



The 4 Elements of Next-Generation Communications

Key considerations in digital transformation to ensure secure, efficient and seamless communications across today's collaborative organisations

Introduction

The benefits of "Unified Communications" across an enterprise has been well documented over the past 5 years, though completely seamless communication across messaging, voice, video and content has not really played out as effectively as promised.

Enterprise Collaboration tools have helped to streamline internal communications somewhat, and video conferencing at the desktop and the meeting room is becoming far more commonplace as organisations recognise the needs to serve employees and customers more effectively. However the growing requirement for more flexible, scalable and secure interactions is putting major strain on networks, and multiple silos of collaborative tools added over time is recognised as one of the biggest inhibitors to digital transformation today.

One thing is for sure; for businesses to stay competitive, to stay connected and to grow, digital transformation is required and the choices you make now will have profound effect on the future of your business.

Considerations and Complications

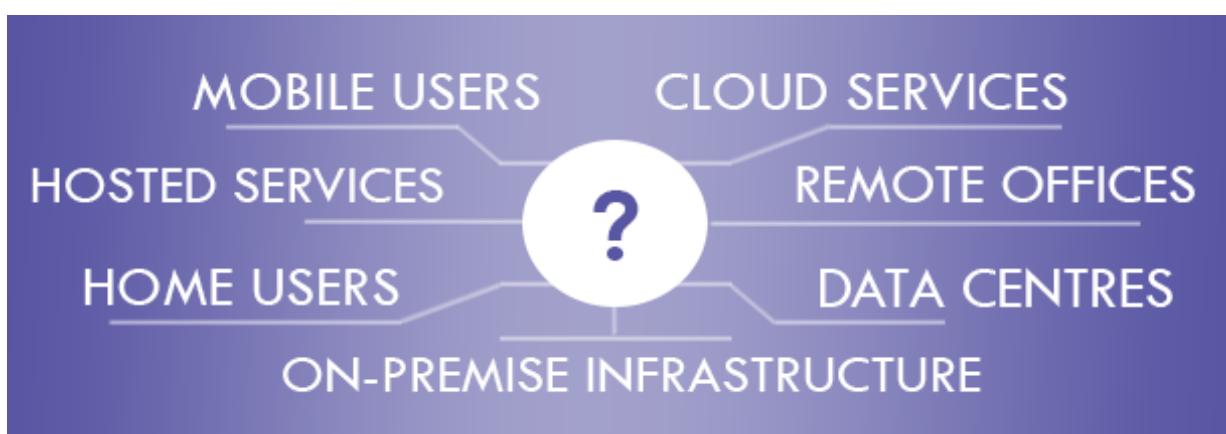
Whether your organisation is considering on-premise infrastructure, cloud-based subscriptions, hosted services or some hybrid of the three, it is imperative to ensure decisions are well founded, well researched, properly advised, and unbiased.

Trial and error may have been the name of the game for some Skype for Business, WebEx and VoIP-in-the-cloud deployments over the past 5 years, but your business communications are no longer areas that can be guessed at. It is critical that email, telephony, wireless and management services work first time and are reliable, scalable, secure and simple to use for everyone. Redundancy and failover must be planned, and end-to-end communication cannot be compromised.

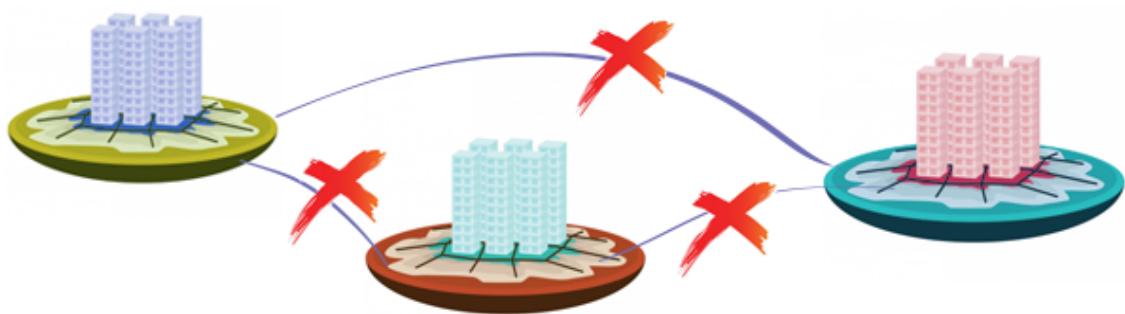
Choosing a collaborative solution may seem simple on the face of it, especially with the power behind marketing and advertising from many of today's large organisations, but in practice, you're often only hearing one side of the story. Some offerings may work in principle with the current platform you have installed internally on a single site, or may seem fantastic during a flashy demonstration, but will it work to achieve your organisations aims? Will it work with interlinked sites, homeworkers, guests, customers and suppliers who are often not on the same network or use the same platforms as you? These are key areas to consider when moving forwards with your digital transformation.



Similarly, linking networks together via the Internet is just one part of the solution. What about sites you wish to keep private on your WAN? How about tablets and Smartphone users, and remote workers who are using their handheld device over a fixed desktop PC?



Yes, it would be wonderful for all of this to happen as seamlessly as advertised, but realistically it doesn't. Islands are being created, and confused complex integrations of a mixed bag of solutions provided by many different providers are creating challenges and pains that are counteracting the promised opportunities of efficient enterprise communications.

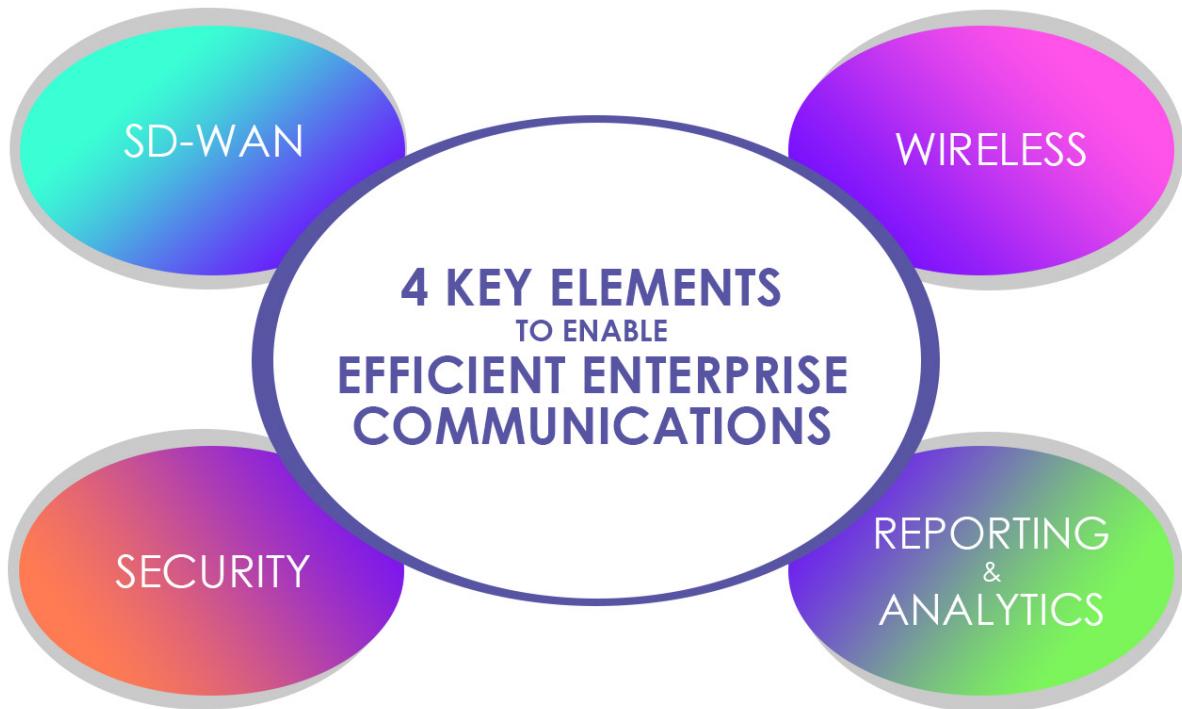


The key to making this all work seamlessly relies on efficient bridging, properly integrated management tools and interoperability gateways, often internet based and increasingly cloud based. However organisations must be careful not to get locked into the wrong choice and driven down a route unsuitable for their business, but similarly not be scared off by the complexity, hold back and wait, whilst losing out on the advantages that competitors are already capitalising on.

It might sound cliché, but the advice right now is to stop and think. Seek independent advice, set your goals so you can measure results, analyse and review progress regularly to feedback into the next phase of your transformation, and understand all of the interlinking elements before you continue.

And finally, be sure you're not being led down a route that sounds too good to be true, and is actually better for someone else's pocket rather than yours.

So what are the important elements to consider for efficient next-generation communications in the enterprise?



1. SD-WAN (Software Defined Wide Area Network)

The WAN plays a highly strategic role in enabling digital transformation of the enterprise that is been driven by the Internet of Things, mobility and the cloud. Software defined WAN is the method of deploying WAN using software networking, and enables administrators to easily make and depoloy intelligent rules about how devices on the network handle traffic and ensure quality of service in achieved for the relevant application flows.

SD-WAN technologies make the best use of multiple WAN connections, not only for providing redundancy to reduce risk, but also to reduce cost. Connections to and from your site are likely to be mixed in type, and will typically already be a primary MPLS, some backup internet links and possibly 3G/4G links, all simultaneously in use.

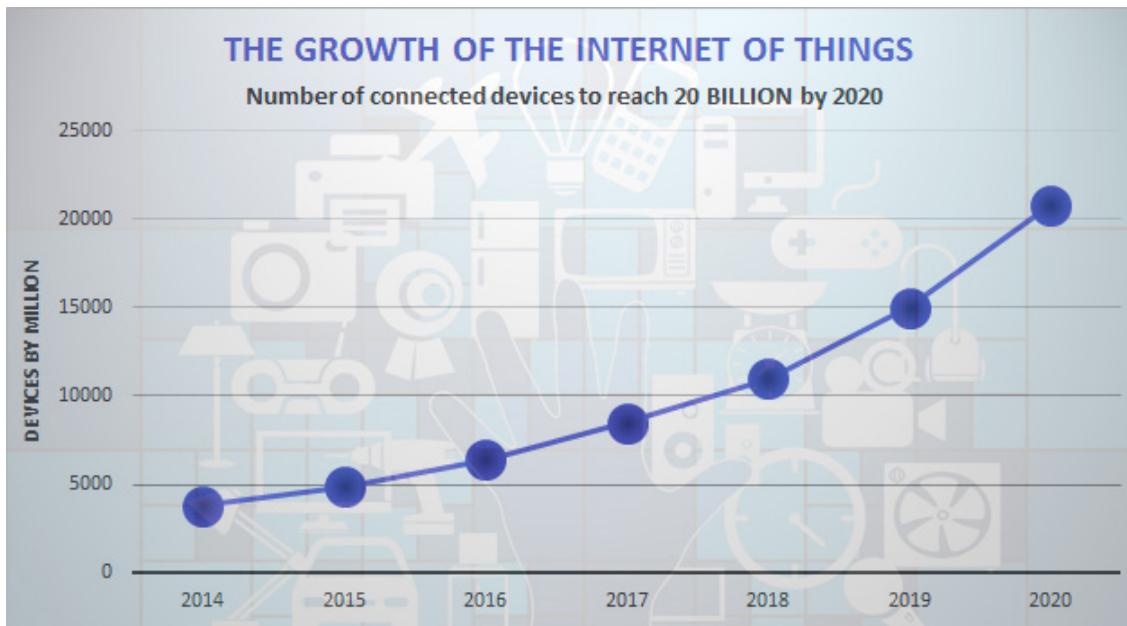
Reducing dependency on expensive MPLS links by using Internet connectivity instead will bring about cost savings as well as increased agility in deployment of new sites. Simplification in management, control and security of remote sites, including home workers, and added Cloud connectivity to Amazon, Microsoft Azure and other hosting centres will make it easier to deploy new applications and achieve higher service levels.

2. Wireless

Mobile connectivity is playing a major role in how businesses become more productive and the reliance upon the corporate WiFi means a secure and efficient wireless network is no longer just a matter of convenience.

Enterprise wireless networks are already under immense pressure from the explosion of mobile phones and tablets, but with the growth of IoT, the impact is only going to intensify. Suffice to say, the IoT is making wireless LAN designs more complex, harder to manage and more difficult to secure against threats.

New Gigabit Wireless standards (802.11ac) have improved performance, but this must be accompanied by security, analytics and reporting to ensure that traffic and bandwidth levels, and quality are maintained whilst the IoT revolution continues to expand.



3. Security

Whether it's your own LAN/VPN security that's of concern, or your considerations of Enterprise Communications in the Cloud, (where data is stored, how it is encrypted and how it is retrieved following recording etc), organisations are extremely concerned about security. Such concerns are understandable without proper explanation of the methodologies involved and an understanding as to why your communication can actually be much more secure in the cloud than on your own corporate network.

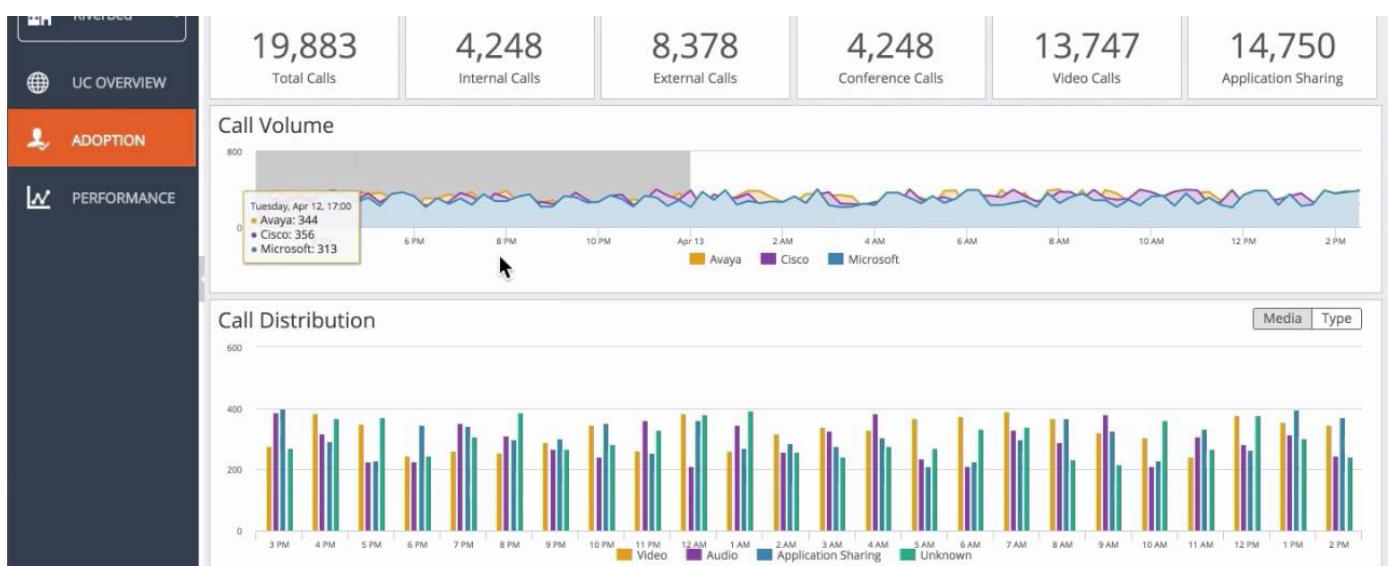
With 61% of IP traffic expected to be driven by wireless devices by 2018, wireless security is critical. And it requires far more effort than simply password protection of your SSID. Intelligent Rogue detection, intrusion prevention, firewall management and forensics with the highest levels of reliability are crucial in ensuring that the solution is a credible one and protects your network from the growing threat of cyber attacks.

4. Statistics, Reporting, Diagnostics and ROI Analysis

According to a 2016 survey carried out by Dell, 75% of IT organisations currently lack the visibility and diagnostic capabilities to drive better Unified Communication experiences to users. Similarly, 55% of them spend time troubleshooting UC quality of experience issues weekly, and 20% troubleshoot daily or hourly.

With the right tools in place, data collection and analysis together with professional reporting and presentation will provide your key stakeholders with the information they need to reach informed management decisions about communication platforms and collaborative technologies. This can be done in-house and on-premise through the proper installation of VM software, however reviews and analysis often end up taking 2nd priority, and therefore it is often a smart move to involve external specialists to ensure this is carried out consistently and effectively.

Visibility, reporting and troubleshooting of many enterprise solutions is surprisingly lacking both visibly and functionally, and so whether looking at cloud or on-premise, it is important to choose the tools that fit in with your mixed environment without compromise to security.



Tools from the likes of Riverbed can give indepth analysis of network usage, mixed UC platforms and endpoints to help organisations fully understand and improve communications & networks

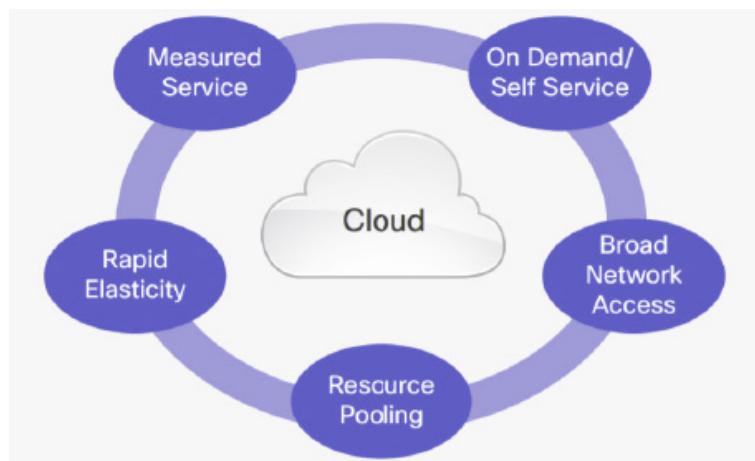
Essential Services to Underpin the 4 Elements

To underpin the 4 Key Elements of Enterprise Communications, organisations must also take into account two other key services; Broadband and Support. Efficient and effective broadband provision and professional support for your network and technology deployment will ensure sure that communications work, first-time and everytime, in the fastest and most reliable way for your organisation.

And if there is ever a problem, you need confidence that you have access to reliable and competent accredited experts that understand all of the key elements in place, and that can ensure optimal performance, investment protection, speed of response & replacement, improved usage and exceptional communication.

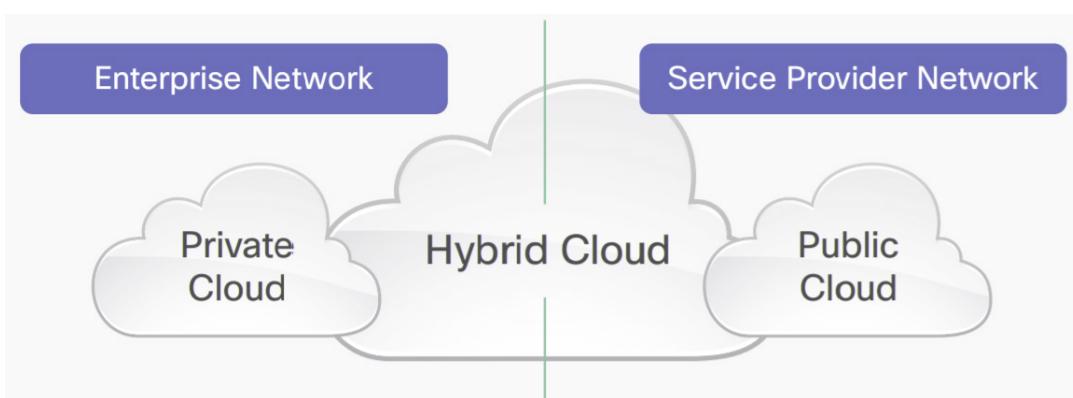
Why is Cloud so important?

Microsoft is growing its share of the communications market with their Skype for Business offering, AKA Office 365 when subscribed to in the cloud. Now, a close second to Cisco in the UC market share race with their WebEx and Spark based presentations in the cloud, the pressure on traditional VoIP and PBX vendors is growing with once huge organisations such as Avaya, who's solutions are typically on-premise, seeking protection from bankruptcy in late 2016. Lifesize in 2015 completely dropped its on-premise offerings and made a management decision to focus 100% on cloud, a decision that appears to have paid off for them with 4000 net new customers coming on board since the decision.



*Essential Characteristics of Cloud in alignment with NIST definitions**

Generally, Cloud means that a service provider is managing the service provisioning, the bandwidth bottleneck around the hub of the service, the always-on service availability, the ongoing scalability and improved reliability, the maintenance costs, software upgrades and the staffing. Though this varies greatly dependent upon whether an organisation opts for a private cloud, public cloud or hybrid, and what service model is chosen; Software as a Service (SaaS), Platform as a Service (PaaS) or Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS). Whatever the choice, however, the organisation still needs to provide the access to it, and that access needs to be secure, resilient, monitored and sufficient in terms of bandwidth. And wherever wireless access is required, that must be well designed for optimum performance, particularly when video is added.

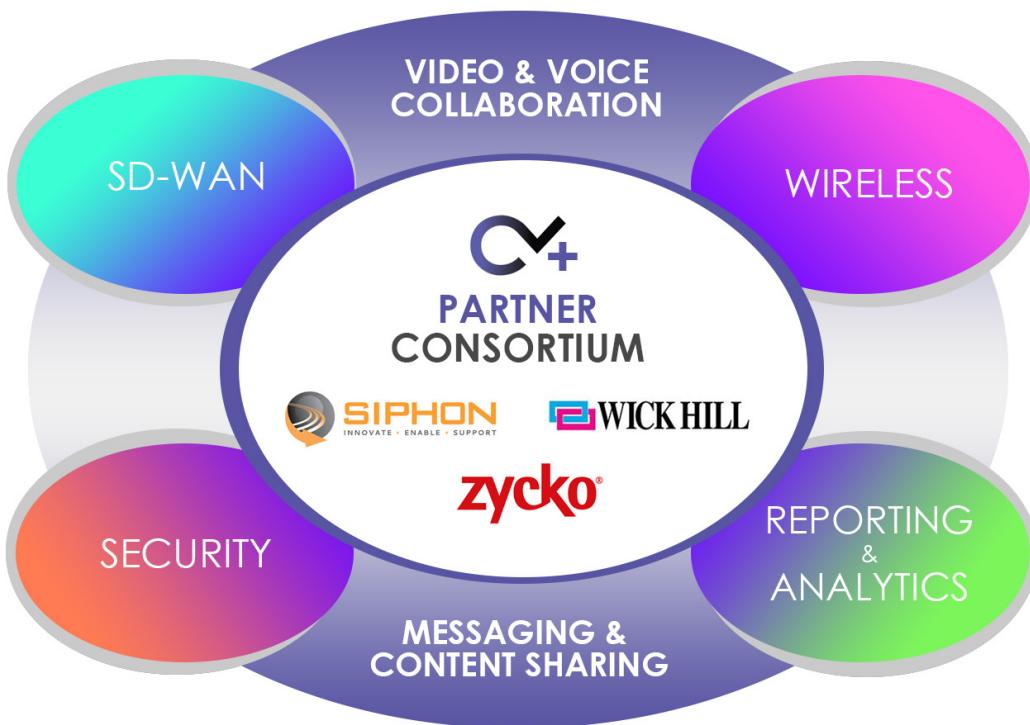


Note that Skype for Business consumes 1.5Mbps upstream per user and unfortunately many early adopters failed to recognise this until after deployment. Added to that, it is limited in its interoperability capabilities and therefore most serious organisations are still considering conventional video conferencing systems, gateways and interoperability bridging services to complement their S4B deployment. These factors ought to be considered at the outset, not part way through or after implementation is complete.

Help from an Unbiased Partner Consortium

There are no organisations that have the complete breadth of knowledge or expertise themselves to help with every telecoms, IT, data networking or UC issue, nor should any organisation possibly make all the above recommendations on its own.

With stringent research and evaluation of each of the key elements discussed, VideoCentric have selected independent experts from leading European companies such as Zycko, VideoCentric, Wick Hill and Syphon Networks and formed a comprehensive Partner Consortium which brings together a virtual team of unbiased experts in their field.



The aim of this independent partner consortium is to provide:

- Trusted technology solution advisors
- Business value analysts
- Multi-product comparisons
- Training for administrators and users
- Pre and post sales consultancy
- Live demonstrations, webinars and events
- The right solutions, network elements & broadband for your business requirements
- Technical Deployment (Installation, Configuration and testing)
- Expert support from the entire solution
- Capex and Opex financing

With the Partner Consortium, you gain the best independent knowledge from experts in their field, who can sit with you around one table and ensure a complete Collaborative solution that integrates with your current deployments, is efficiently managed and supported in the long-term, and ensures the highest levels of ROI for your business.



The independent Partner Consortium brings expertise and certifications across the board of Video, Voice and Data Communications, with access to best-of-breed technologies and vendors including but not limited to:



Polycom™



Gold
Partner



Get in touch

Contact us via 0118 9798910 and speak with one of our technology specialists about what you are looking to achieve with Video, Voice, Data and Unified Communications. Whether you have specific outcomes you wish to achieve, are having challenges with quality or usage of Collaboration across your organisation, or are looking for a way to take communications to the next level, we can help you move forwards with your digital transformation.