vulnerable to the shutdown as any other system if the company hasn't taken any steps to protect it.

Lack of mobile support is another significant issue for businesses whose employees are on the go and need mobile apps—such as softphone, chat, web conferencing, video calling, business SMS/texting and the corporate directory—at their disposal, and preferably at no additional cost.

Decentralized administration across branches also vexes the survey respondents. Without the ability to leverage the same communications solution across every business site, from small service centers to manufacturing facilities to corporate headquarters—and support it via unified administration capabilities—the complexities of deployment and maintenance and the drag on productivity take their toll (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. What are the top limitations of your current business phone system?
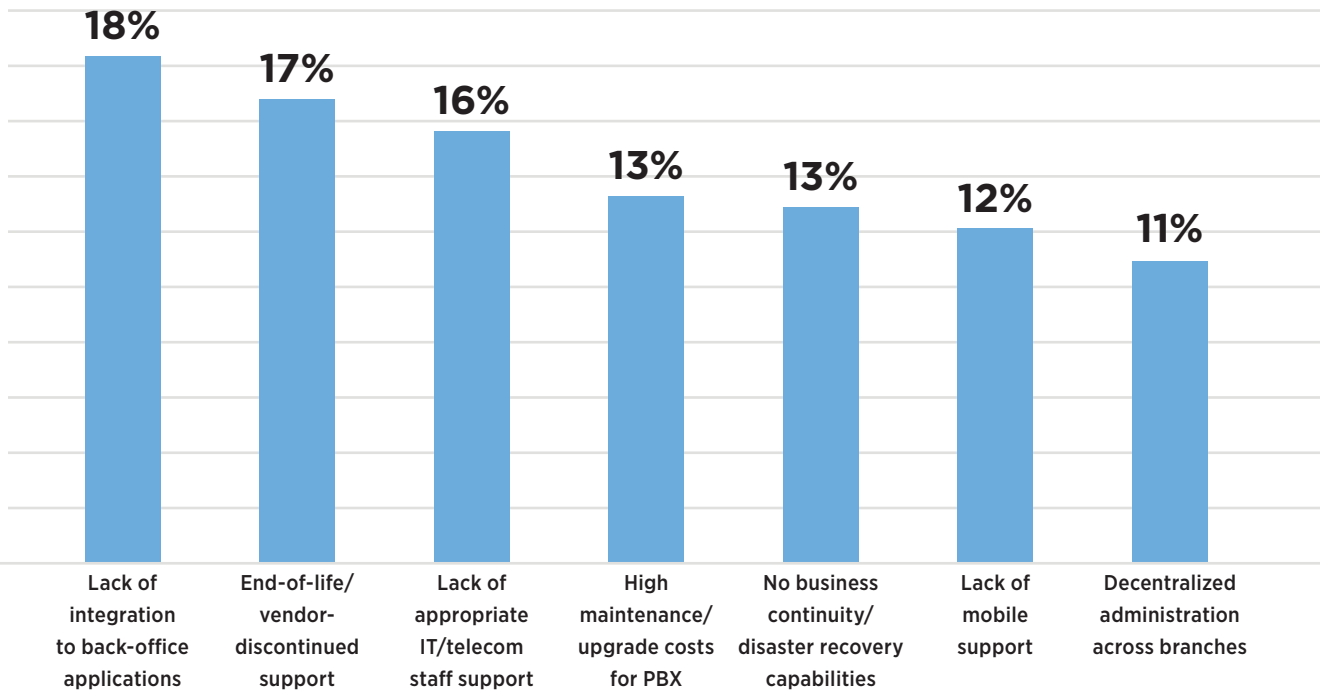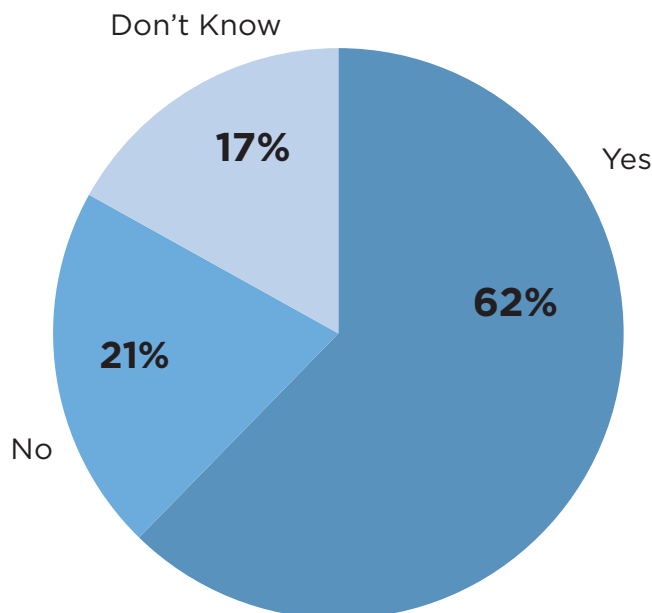
Enter Unified Cloud Communications

More than 90 percent of survey respondents say they are mostly or very comfortable using the cloud for critical applications. And what application could be more critical than unified communications, which serves workers' needs to dynamically access critical collaboration services from any location using a web browser or smartphone? No company wants its employees to be disconnected from customers when they're out of the office. It's important that they be able to configure desk phones and mobile phones to ring simultaneously or hop on a virtual videoconference from wherever they are.

The right cloud communications solution will make this all possible in a holistic and integrated fashion, rather than requiring users to adopt multiple solutions to achieve their ends, as 85 percent of surveyed respondents claim they have had to do. The right cloud communications system will enable integration without charging per-seat fee charges for efficiency-enabling software-based phones and mobile device applications. There won't be scalability limits, either, so companies will be able to quickly add new employees to the network to accommodate future growth. More than 60 percent of survey respondents expect to significantly increase the number of employees they have across offices over the next three years (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Does your company intend to significantly increase the number of employees in one to three years?

Equally important, the cloud will provide the resiliency and reliability necessary to keep communications readily available. Businesses can leverage a cloud communication service that runs in data centers located in geographically dispersed sites across the globe in support of built-in redundancy and automatic and transparent failover to prevent disruptions in service. Additionally, administrators will have streamlined, centralized access for easy online management of tasks, such as setting up extensions and auto attendants, across multiple sites.

Most important of all, the appropriate cloud communications system will address survey respondents' top four concerns:

- **Integration with back-office applications.** For CRM systems, for instance, workers can enjoy single-sign-on capabilities and the delivery of critical information with consolidated reporting and administrative information. Or they can call contacts from online services like their Skype for Business directory using their virtual extension, among other capabilities.

- **Continuing support.** The cloud clearly represents the future of enterprise communications. The cloud is in a major adoption phase on this front because it is the obvious backbone for driving responsive customer engagement experiences and internal collaboration at scale with flexibility, which are key requirements to be a competitive business today.

- **IT burdens.** The provider will handle ongoing upgrades and maintenance to assure operations smoothly continue, freeing busy IT teams to tackle other tasks.

- **Maintenance and upgrade costs.** Not having to pay for external third-party services is clearly a benefit when it comes to minimizing and optimizing IT spend.

8x8: The Choice for Your Business Cloud Communications

As your business considers transitioning from a legacy PBX phone system and the difficulties that system presents, it's important to ensure that the cloud communications and collaboration solution you choose will meet all of your expectations regarding effectiveness, reliability, scalability, flexibility and cost-efficiency.

Many vendors that present themselves as leaders in the cloud communications and collaboration area fail to provide packages and capabilities that meet all these requirements, and more. They may lack, for example, a flexible mix of services; mobile apps at no additional cost; strong service-level agreements for business continuity by means of multiple, redundant global data centers; or a well-integrated solution comprised of their own products rather than built on a mash-up of multiple vendors' technologies.

In addition, some communications systems may not be certified for compliance with federal and industry standards like HIPAA, PCI or FISMA—a requirement for 70 percent of survey respondents (see Figure 5). These systems might also lack enterprise-level, centralized analytics for all branches and extensions in support of company business decisions. Close to 85 percent of respondents consider enterprise-level analytics to be important, but 46 percent lack this feature today (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. Are your company's communications systems required to support certifications such as FISMA, HIPAA or PCI?
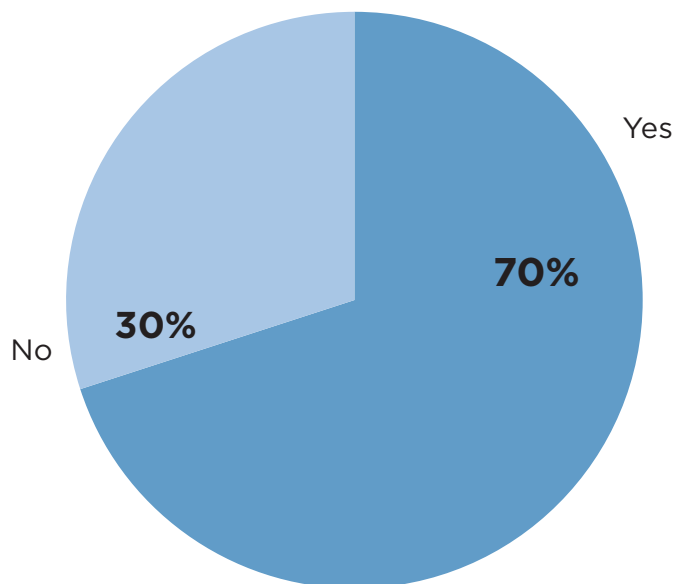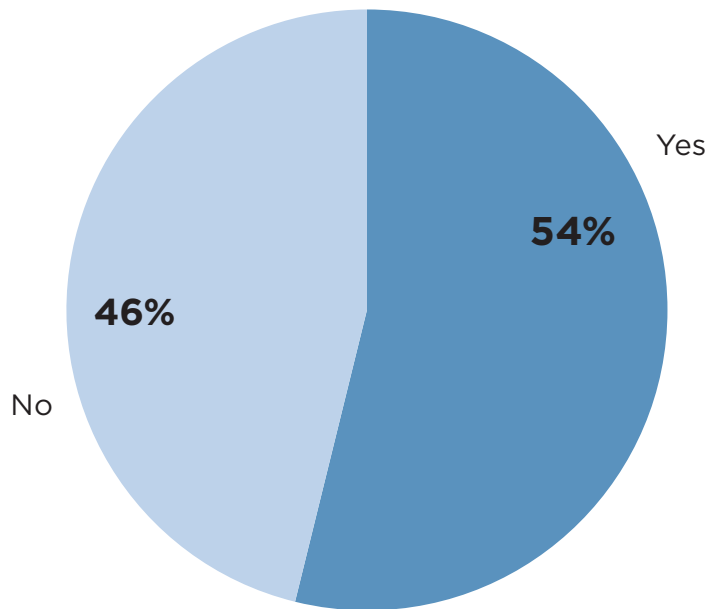
Figure 6. Does your current legacy communications system provide enterprise-level analytics for all extensions?

Not to worry, though. 8x8 Inc. handles it all, offering cloud-based, enterprise-class software solutions for small and midsize businesses, mid-market and distributed enterprises worldwide. Its communications and collaboration technology opens the door to delivering both business simplicity and agility so that your organization will be productive from day one and prepared for growth. It's designed with cost-optimization in mind, so that you'll realize rapid ROI through improved efficiencies both with your employees and also with the maintenance and management of your communications systems. And it drives better collaboration, making it possible for communications to take place between employees or with customers using any device, anywhere—even switching between devices with no disruption to the flow of the experience.

To learn more about 8x8 cloud communications solutions for small and midsize businesses, call 1-855-465-7904 or go to 8x8.com.

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