Implementing Productive Teleworking with Business-Quality Mobile Communications

TREND ADVISOR

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major worldwide business disruption. Companies large and small have had to adapt to employees working remotely in ways that won't jeopardize operations.

Business continuity planning has had a major resurgence, especially around how new communications technologies can support teleworking and work-from-home programs that promote seamless business functioning during times of disruption.

For those businesses that never explored remote working before the pandemic, a major concern is employee productivity. But multiple reports on teleworking trends over the years have shown that remote working can actually boost productivity and decrease several types of business operating costs.

But what IS teleworking and what role do mobile communications play in it?

In fact, mobile communications can be central to the success of teleworking when companies use mobile technologies to replicate the communications quality, security and control of traditional in-office communications.

This trend advisor explores aspects of the teleworking trend and discusses how mobile communications technologies can support such programs.

Teleworking is central to the 'new normal'

Teleworking, telecommuting, remote working, virtual workplaces and Work-From-Home strategies see varying degrees of success depending on the type of business.

Global Workplace Analytics reports that "telework" describes the practice of substituting technology for any travel, while "telecommuting" is more specifically the use of such technology to eliminate a commute to a traditional office.

GWA also notes that there is a trend of moving away from both terms in favor of "remote work," "distributed work," "mobile work," or "smart working" in the UK, and "work-shifting" in Canada. In recent years, the concept has evolved into ideas such as virtual workspaces or virtual workplaces.

The general definition for all of these terms is working from a remote location and using current communications technologies to replicate the in-office experience of interacting with coworkers, customers and others.

Telework interest spiked in the US after the terror attacks of 9/11 in 2001. But many believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly accelerated the teleworking trend, and may permanently change the way we work. Businesses scrambled to shift as many employees as possible to home-based telework as a necessary response to the crisis' closures and social distancing needs.

The US-based research group Brookings Institution projects that telecommuting is very likely to continue for many jobs long after the pandemic conditions have eased.

If implemented properly in the post-pandemic world, teleworking can improve job satisfaction, raise productivity, reduce emissions, and spread work opportunities to more remote regions.

Hopping on the trend

Researchers point to a host of economic, environmental and societal advantages that can result from teleworking.

GWA estimates a typical employer can save an average of $11,000 per half-time telecommuter per year. These savings primarily are the result of increased productivity, lower real estate costs, reduced absenteeism and turnover, and better disaster preparedness.

GWA also estimated that employees save between $2,500 and $4,000 per year by working at home half the time because of reduced travel, parking and food costs. Cutting commuting time is estimated to save workers the equivalent of 11 workdays every year, and nearly triple that savings for those who commute extreme distances.

Those benefits to workers can then translate to lower staffing costs for employers.

Two researchers reported in American Economic Review that they gave US call center jobseekers the choice of either a standard on-site job or a randomly selected alternative, such as flexible scheduling or the ability to work from home. It found the average applicant was willing to take an 8 percent hourly wage cut in order to work from home.

A recent survey by Gartner, a research and advisory firm, was cited in Forbes and found that nearly three of four company leaders said they plan to move at least 5 percent of their staffs to a full-time remote schedule instead of returning them to offices.

The communications technology key

The basic requirements for effective teleworking are: a quiet, suitable space in the home for working; good data connections to company resources for a laptop or desktop computer; and reliable voice communications of business quality.

Virtually every report, study and analysis of teleworking zeroes in on quality voice communications as a key to a successful remote working program.

The goal is to ensure employees can interact with colleagues, customers and partners effectively and frequently, mimicking the communications patterns that occur in a traditional office setting.

In fact, voice communications have become even more important for business continuity since in-person meetings cannot take place while social distancing measures promote work-from-home programs.

Teleworking communications needs are being addressed in several ways. In some cases, remote employees are using consumer-grade video conferencing applications. But many problems have been documented with these services. Unauthorized people have entered business meetings and flashed offensive things on participants' screens. Security researchers report vulnerabilities can allow hackers to access webcams.

Besides such security concerns, these apps can suffer from performance issues, especially during peak usage times, which means communications fall well below business quality.

Some companies are supporting remote worker communications by shipping a desk phone to all employees to use in their home offices.

But this approach can result in some major headaches and hassles:

- The equipment is expensive to purchase and ship, basically doubling desk phone expenditures if everyone has a desk phone at home and in the office.

- Remote support and troubleshooting of desk phone problems can be problematic if IT team members cannot directly access the phones.

The most effective and easily implemented approach to teleworker communications is to use mobile communications. Essentially every employee that can work remotely already owns and knows how to use a mobile phone.

New cloud-based communications integration technologies can integrate these mobile communications with the company's business communications platform. That effectively turns the mobile phone into a desk phone that employees can use anywhere they happen to be – even in their current workspace in the shed in the backyard.

Key technical considerations for mobile-enabled teleworking

There are three primary requirements for making mobile phones the primary communications tools for teleworking business users:

- **Enable business features** – Business communications must be professional and polished to create the proper impression with customers and partners. Employees and the people they communicate with expect call transferring, conference calling, call hold, and similar business-class communications features.

- **Ensure compliance** – In some industries, communications capturing and archiving is required by law. In other cases, being able to record and analyze calls is an essential part of customer service and customer experience management. This means mobile communications should be captured and recorded just like with landline desk phones.

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- **Manage business identity –** It is important to ensure that employees are conducting business communications from a business number, instead of a random cell phone number with their personal identities. This requires the ability to enable mobile phone calls to carry the business number and identity.

One approach to addressing these requirements has been to install Unified Communications apps on each employee phone, to connect back to the UC server "over-the-top" by using the data communications capabilities of the mobile device.

But industry researchers have shown consistently over the years that adoption of these UC apps is very low, even "practically nil" in the words of one industry analyst.

The problems with over-the-top apps can include poor call quality, difficulties with configuration and usage, inability to capture and record calls and texts for compliance or quality control, among others.

However, a new wave of mobile integration technologies is doing away with the need for such apps by enabling mobiles to be natively integrated with a company's communications.
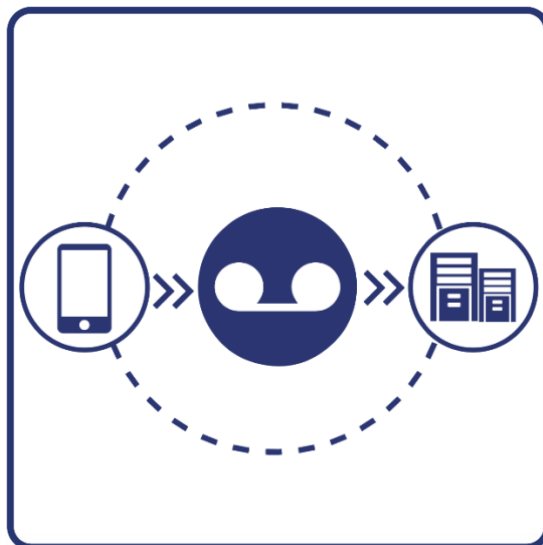
Next-Generation Fixed-Mobile Convergence

[Fixed-Mobile Convergence (FMC)](#) has been a longtime focus for many companies seeking to integrate mobile devices with the traditional wired telephony infrastructure.

The new generation of FMC takes advantage of mobile phone SIM technology and modern cloud-based communications control methods.

The result is that mobile devices can effectively become native end-points of the corporate communications system without needing over-the-top mobile apps.

That means employees can forward calls, put them on hold, activate hunt groups, set up conferencing, operate extension dialing, all using the native interface of their mobile phones.

Because the mobile phones become end-points of the corporate system, calls and texts can be sent and received from the business number, not the cell phone number.

Lastly, communications from the devices can be routed to the company's IT systems for managing, security and policy enforcement. So, for example, mobile calls and texts can be captured and recorded using the same compliance tools that a company uses for landlines.
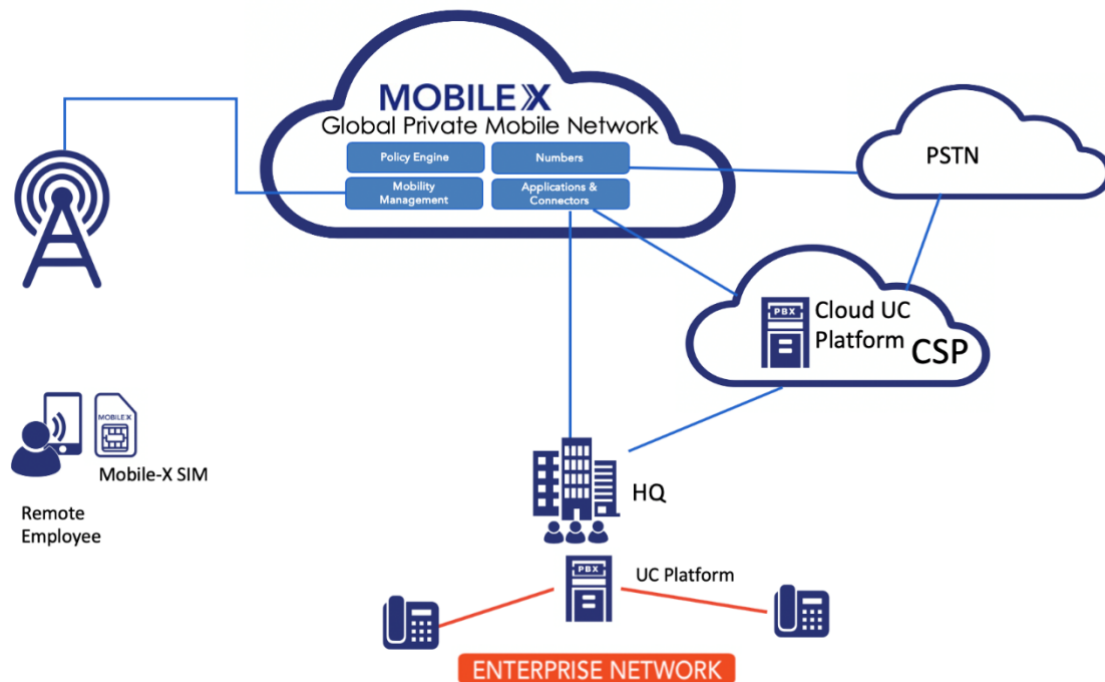
Mobile-X Overview

FMC capabilities such as those detailed here are why the Tango Networks Mobile-X service is increasingly the choice of companies adopting teleworking and business continuity programs.

With Mobile-X, employees place calls on their mobile phones using the native, built-in phone application that came with the smartphone. But calls and texts are identified with the company business number and identity, not some unknown mobile phone number or personal caller identity.

Business calling features can also be activated right from the mobile phone's regular, native interface. This gives employees easy access to the features they know and expect from business calling – transfer, conference, hold – all on their mobiles phone with no special apps.

That means not only are employees reachable for business calls, but also that the calls have the quality and polish that will properly represent a business.

Mobile-X enables compliant mobile communications as well, permitting a business to capture employees' mobile calls for monitoring, recording and archiving.

Mobile-X provides true business-class Mobile Unified Communications that deliver the quality needed for teleworking with maximum productivity. The service is a central part of a business continuity communications program.

Visit www.tango-networks.com to learn more and get started with Mobile-X today.