



OPUS™

Five Ways to Adapt Your Communications Roadmap for Hybrid Working

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Introduction: What is the new normal for businesses during and post-COVID-19?

In response to the first national lockdown, organisations throughout the UK reacted admirably to equip their staff with the technology they needed to work safely and remotely. The speed and suddenness of the stay-at-home directive, coupled with the unprecedented nature of the situation and a surge in demand for webcams, laptops and other devices, meant most businesses had to make do with existing systems and hardware to support their teams. In the short-term, this enabled many businesses to keep operations running fully remotely.

Many staff are now back in the workplace for at least some of the week but with a challenging Winter with Covid ahead of us and the chance of further restrictions and home-working if infection rates rise. Organisations are now asking the: are their systems and processes set up to accommodate a lasting future of hybrid working.

If we have learned anything over the last 18 months, it is that nothing is certain. Organisations looking to future-proof their operations and adapt to an increasingly flexible workplace need to look closely at the technology their teams are using, as well as the strategies underpinning them, to maximise on new opportunities for communication, collaboration and efficiencies.

What questions should they ask themselves and how should they proceed?

In this white paper, we examine the key business trends emerging post-pandemic, the top hybrid working challenges businesses are facing and five ways that businesses looking to adapt should review their communications strategies around flexible hybrid working.

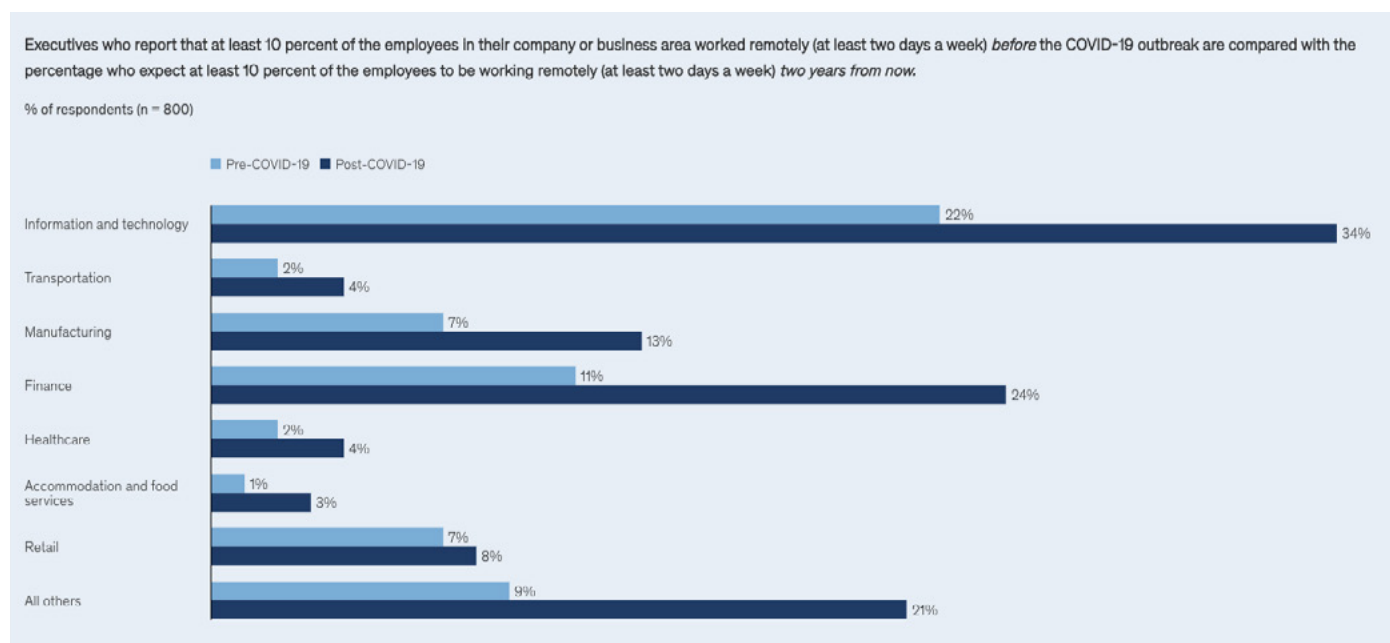
1. Key emerging trends

Perhaps the most significant trend to have affected businesses across industries was the sudden shift to remote working. With the exception of manufacturing and essential services, most businesses have embraced remote working in some capacity, driven by social distancing guidelines and **associated government legislation**. This has required them to rapidly accelerate their digital transformation plans to facilitate home working and remote workforces.

Last year, **a report by McKinsey** predicted that remote working practices were here to stay (see graph, below). Now, as lockdown restrictions begin to lift and we have visibility over the numbers of people returning to their offices and workplaces, we are seeing that prediction come true, signalling a hybrid working environment that businesses can either reject or embrace as they look to plan their long-term strategies around emerging work trends.

Remote work

Executives say some remote work is here to stay, though not for everyone or on every workday



Source: McKinsey Global Business Executive Survey, July 2020

A recent study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that almost two-thirds of **employers** have planned to introduce or expand a mixture of remote and on-site working. These findings are reinforced by a series of headlines from large, global organisations such as **PwC**, **Deutsche Bank** and **BP** announcing their shift to hybrid working.

While many organisations are recognising the opportunities in shifting to a hybrid work model, a separate poll, commissioned by **Leonne International**, identifies the operational challenges standing in their

way. The research, carried out during the onset of the pandemic, found that 33% of UK businesses lack the technology infrastructure to manage long-term remote working, with 41% reportedly planning to increase their IT and tech investment in the near future to cope with the shift. To maximise the value of those investments and see a longstanding return, businesses are best placed to make them in systems and technologies that will serve to bring together remote and office-based workers in a unified way.



A longer-term strategy is needed

Unsurprisingly, a report by Citi GPS confirmed that COVID-19 has raised the importance of basic connectivity, with reliability more important than maximum speed or potential.

Businesses are now looking at ways to transform their systems to more agile, cloud-based solutions, which is driving demand earlier than would have been the case pre-COVID-19. They need more robust, reliable technology that services both remote workers and office-based workers to continue delivering a standout customer experience and remain competitive.

Similarly, governments need to move more of their applications and services online. Some are contemplating how remote learning could be enhanced to strengthen business continuity ahead of a future crisis and maybe even have a role during normal times.

While there are multiple reported benefits to remote working, including greater productivity and a healthier

work-life balance, implementing the right technology tailored to long-term working trends is crucial. While many organisations pivoted towards remote working throughout the pandemic, they must also prepare for some colleagues' return to the office.

At Opus, we're working hard to help our customers adapt to these trends, unlocking the benefits of flexible working while maximising the value of their existing technology investments, a commitment evidenced by our recent award of **Mitel Cloud Partner of the Year**.

"Opus has demonstrated outstanding performance in guiding customers through the challenges of the past year as organisations looked to mitigate the workplace changes driven by the pandemic and modernise their communications and collaboration capabilities."

Scott Peterson, Chief Revenue Officer, Mitel

What are the impacts of remote working on businesses today? And how are those challenges creating new opportunities for companies to evolve their communications estates?

2. The top remote working challenges

While an organisation's ability to adopt hybrid working will vary depending on the industry type, business size and how well it was set up to support flexible working pre-COVID-19, common threads have emerged. Broadly speaking, these can be broken down into technology challenges, human challenges, and commercial (financial) considerations.

Technology challenges

The hybrid working model brings with it a variety of technology challenges distinct from those of fully remote or fully on-site practices.

Audio quality

How will teams hold virtual meetings with remote employees when half of the attendees are sitting in the same office space? Feedback resulting from the use of multiple devices will disrupt proceedings, but muting speakers and relying on a single laptop offers an equally poor experience. A busy office environment can present further challenges in the form of background noise and other audio distractions, many of which could be discussing sensitive or confidential subjects.

Video conferencing

What about the use of cameras? When an entire team is operating remotely, video capabilities are transformative in terms of bringing attendees together and communicating body language that would otherwise be lost away from face-to-face environments. When multiple attendees are operating within the same office space, however, numerous cameras can provide a disjointed experience, while creating the impression that everyone is still working remotely when, in fact, they are not. If the office-half of the attendees are huddled around a single laptop for audio purposes, how will this reflect in the video the remote employees are seeing or, worse, customers video calling in, expecting a professional, even corporate interaction?

Shadow IT

Thirdly, even within organisations, employees may have thus far utilised differing technology solutions in order to meet short-term remote working needs. One team may be operating using the company's Microsoft Teams platform, while other individuals are leveraging Zoom or Webex to make and receive video calls. How will these different

systems interact with one another? With employees dependent on different telephony solutions, inefficiencies will naturally occur when it comes to both internal and external communications.

Security risks

Video conferencing from open-plan offices and service desk environments can open organisations up to new security risks. Confidential information may feature on visible screens behind video feeds, for example. Meanwhile, remote users accessing company data through a range of **cloud technologies** (including storage and backup options) from unsecured locations could risk security breaches. The use of multiple, unmonitored devices exacerbates this. The risk is especially critical when it comes to security systems. Pair long-term remote working with a sudden **spike in cybercrime** due to COVID-19, and it's a race to the cloud.

It's also worth noting that many traditional disaster recovery plans (whereby staff could switch operations to another similarly equipped office location) are no longer fit for purpose.

Inefficiencies

Unless organisations already have cloud-based solutions capable of being used anywhere with an internet connection, or they have a UC solution that enables remote working, calls to a main number can't be easily transferred to a colleague's extension. This can lead to disruption, inefficiencies and, in some cases, reputational damage as service begins to suffer.

As a result, the timelines for digital transformation roadmaps have significantly shortened.

From disruption, innovation

As companies across the UK accelerate the shift to flexible working, the increased demand for telephony systems, more advanced communications estates and other technology solutions has driven an explosion in opportunities for businesses to evolve. Headsets can help to solve audio challenges in busy meeting room environments, while cameras can be set up in boardrooms to help organisations present a unified front to remote customers video calling from a world away. Many of the solutions businesses have already utilised to great effect under fully remote conditions can be further leveraged in order to streamline the transition from remote to

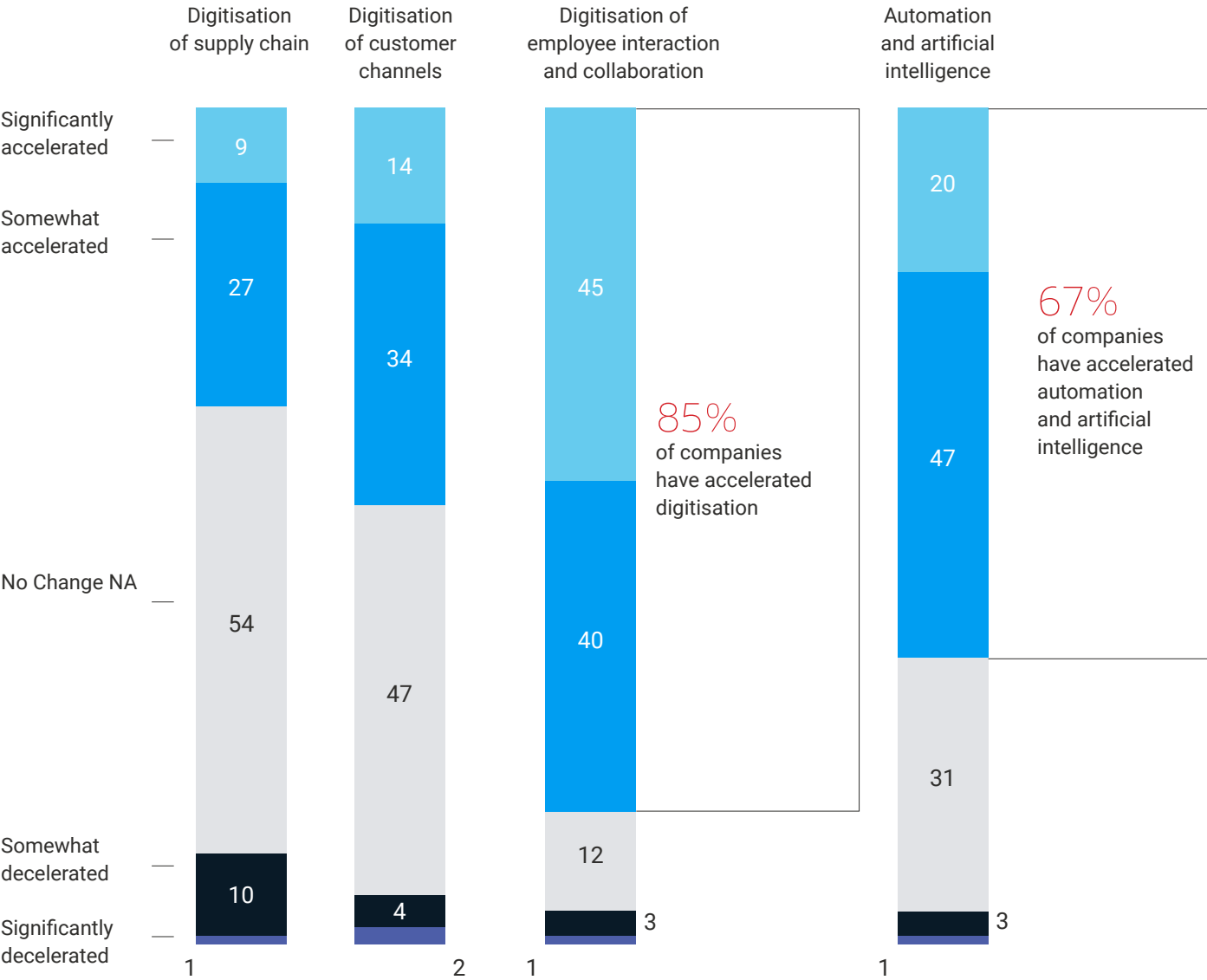
hybrid working. Microsoft Teams is a good example of a platform packed with features, from Background functionalities, Together mode and Direct Join, to help businesses improve hybrid efficiencies and work better.

Notably, the value of connectivity has increased during the pandemic and telecom network infrastructure has enabled functions such as **eHealth and Big Data & Monitoring**.

The way we work is fundamentally shifting. Businesses capable of adapting to this shift will not only weather the new challenges they face but gain a competitive advantage and thrive.

Executives say they have accelerated the deployment of digitisation and automation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, how has your company's or business area's adoption of the following technology trends changed? % of respondents (n=800)



Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.
Source: Mckinsey Global Business Executives Survey, July 2020

Human elements

The subject of hybrid working has itself raised questions around organisations' obligations to continue supporting flexible working practices as restrictions loosen. Has remote working become an employee's right or can a company insist that staff return to the office once the government declares it is safe for them to do so? How does this impact employee wellbeing?

- Whether at home or in the office, do employees have a dedicated space in which to work, away from distractions?
- Long-term, what other factors are affecting their ability to conform to regular office hours (children at home, or elderly relatives to care for, for example)?
- How can managers monitor and support both on-site and remote employees fairly and equally?
- How can managers boost morale and ensure the company culture is maintained when half of the team is office-based and half are home workers?
- What communication methods do different teams respond best to, and do they have the technology to enable them?
- How will the company conduct formal meetings and more informal social gatherings?
- How should people ask for help?

Advice from the **ICAEW** recommends employees are provided with some information about good working practices, for example keeping regular hours and scheduling breaks.

Home working has a particular risk of isolation for many, as staff can go for long periods with limited contact with others. Even if they have family around them, many benefit from interacting with their colleagues. Establishing regular catch-ups or team meetings (over video where possible) can help to break up the day and provide some structure and contact points.

Regular contact helps managers identify if anyone on their teams – office-based or remote – is struggling from a mental health perspective so they can provide support where possible.

Apart, yet together

The most readily apparent employee benefit from a human perspective is an improved work-life balance.

Flexible working mitigates (or in the case of fully remote employees, removes altogether) the issue of commuting, with employees saving an **average of five hours per week** normally spent on the road during the pandemic. At the same time, lockdowns have given employees more time around their immediate families. For many, that time is invaluable.

"According to McKinsey, 80% of people enjoy working from home."

Less apparent are the cultural benefits of a flexible workforce. Office environments are typically siloed, and it is not unusual, particularly amongst large workforces, for teams to keep to themselves. Regularly scheduled video catch-ups facilitate the coming together of different teams and communication between colleagues who might never otherwise engaged with one another. Over video calls, employees are quite literally invited into one another's houses and home lives. They meet children, greet spouses, fawn over pets, forming working relationships and even friendships with the potential to eclipse those formed in traditional workplaces.

For most organisations, the solution will lie in balancing commercial objectives with employee wellbeing. It is easy to view the two as competing goals, but healthier, happier employees given the freedom (and the technology) to work more flexibly can itself **boost productivity** and create stronger employee engagement needed for the retention and acquisition of new talent.

Succeeding in this field opens up businesses to the possibility of greater inclusion, a sense of community and a competitive advantage that might not have been possible in a strictly office-based environment.

Financial considerations

The financial impact of the global health crisis on organisations is a white paper in itself. In this uncertain environment, keeping pace with competition while maintaining financial viability is key. How can businesses navigate these challenges to remain profitable through a future in which hybrid working and the risk of further lockdowns become a reality? And what opportunities does it open?

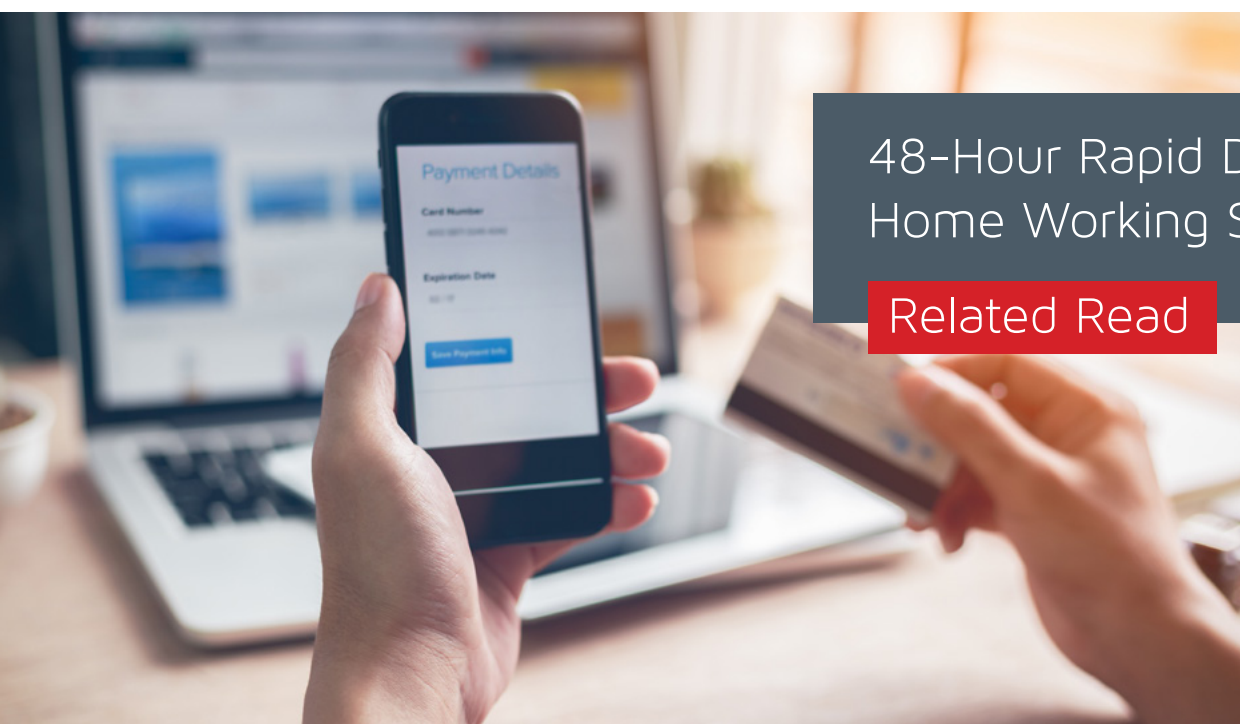
Turning survival into growth

The growing adoption of hybrid working has prompted a desire to dramatically reduce spend across rental payments, hardware (e.g. desktops and physical telephony), and more.

The uncertainty of the situation made such decisions difficult over the course of the pandemic. Organisations could not confidently close office spaces when the roadmap for coming out of lockdown was not clear. Now, as restrictions loosen and companies can see employee preferences for continued home/flexible working vs returning to the office, they are able to make more informed, calculated decisions in terms of how much real-estate space they need going forwards. Other possibilities include renting out unused office space, repurposing them into creative/collaborative hubs or relocating operations to less expensive, out-of-city locations.

Equally, the shift from CapEx spend (on capital equipment) to OpEx spend (cloud-based monthly costs) brings opportunities for scalability to align with demand. Cash saved can then be reinvested in other technology requirements to support the business in moving forward.

A more balanced approach to remote working provides the opportunity for businesses to cut costs and justify their technology investments (for example, greater emphasis on security for remote workers). Strike the right balance between CapEx and OpEx spend, and businesses will discover a flexible working model through which they unlock the benefits of both on-site and remote working, future-proofing their operations and creating new growth opportunities.



48-Hour Rapid Deploy
Home Working Solutions

Related Read

3. Five ways to adapt your communications estate

The ongoing impacts of the pandemic and the shift it is driving towards hybrid working guarantees that long-term strategies are required in order to grow.

Where should businesses look to make changes when reviewing their systems and operations? And how should these be implemented to maximise rollout and ensure teams – both on-site and remote – are getting the most value out of their new processes?

Read on to discover the top five ways for businesses to adapt their communications estate to the new normal:

3.1 Introduce collaboration tools

Introducing hybrid working solutions (available as part of our **48-Hour Rapid Deploy Solutions**) that deliver an in-office IT and communications experience, regardless of the physical location, is an impactful way to bring employees together, support flexible working and, most importantly, empower employees to carry out their job roles to the best of their abilities.

“Companies must adapt to survive and in time thrive. Introducing collaboration tools presents a great opportunity for businesses to evolve and flourish while improving their service levels.”

Michael O'Donnell, Chief Commercial Officer, Opus

While plenty of businesses have adopted Microsoft Teams, many won't have integrated Teams with their telephony. Drawing these platforms together is the next logical step for businesses looking to streamline their communications, improve collaboration within the hybrid working model, and further enhance team working and customer experience.

Mitel-Microsoft Teams integration development

At Opus, we've developed our own first-to-market Mitel-Microsoft Teams integration service to enable flexible workers to make and receive calls on the Teams apps via the Mitel platform.

This solution has enabled customers to manage inbound/outbound calls, wherever they happen to be working from, with minimal disruption or capital expenditure.

However, determining the right solution for each business will depend on whether they have a basic unified communications requirement or the need for a more complex solution. For example, one business might find Microsoft Teams sufficient, while another may need call recording capability and the ability to report on contact centre agent performance, too.

“We're seeing businesses wanting to leverage Teams, but actually it's not always the right fit. In many cases, organisations need an enterprise telephony platform to achieve the solution nuances they're looking for.”

Matthew Dudleston, Sales Director, Opus

*Whatever the business challenge, at Opus, we can help you determine the right solution for your changing company needs and requirements while removing complexity. **Get in touch** to discover how we can support you.*

3.2 Bring business telephony to the home office

In a regular office environment, most employees will be accustomed to having a phone on their desk and the ability to receive, transfer and record calls as needed. However, not everybody has the same home office setup when it comes to their telephony.

With employees relying on different telephony solutions, inefficiencies will naturally occur when it comes to both internal and external communications. Calls are likely to be missed, transfers may fail and communication with colleagues and customers may break down.

For industries such as the financial services sector, call recording is mandatory. As more organisations embrace hybrid working practices, it falls to them to ensure calls made via Microsoft Teams or mobiles continue to be recorded (avoiding compliance issues).

Organisations with contact centres are also facing challenges when it comes to agents working remotely. This includes an inability to manage staff face-to-face and reduced visibility of call statistics, making it especially difficult for contact centre managers to monitor agent activity off-site. As omnichannel communications rise, how can organisations balance their employees' need for flexibility with customer expectations that include the ability to contact the company via different media or channels at whatever time suits them best?

At Opus, our [48-Hour Rapid Deploy Solutions](#) are specifically designed to solve these challenges. More specifically, we can help you add remote/teleworking to your existing phone systems and integrate employees' mobile phones into office telephony for full flexibility.

"With more stakeholders using the technology themselves, consumer choice suddenly holds much more weight when it comes to choosing the right UC solution."

Matthew Dudleston

Bringing consistent communications capabilities to your workforce through a combination of **unified communications**, **cloud telephony** or integrating desktop applications — such as **Microsoft Teams with business telephony solutions** — will enable employees to make and receive calls wherever they are. As a result, businesses can unlock the benefits of flexible working without compromising on service and efficiency.

"Our goal is to understand our client's strategic direction and create a technology roadmap to support them on their journey"

Michael O'Donnell

Related Read: [So What Now for the Office? \(Working Towards the New Normal Office\)](#)



3.3 Strengthen data protection, compliance and security

As we have already touched on, security is a key issue faced by businesses adopting hybrid working. To summarise, remote employees are accessing company data differently. Confidential data is no longer confined to the office on a reliable network in a specified location, while video conferencing from office locations opens up new privacy risks.

If data isn't accessed in a secure way, on a secure network, company data could be at risk. In some cases, businesses could even be at risk of breaching GDPR regulations if employees aren't careful.

Similarly, if customer service staff are required to take credit card payments whilst working from home, it's essential to protect credit card holders and staff by having **PCI Compliant payment solutions for home workers**.

"The rush to get everybody working from home has meant that, in many cases, security hasn't been rolled out sufficiently."

Michael O'Donnell

Establishing a robust, enterprise-grade security solution and deploying it across the cloud is therefore key. To help employees stay secure wherever they are (on any

device), businesses need a dedicated cloud solution. This will enable them to apply security measures across all employee devices as required.

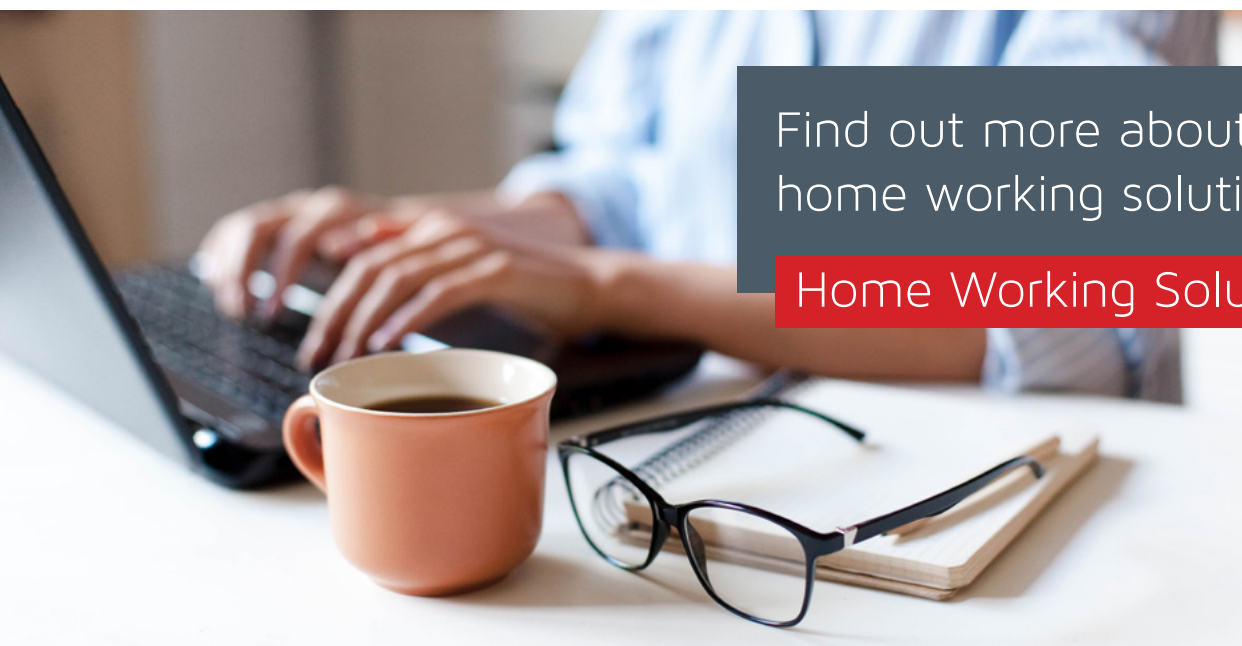
Our **48-Hour Rapid Deploy Solutions** can help businesses add cloud-based solutions to their existing infrastructure fast, enabling them to provide their employees with secure remote access to company emails and data. Put simply, we can help businesses to fill the gaps in their existing security provisions to ensure confidential company data isn't left exposed.

To discover how we can help you strengthen data protection, compliance and security, **get in touch today** to book a free virtual consultation with one of our experts.

3.4 Maximise connectivity across busy households

In a professional office setting, connectivity was rarely an issue, with bandwidth pre-defined based on the company's unique requirements. By comparison, remote working places connectivity dependencies firmly with each individual employee. Across teams, employees' connectivity can vary significantly. Across a large workforce, the issue further compounds.

In a remote working scenario, if an employee's internet goes down, they will not just be unable to work. They will be completely cut-off from the wider business, with implications ranging from disrupted communications to business continuity, depending on the individual employee



Find out more about our home working solutions today.

Home Working Solutions

and their role. To combat this, businesses should look to invest in VPNs (Virtual Private Networks), mobile backup and **4G options**, keeping employees connected anywhere, anytime.

At Opus, we help businesses address a range of connectivity gaps and recommend solutions to keep their employees connected safely and securely. Our 48-Hour Rapid Deploy Solutions include network divers, DDI divers and IVRs to support employees working remotely.

3.5. Migrate to the cloud

Migrating the communications estate to the cloud is one of the most comprehensive ways for businesses to adapt to the new normal. With the cloud at their fingertips, companies can address the suite of challenges referenced throughout this white paper, achieving greater reliability, stronger security and future-proofing their communications against potential crises.

Additionally, migrating the contact centre to the cloud delivers the following benefits:

- Become more customer-centric by offering an omnichannel experience

- Easily scale agent requirements up and down depending on changing demand
- Ensure efficient disaster recovery in the event of an incident
- Reduce or even remove reliance on a physical office space (and hardware)
- Simplify layering additional technology to your existing estate
- Reduce maintenance costs (due to less reliance on hardware)

Read more about the next evolution of remote working and how your organisation could benefit.

As an independent technology services provider with first-class experience in delivering best-of-breed unified communications and contact centre solutions, we understand that in unprecedented times, having the right technology in place to ensure business continuity is vital.

At Opus, our **Omnichannel Contact Centre Rapid Deployment Solutions** are specifically designed to help today's businesses continue to deliver a standout customer experience while working remotely.

To find out how we can help you migrate to the cloud and continue delivering a standout customer experience while working remotely, reach out to one of our experts now.

Book Now

Conclusion: How Opus can help (free virtual consultation)

At Opus, we're offering businesses a free virtual consultation with an experienced solution design specialist to help them enhance their remote working capabilities and better navigate the challenges ahead.

"At Opus, we take a consultative approach to align our technology solutions to support the strategic goals and visions of our clients. Our partnership enables those organisations and their teams to focus on delivering and executing against their plans to drive efficiencies along with improved and enhanced customer experience."

Matthew Dudleston

During the discovery and assessment, we evaluate how well the company's current equipment meets their new remote working requirements, make suggestions as to how they can leverage existing investments to achieve more, and recommend **steps they can take now or in the future** to make their communications easier and more efficient for their employees.

Our free virtual consultation supports businesses with:

- Assessing their current communications estate
- Identifying gaps and highlighting areas for improvement
- Recommending bespoke solutions to support remote working

Explore our range of **customer success stories** and discover how we've already helped businesses gain a competitive advantage and future-proof their communications estates.

"As an independent technology provider, we assist organisations with their business challenges and help them remain agile in a rapidly evolving market."

Paul Allen, Director at Opus

Click the button below to request your free virtual consultation and start taking steps to improve business communications across your telephony, security and connectivity today.

[Book Now](#)



About Opus

Opus is a trusted, independent technology services provider delivering communications, contact centres, collaboration, mobile, IT and managed print solutions to medium and large enterprises nationwide. We integrate best-of-breed solutions and provide them as a managed service with caring personalised support.

We hold the prestigious Institute of Customer Service ServiceMark accreditation, which only 5% of institute members possess and even fewer in the telecoms industry. We regularly achieve Net Promoter Scores in the mid-70s against an industry average of 15. We were also Highly Commended in the Customer Service category of the 2019 Comms National Awards.

Opus focuses on a select number of vendor partners to provide specialist engineering support. We strive to hold the highest levels of accreditation with those partners and are currently Platinum Partners with Mitel, Gamma, 8x8 and Cirrus, and a Gold Microsoft Partner. This affords us preferential pricing, support and a seat at the table with partners when new services are being discussed and agreed. We recently became the first UK reseller to achieve 8x8 deployment certification, second only to one other organisation in the US.

Get in touch today to see how we can help.

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