RingCentral

WHY REMOTE WORK IS NOW FUNDAMENTAL TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

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Welcome

ALL OF A SUDDEN, everybody's talking about remote working. It's the way of the future, say media pundits with an eye on the lockdown's long-term effects on society. And they're right.

If they'd been paying more attention, however, they'd have seen this trend coming long before a virus turned 'social distancing' into the defining phrase of 2020.

Younger employees in particular are less than thrilled at the prospect of commuting to an office for the next 40 years. They want more out of life than the nine-to-five and can see a clear route to achieving that with cloud technology, fast internet speeds and secure networks.

It may not be blogging from a beach in Bali, but a slew of evidence suggests that logging in from home – for part of the week, if not all – leads to a better work/life balance and a feeling of personal control that benefits everyone.

The good news for employers is that very often, remote working holds tangible upsides for them too.
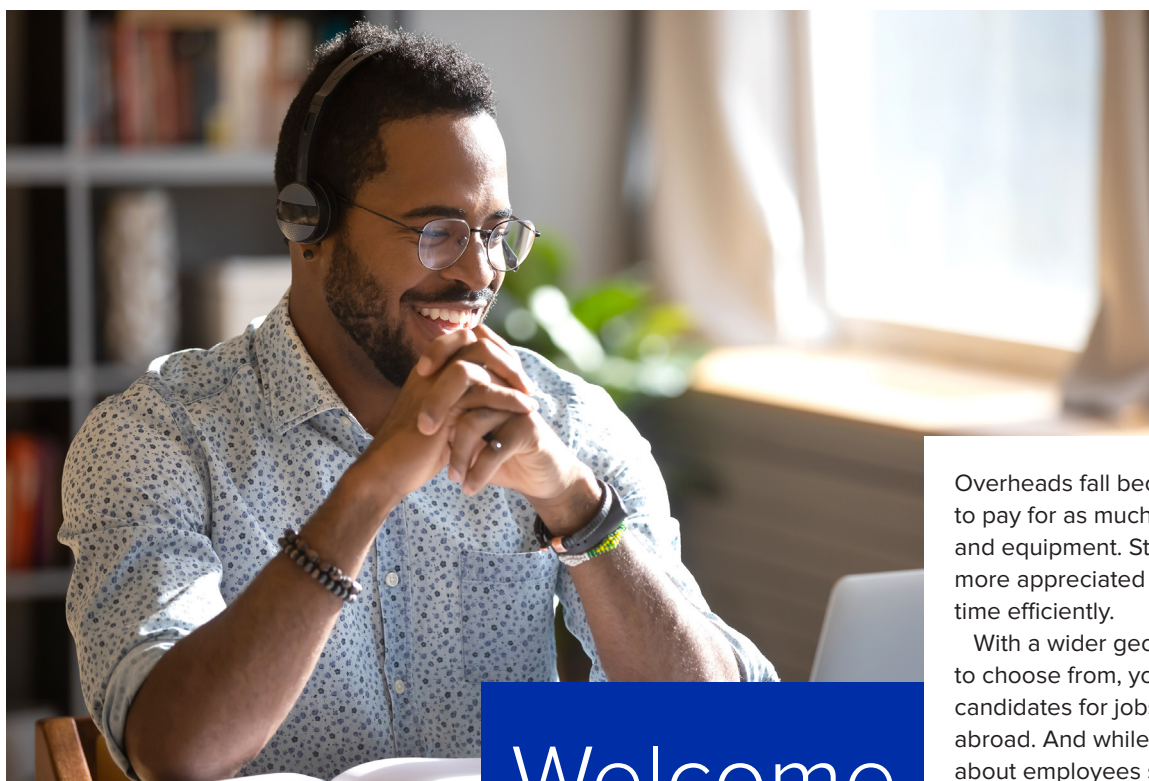
Overheads fall because you don't need to pay for as much premium office space and equipment. Staff feel less stressed, more appreciated and ready to use their time efficiently.

With a wider geographic talent pool to choose from, you can attract the best candidates for jobs, perhaps even from abroad. And while you may be worried about employees slacking off in front of the TV, studies have shown that on the contrary, remote workers are keen to prove their worth. In practical terms, that can only boost your productivity.

We've heard a lot in recent weeks about HD video conferencing, along with the imminent introduction of 5G broadband. In the meantime, innovations such as secure file-sharing and Call Flip – flipping between a desk phone and a mobile phone in the middle of a call – offer employees the chance to collaborate from anywhere. In that sense, it's an exciting time.

For the most part, this supplement examines Unified Communications as a Service, or UCaaS. Described as the ultimate DIY comms stack, UCaaS provides businesses with everything from immersive web-based conferencing tools to video communication, instant chat and more.

If your telephone switchboard is looking old, a state-of-the-art system from RingCentral may be the solution you need – and cheaper than you might imagine. As many SMEs will testify, the notion that only big businesses can afford UCaaS is a flawed one.

At home or in the office, we hope you'll enjoy our report.

CONTENTS

The freedom to shine

With UCaaS technology, the benefits of working from home have never been clearer

IF YOU WANT to criticise traditional office life, there's no shortage of targets to choose from. Fairly or unfairly, employees have been complaining for years about long commutes, rigid working hours and not seeing their nearest and dearest enough.

Until recently, grumbling was as far as it went, since working from home was a pipe dream for most professionals. But with advancements in digital technology – and the demand from millennials and Generation Z for a healthier work/life balance – all that is changing fast.

In the decade from 2008, the number of remote workers in the UK jumped from 3.6 million to 4.5 million. In Europe, 9.6% of people worked remotely in 2017 (at least some of the time), compared to 7.7% in 2008.

Indeed, by the end of last year, 83% of UK companies offered some degree of remote working, and 17% of firms allowed more than half their staff to work remotely. Globally, remote job openings have increased 151% in the past year.

"People want freedom," says Gary Walker, founder of Glasgow-based consultancy 22North, which helps companies create and nurture remote teams. "They want flexibility."

After Covid-19 subsides, employers might prefer that arrangement too, for social distancing reasons and the chance to save on office space and expensive on-premises hardware.

Research suggests that working from home to their own timetable – and hoping to impress the boss, perhaps – boosts employees' productivity by as much as 40%.

If that isn't reassuring enough, features such as Task Manager enable supervisors to set targets, establish deadlines and track progress. This in turn will flag up weaknesses, enabling them to nip any problems in the bud.

Cloud control

Working from home in an effective manner depends to a large extent on having the right tools. So, let's talk about UCaaS (Unified Communications as a Service) and how this relates to SMEs.

For years, the average company's communications set-up consisted of email and a basic business phone system. In time, Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP technology emerged, as did video and instant messages over the web.

Unified Communications (UC) bring these tools together in an easy-to-manage environment that saves users the bother of having to jump between applications.

At first, UC systems combined voice, messaging, email and fax. These days, they typically include:

- Web conferencing platforms and virtual meeting spaces;
- Interactive whiteboards for collaboration;
- Real-time presence systems and instant messaging;

- Enterprise collaboration platforms;
- Video services for conferencing and telepresence;
- Voice-based applications like telephony and voicemail; and
- Text-based tools such as text, social media, chat and email.

On a practical level, the rewards for adopting such technology are many and varied. Users can move seamlessly between tools, access detailed analytics and offer enhanced customer service, since they're able to work more quickly and smoothly. The system is also scalable, so a company can add services and solutions without looking for another vendor.

UCaaS is a cloud-based refinement of UC, offering additional scalability and flexibility. With the minimum of fuss, companies can add myriad powerful features to their communications technology, from call routing to artificial intelligence.

Accessing the software they need instantly requires no on-premise hardware installation, and it's a simple matter to upgrade or downgrade the system depending on their needs.

Small business benefits
For smaller organisations, UCaaS's advantages can be particularly attractive, providing multiple opportunities to cut costs and bolster performance. The five most significant benefits are:

- Cost savings through the use of VoIP and consolidated subscriptions;
- Flexibility of services, channels and user control;
- Mobility, meaning you can log on and work from any place with an internet connection;
- Simplicity of installation and use; and
- Breadth of integration with popular work applications.

At its most basic, the power of UCaaS is that anyone in a small business can connect with the right person at the right time, on any device. For young employees especially, who've grown up using smartphones, tablets and laptops, that's a compelling proposition.

So, where does an SME start?
The first step in picking a vendor is to decide where you need to empower your workforce, increase productivity or generate new business. That means considering your short and medium-term strategy, examining your company's strengths and opportunities and identifying how incremental improvements can add up to big wins. In which areas does your business need to operate more efficiently?

As your individual needs will determine the package and provider you choose,

it's useful to make a note of which specific services you require.

Fortunately, some UCaaS systems integrate with existing business tools to streamline workflows across the organisation. Examples include CRM software like Salesforce and Zendesk, productivity apps like Trello and Asana and marketing gizmos such as Hubspot and Mailchimp.

Finally, as you're weighing up which provider to use, consider the following points:

- How easily will the system scale to support your needs as they vary?
- Is the provider flexible when it comes to your current and future requirements?
- Will the service work for bring-your-own-device (BYOD) and mobile employees?
- Will your IT, admins and users be able to make small changes, updates and fixes more easily?
- Does the service reduce costs now and into the future?

The prospect of change can be daunting, and many businesses are cautious. More than half of those transitioning to cloud services envisage a two-year timeframe to complete the move. But with satisfaction rates of 82% across the market, it's a move we'll see more and more often.

THE SYSTEM IS SCALABLE, SO A COMPANY CAN ADD SERVICES AND SOLUTIONS WITHOUT LOOKING FOR ANOTHER VENDOR

Building a better future

Working life is set to change drastically when the pandemic is over, says RingCentral's Sunny Dhami

COVID-19 HAS ADDED extra dimensions to Sunny Dhami's job. As product marketing director EMEA at RingCentral, his main concern till recently was monitoring customer feedback and adding products and features to its unified communications solution. "Our customers get a new and improved version of our service every quarter," he says proudly.

Cloud communication – a growing business already – is suddenly in the spotlight. "Moving to the cloud is not really something new, but it's given people access to the tools they need to continue working," he says.

Tools such as Office 365, Google, Salesforce and Zendesk can all be integrated with RingCentral's service. "It's a cloud ecosystem," says Dhami. "Regardless of whether you're in an office or at home, you still have access to those tools. The cloud has really supported remote work, especially in the pandemic we're in right now."

UCaaS – Unified Communications as a Service – has proved a godsend to companies in lockdown. "We were very, very busy early on, setting businesses up overnight with a RingCentral service to replace maybe a legacy solution in

their offices, to make sure calls could be forwarded and that they had access to those calls."

But as the crisis continued, the list of requests from clients grew longer. "People were looking at call queues and how to stay connected. 'We've moved to working from home,' they said. 'Now, how do we stay operational?'

"Then we were working to optimise how calls are routed, ensure people are contactable and make sure they can still reach out to customers. Staying connected with colleagues is also very important."

Thoughts are now turning to a gradual return to normality. "Businesses are looking at what happens next – whether they will go back to a physical location at all or whether they will continue being fully or somewhat remote," says Dhami.

MOVING TO THE CLOUD IS NOT REALLY SOMETHING NEW, BUT IT'S GIVEN PEOPLE ACCESS TO THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO CONTINUE WORKING

At the same time, social distancing remains a priority. "An element of that does include having a cloud-based phone system where people can access their calls, their voicemails and their contacts remotely, and be able to have video meetings and share files."

The trend towards UCaaS has accelerated sharply, perhaps heralding a different kind of workplace in future. "Facebook and Twitter have already announced that they won't make people come back into the office for the rest of the year," Dhami points out.

At corporations and SMEs alike, "there's a lot of protective measures being put into place, making sure we don't come into direct contact unnecessarily, video meetings even within the same location… We'll start to see the amplification of people collaborating remotely."

When it comes to smaller businesses, he says, one of the principal benefits of RingCentral's platform is that it scales. "So, you get an enterprise-grade phone system for the same price as the system you're using now, but with call recording, call queues, a soft phone so you don't need to pay for physical devices, a mobile app so you can take your business number with you wherever you are, video meetings… it's built into your platform so you no longer have to pay a separate provider if you need that.

"You can use all of them on a single platform in a very cost-effective manner and be able to scale and grow with your business."

In the wake of the pandemic, consolidating an array of different services into one will reduce costs instantly, he adds. "Not only that, but you're potentially providing additional features and flexibility for your workforce."
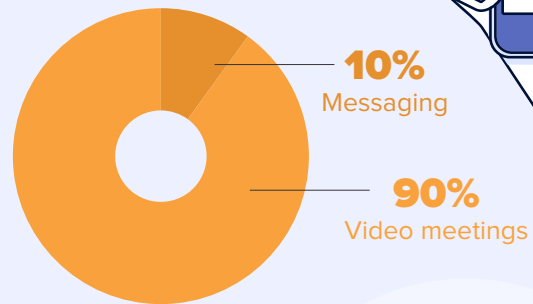
Remote controls

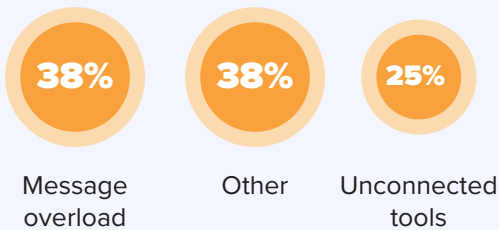Commercial CIOs respond to questions about the role of technology in the new world of work

How have your teams responded to being fully remote?

74%
Very well

26%
Managing OK
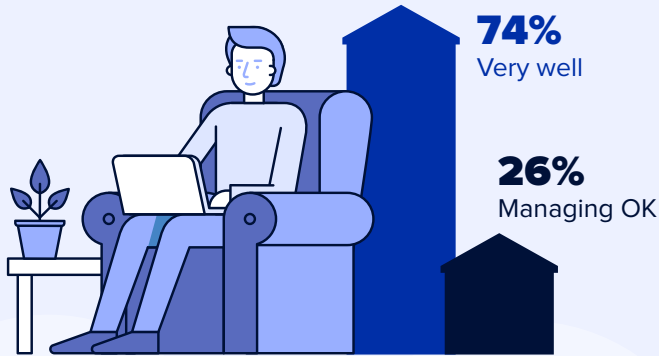
What tech has stood out for you during the crisis?

10%
Messaging

90%
Video meetings

What's the biggest comms pain point in your organisation?

38%
Message overload

38%
Other

25%
Unconnected tools

Have you started discussions about longer term suitability of your technology?

58%
Yes, we're evaluating post-crisis needs

42%
No, we're satisfied with the current platform

Have you experienced any unexpected results due to being forced to be remote?

Real-time virtual collaboration

More video conferencing

Dedicated "non-work" initiatives

26%
No

74%
Yes

High staff engagement

High productivity

Increase in team messaging
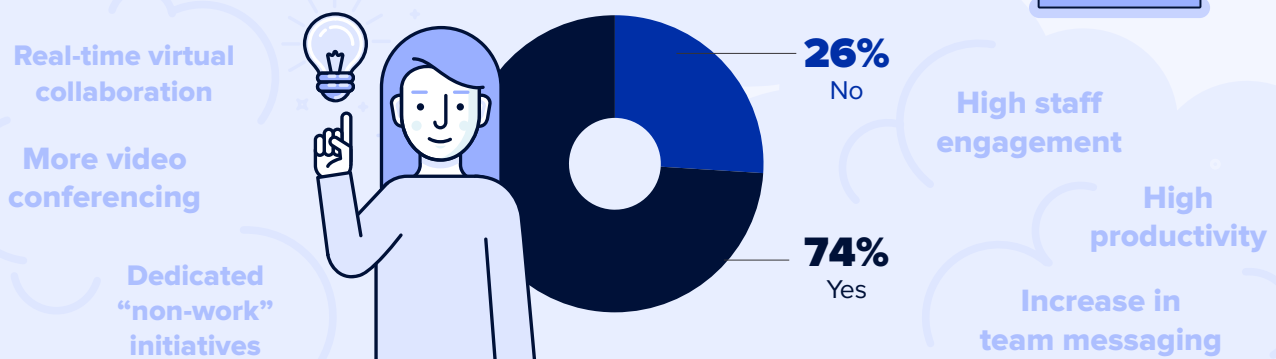
CASE STUDY 1

The ultimate test

In the face of a pandemic, UK architectural firm 5plus is going from strength to strength

LIKE THE REST of us, 5plus Architects had no idea Covid-19 was on the horizon. But when its staff were forced to work from home, the award-winning business had good reason to be grateful for RingCentral's all-in-one communications solution.

The practice, which operates as a single studio across sites in London and Manchester, is highly collaborative and intent on providing top-notch customer service. That's why, before the virus struck, technical director Kieran Gilman was eager to improve the flexibility and sophistication of its phone system.

The team's motto is "One practice, two locations". This phrase has come to symbolise a sense of cohesion, accessibility and teamwork that has earned the firm an Architects' Journal accolade and Building magazine's coveted Practice of the Year award.

But in employee surveys, the shortcomings of its old phone system kept coming up. With disparate services at each of its sites, there was no way to transfer calls internally, no direct-dial numbers for individual employees and too little functionality in general.

If a client in Manchester phoned London by mistake, for example, the resulting rigmarole – asking them to hang up and dial the Manchester number directly – made the company's claim to be a cohesive outfit look shaky.

After much research, Gilman decided that cloud communications was the way to go. With that in mind, he examined several providers' costs, flexibility and feature sets.

"During our RingCentral trial, I threw everything I could at the system," he says. "I tried my damnedest to break the thing, but I couldn't."

WE CAN EASILY HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE ANSWERING OUR BUSINESS LINES, ANY TIME, EVEN FROM HOME

All mod cons

Before the coronavirus outbreak, nearly everyone worked in the studio. When the UK went into lockdown, however, 5plus was extremely well placed to carry on its business.

Using the RingCentral app, its workforce can make and take business calls and even join and host video conferences – anywhere and from any device, be it laptop, smartphone or tablet. Its built-in team messaging platform also enables them to share files and take part in real-time chats.

And with a company-wide infrastructure in place, staff can transfer calls with ease, use internal dialling to reach colleagues more quickly and launch video conferences with just a few clicks.

In the early days of the crisis, a few directors wondered how they were going to answer the telephones with nobody in the studios. "That was an instinctive question," says founding director Adam Thornton. "But then everyone realised that now we can easily have the right people answering our business lines, any time, even from home."

An additional benefit, which became apparent in the quarter that followed the RingCentral system's rolling out, was that internal travel costs fell by half.

"Even during the pandemic, we're getting our people talking face-to-face digitally," adds Gilman. "That's tremendously beneficial, not only from a customer service perspective, but also just on a human level. With everyone on lockdown and isolated like we've never been before, this level of communication is a huge benefit for us all."

Arco's got it covered

As lockdown took hold, the UK's biggest PPE supplier found smart new ways of working

AFTER NEARLY 140 years in business, Arco has been transforming itself, dropping outdated practices and replacing legacy systems with state-of-the-art technology.

Which is good — because as the UK's leading health and safety specialists, its services have been vital throughout the coronavirus emergency.

The Hull-based family firm — now best known as the nation's largest PPE supplier — had a turnover of roughly £300 million, but launched a top-to-bottom modernisation programme in 2017 to futureproof its operations.

With 11 regional offices working independently, it used to suffer from a fragmented service. In addition, says head of operations support Alan Garratt, "Out telephony system was really quite antiquated and didn't allow us to do a great deal more than just field calls."

One problem was metrics. "We couldn't tell how many emails or calls we were getting on any particular day, what the trends were like, whether we were busy... It was opaque. So, we wanted a technology that would allow us to get as much granular detail as possible."

A five-year, £70 million renewal plan, focused on digital transformation, greenlit the building of a corporate distribution centre and moving to a new head office to achieve a consistent, centralised service. A 200-seat engagement centre utilises RingCentral's cloud-based technology. "The reliability has been phenomenal," says Garratt.

To begin with, the main issue was helping long-tenured colleagues adapt. "It's like moving from an old Nokia phone to a brand-new iPhone," he says, acknowledging RingCentral's help in bedding the system in. These days, however, everyone is aware of its value.

THE ABILITY TO MOVE SEAMLESSLY FROM COMPLETELY OFFICE-BASED TO COMPLETELY HOME-BASED HAS REALLY OPENED OUR EYES

"Initially, everyone's a bit reticent to change and now, almost two years down the line, we really have a great deal of engagement with the systems, both from our colleagues and from our customers," says Garratt. "They understand the benefits of what we're doing and why we did it."

Emergency protocol

Over the past few months, the system has proved its worth in ways that Arco never foresaw. "The biggest success story for us," notes Garratt, "is the transformation of our customer engagement centre from entirely office-based to entirely home-based in the space of ten working days.

"Of course, we had a disaster-recovery plan, which involved taking laptops to another Arco site and trying to spin up a limited function there if we had a power cut or the internet went down. No one imagined us vacating the building entirely and making every single person work from home.

"The ability to move seamlessly from completely office-based to completely home-based has really opened our eyes, and not just to the power of the technology. It is actively shaping our thoughts and future strategy for the customer engagement centre.

"We are now looking at having a core of 20-25% of our colleagues home-based at any one time. We would never have imagined that two or three months ago. I can't thank the technology enough from that point of view."
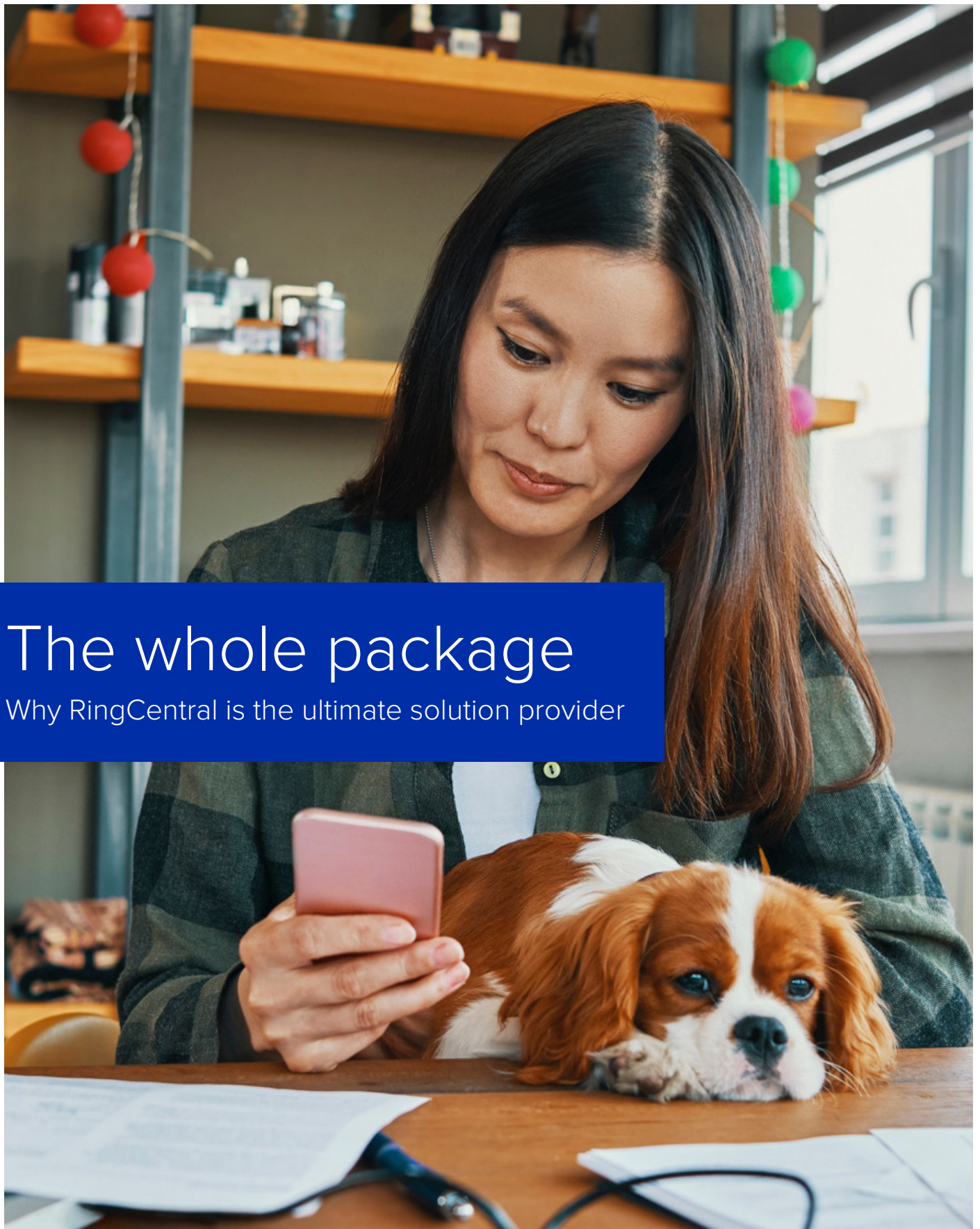
The whole package

Why RingCentral is the ultimate solution provider

WITH ITS FASTER, smarter, more effective communication capabilities, RingCentral's cloud-based technology can empower businesses on an international level.

Effective across multiple devices, the company's UCaaS solution is easy to manage and scales globally. Built on a secure, reliable platform, its services bring together voice, online meetings, team messages, video conferencing, collaboration, customer engagement and contact centre wizardry.

A single platform
Using RingCentral Office, you'll have team messaging, video meetings and phone calls at your fingertips – on the same screen, on any device. As well as being more efficient, it enables your business to consolidate several vendor contracts in one subscription.

Download the RingCentral app – or access it via a browser – and you can switch calls and meetings from your mobile to your desktop and vice versa.

A cloud-based phone system offers features such as call delegation, call screening, extensions, local numbers and visual voicemail.

And while collaborating, you can use a single, unified workspace for team messaging, file-sharing, tasks and calendars.

The technology makes high-definition video conferences possible with screen-sharing, web-sharing and file annotation. On top of that, you can move from calling to messaging to video conferencing without switching applications.

At every juncture, seven layers of security keep your data safe.

An app to appreciate
Having phone calls, team meetings and video messaging in one place saves you time and helps teams stay more connected.
- Use one business phone number for calling and fax – and route incoming calls efficiently with a multi-level auto attendant.
- Manage HD video meetings, share screens in real time, record meetings in the cloud and integrate with Office 365 and Google Calendar.
- Message colleagues and clients from your PC or mobile device, assign tasks, share links and files with no size limits and invite guest users to collaborate.

Integrated software
RingCentral Office provides access to indispensable Google and Microsoft software integrating with popular tools such as Google Drive and Microsoft Teams. In the same vein, Salesforce, Box, Okta, Oracle and Zendesk slot in perfectly.

As a result, you can schedule meetings or conference calls directly from Microsoft or Google calendars while you're working; consolidate your contacts on an easily searchable screen; or click and dial phone numbers that appear in emails, documents, webpages and faxes.

When the person you want is not available, smart call handling diverts the call to someone who is.

Reaching and sharing files in Box and Dropbox is straightforward too. You can even add a cover page and note – and fax files to as many as 50 recipients.

Out and about
Versatile app functions give users on the road the opportunity to replicate the office experience. Notably, you can answer incoming calls anywhere by routing them to your mobile phone.

What's more, you don't need a specific physical presence to have a commercial presence. You can set an outgoing number on your mobile, for instance, so that you can operate as a local business, calling from anywhere.

That's the power of cloud communications.

VERSATILE APP FUNCTIONS GIVE USERS ON THE ROAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO REPLICATE THE OFFICE EXPERIENCE.