Planning for UC Audio Devices

Undertaking the audio aspect of a Unified Communications (UC) rollout can be daunting. But a well-organized, thoughtfully considered plan that includes user input will make the overall rollout run smoothly and increase user adoption.

To that end, we've outlined three stages of UC audio deployments: Plan, Deploy, and Adopt. For each stage, we've compiled FAQs and supporting Checklists to help you through the entire process.

These **Plan FAQs** address typical questions that IT organizations raise during overall planning for UC audio device deployments, including pilots and evaluations of devices. This is a direct result of our participation in many UC rollouts, empowering users worldwide to do their best work.

PLAN | DEPLOY | ADOPT
One in a series on helping IT organizations in their rollout of audio devices for UC

UC Toolkit FAQs

1. WHY DO I NEED A UC AUDIO DEVICE DEPLOYMENT PLAN?
From audioconferencing to telephony, the top UC functions are audio dependent, so providing your workers with devices that best support those functions—from the very first call—naturally maximizes user adoption. But UC audio doesn't plug itself in; thorough planning helps ensure a successful initial experience for users and increases the likelihood of solid return on your UC investment.

2. THIS IS OUR FIRST UC AUDIO DEVICE DEPLOYMENT. WHERE DO I START?
Look at the workstyles of your employees. Are they primarily in the office, mobile, or a combination? Do they work at home? No one wants to adopt entirely unfamiliar habits, so think about how UC is going to benefit them using ways in which they work already. Depending on their workstyle, users need a different kind of audio device for the way they will use UC.

3. HOW DO I SELECT THE AUDIO DEVICES TO PILOT?
Deciding on the right audio device comes down to the workstyles of your users. Some users connect to a PC, a mobile phone, and a desk phone throughout the day. Other users require in-office mobility or prefer to be hands free using a corded headset or speakerphone, whereas still others spend the bulk of their day on the road. Make sure the products you choose to pilot will map to how your users work.

4. WHICH AUDIO DEVICE FEATURES SHOULD I TEST?
After you've reviewed and selected the products to test, start mapping functional requirements of product features. Focus on basic ones as well as those expected to be used most. In addition to general product features such as volume and mute control, tested aspects might include audio quality (sending and receiving), ease of use, durability, flexibility, wearing comfort, length of talk time before recharging, portability, and plug-and-play capability—as well as overall user experience. Develop a trial test plan that meets your business communication goals.

5. WHAT KIND OF SCENARIOS SHOULD I PILOT?

That depends on your organization and the people in it. Many users work from home, at the airport, in cafes, and in other areas with significant external noise, whereas others work in an open office or private office. Make sure you know where and how your employees normally work, and let that guide the scenarios.

6. WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE TEST GROUP?

Your short list of candidates should be a representative cross-section that reflects the way your organization works. For example, executive administrators and mobile workers typically are excellent testers. Also, identify potential super-users—tech-savvy early adopters or advocates for IT—to act as an extension of IT.

7. HOW DO I INTEGRATE UC AUDIO DEVICES INTO MY OVERALL STRATEGY?

Sometimes audio devices augment your existing telephony. In other cases, they replace desk phones entirely. Hybrid scenarios are also possible. It's important to understand the overall UC objectives of your company and then align your audio device strategy accordingly.

8. WHAT ABOUT USERS WHO WANT WIRELESS AUDIO DEVICES?

There are different wireless headset technologies available, from Bluetooth® to DECT™. Bear in mind that, depending on the technology, the number of wireless devices that can work in a prescribed area varies. Getting this balance right is crucial to optimal headset performance. Again, an understanding of the workstyles of your users—whether in-office, mobile, or virtual—will help you choose the number, and the kind, of wireless headsets you should pursue.

9. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KEEP EMPLOYEES IN THE LOOP?

Whenever you change the way employees work, it's vital to give them a sense of ownership. From the beginning, explain the ways it will benefit them. Keep employees continually informed. Most important, make them feel as if their specific needs guide the decisions.

10. HOW SHOULD I MEASURE SUCCESS?

Establish metrics that reflect how much your audio devices can help meet the goals of your organization. For example, can you decrease paid conference call minutes and number of emails? How satisfied are employees before and after deployment? Agree on the key performance indicators (KPIs) with your management team and use them as a barometer when you evaluate potential devices.

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