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Understanding the Communications Requirements for a

DIGITAL WORKPLACE

WHITE PAPER

Prepared by
Zeus Kerravala

INTRODUCTION: THE DIGITAL BUSINESS ERA HAS ARRIVED

Businesses are evolving faster than ever before. Key technologies such as the cloud, mobility and the Internet of Things (IoT) are enabling companies of all sizes to undertake broad and deep digital transformation initiatives—changing the way they operate, creating new business models and lifting employee productivity to new heights. The ZK Research 2019 IT Priorities Survey found that 90% of all companies now have at least one digital transformation project underway (Exhibit 1), up from 84% just two years ago.

In today's business climate, organizations thrive when workers can collaborate easily, have access to the information they need, make quick decisions and move on to the next task or project. Unfortunately, most workplaces aren't designed for agile working. The traditional "cube centric" workplace was ideal for an environment where workers came to the office, performed similar tasks day after day and had limited interaction with co-workers. Today, the key to success is having a digital workplace—that is, an environment where the technology doesn't get in the way, is free from "human integration" and enables employees to complete tasks regardless of whether they are in the office, at home or on the move.

Exhibit 1: Companies of All Sizes Are Embracing Digital Transformation
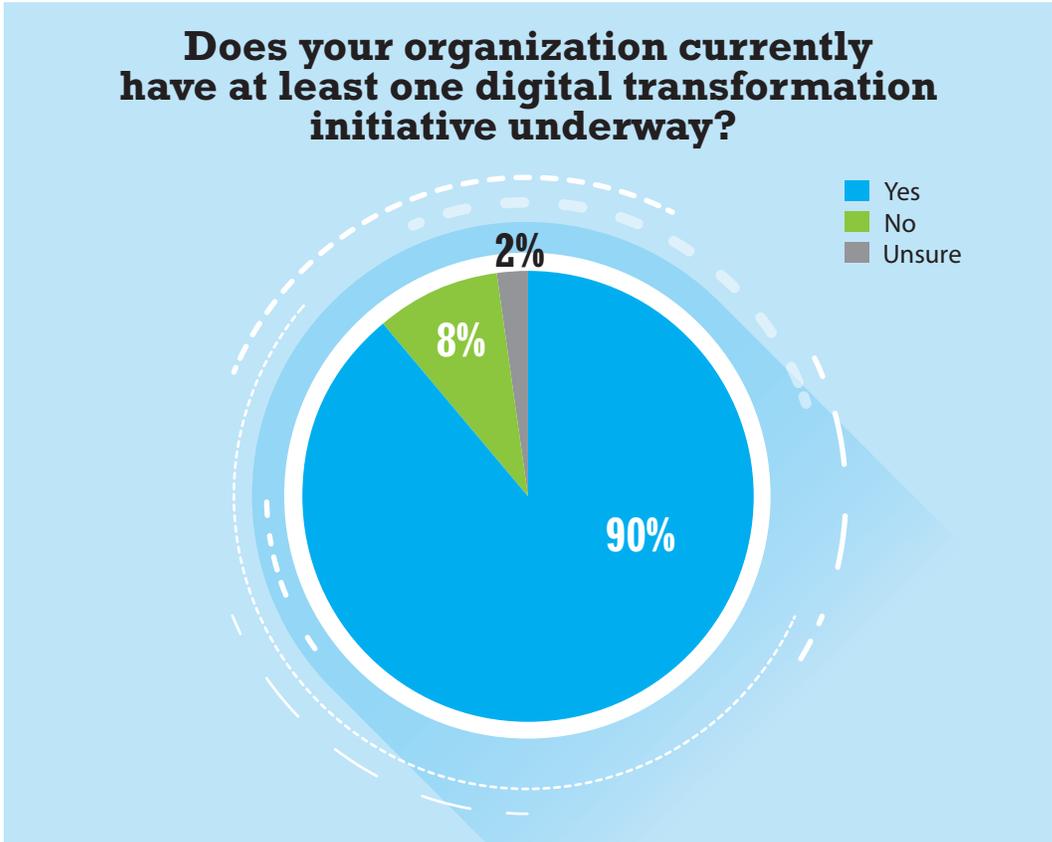
Does your organization currently have at least one digital transformation initiative underway?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

2%
8%
90%

ZK Research 2019 IT Priorities Survey

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zeus Kerravala is the founder and principal analyst with ZK Research. Kerravala provides tactical advice and strategic guidance to help his clients in both the current business climate and the long term. He delivers research and insight to the following constituents: end-user IT and network managers; vendors of IT hardware, software and services; and members of the financial community looking to invest in the companies that he covers.

A digital workplace enables workers to maximize their productivity when in the office and eradicates the expression "I'll take care of that when I'm back in the office" from our vocabulary. The following are key attributes of a digital workplace:

Cloud-centric model makes all applications available whether employees are in or out of the office.

Continuously connected devices give in-office workers access to all services and data, all the time.

Data resiliency ensures information is protected and backed up. In the digital era, data is gold, and businesses must ensure it's protected.

Simplified communications remove much of the "human latency" in business processes that was created by the need to use multiple collaboration tools.

Mobile-first tools enable workers to operate from anywhere.

The above are all key requirements for the digital office, but there is no single product that a business can buy to meet them all. Consequently, it's important to understand what combination of services will enable a business to become a digital organization.

SECTION II: CHARTING A PATH TO THE DIGITAL OFFICE

Having the right mix of communications tools can enable companies to transform into digital businesses. IT professionals and other decision makers should consider network, voice and data to be the core building blocks of the digital office. Specifically, businesses should prioritize the following communications services:

Cloud Voice and Collaboration

Many businesses consider it risky to move their communications to the cloud. The fact is, it's riskier to *not* migrate to the cloud for a number of reasons that business leaders must understand:

Increased agility: Legacy communications are brittle and static, so making even simple changes can take a long time. With cloud services, new features can be delivered everywhere quickly. This increased agility enables companies to align their communications strategy with their business strategy.

Having the right mix of communications tools can enable companies to transform into digital businesses.

Ubiquitous access: Traditional communications platforms are only available when the employee is in the office. In contrast, cloud systems can be reached whether the worker is in the office, at home, on the road or anywhere else. Also, the cloud makes it possible to access business communications features on any device (Exhibit 2).

Business continuity: Pervasive access makes it possible for workers to utilize communications services even when the physical office is unavailable.

Faster innovation: With an on-premises solution, upgrades disrupt the business because the application must be taken offline for a period of time. For this reason, many companies will put off or even skip upgrades. With a cloud solution, customers have immediate access to new features as soon as the service provider adds them. This ensures workers always have the latest and greatest services available.

Budget efficient: Many companies, particularly seasonal ones, must purchase capacity to meet business demands during peak periods. For example, an accounting firm may need to increase staff during tax season, so it must purchase a system that can accommodate that. This means the system will be underutilized much of the year. Cloud services are agile, so businesses can purchase what they need today and then increase capacity as required.

Exhibit 2: Cloud Services Are Device Independent
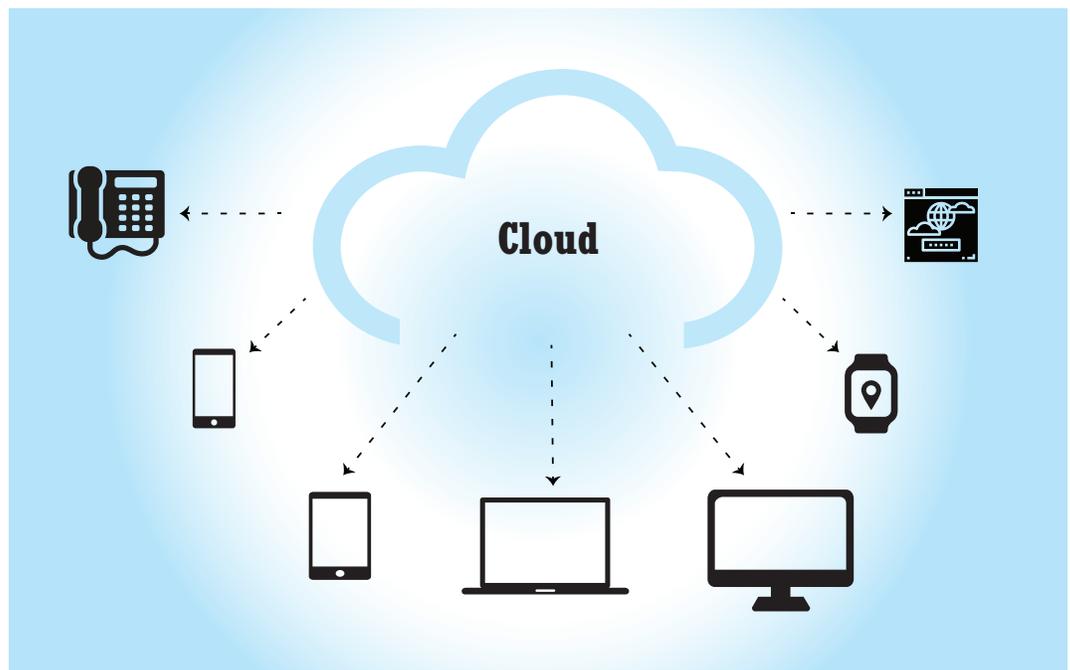
ZK Research, 2019

All businesses need to consider themselves "always on," meaning all services are available all the time.

Business Internet/Fiber

Many types of network services are available to businesses. One that has been growing in popularity is fiber-based internet services. We live in a world where everything is connected, making the flexibility and speed of fiber ideal.

Organizations must keep pace with the fast-moving technology landscape, which drives the requirement for the best and fastest internet connection. Fiber is superior to other forms of internet for several reasons:

Symmetric speeds: Most forms of internet have asymmetrical speeds in which the upload speed is a fraction of the download speed. Fiber speeds are symmetric in nature, meaning the upload and download speeds are the same. This is increasingly important because cloud services such as social media, cloud storage and video require fast speeds for both uploads and downloads.

Highly reliable: Fiber connections are typically more reliable than the coaxial and copper wires used by cable and DSL, respectively. Fiber-optic cables are designed to be in place for decades and are nearly damage proof.

Optimized cloud experience: For many businesses, the cloud has become the de facto method of accessing applications. An optimal cloud experience requires a fast network and lots of bandwidth, and fiber can deliver that.

Consistent performance over distance: Copper wires perform poorly over longer distances because of signal degradation. In contrast, fiber is based on light and does not have this problem, as there is no signal loss for up to 25 miles.

Low latency: Because fiber uses light waves as its medium, it has very little latency compared to other forms of internet.

Internet Wireless Backup

All businesses need to consider themselves "always on," meaning all services are available all the time. If the network connection goes down, the business stops. If the outage lasts too long, the company may suffer irreparable damage and never recover. This puts an emphasis on network uptime, driving the need for a back-up network connection. Many options are available to business decision makers, but wireless internet should be at the top of the list for the following reasons:

Always available: Wired communications generally have been preferred as a backup to the primary connection, which is also wired. In many buildings, all wired communications come into the building through the same conduit and often use the same in-building facilities. This means

Phone and

internet

communications

are the lifeblood of

companies.

a facilities failure, cable cut or power outage could result in the primary and the backup both failing. Wireless internet comes in over the air and is always available, even when all wired communications are not.

Fast deployment: Wired connections often require 90 days of lead time to turn up, while wireless internet can be turned up almost immediately. This can be beneficial when opening a new location because the wireless network can be used until the wired connection is in place.

Protection from network outages: A network outage is a business outage, and that can negatively impact companies in many different ways. A network outage can shut down an online service, resulting in lost sales. Also, workers won't have access to critical cloud services such as email, file storage, customer relationship management (CRM) systems and other applications. Lastly, a prolonged outage can damage a company's reputation, driving customers to competitors.

Continuous communications: Phone and internet communications are the lifeblood of companies. Wireless internet can keep all of an organization's critical systems running, such as the phone and collaboration tools. The outage will be transparent to customers, so the company won't skip a beat.

SECTION III: KINETIC BUSINESS IS A COMPLETE DIGITAL OFFICE SOLUTION PROVIDER

When it comes to network service providers, decision makers have a wide variety of choices. Many organizations will make the easy choice and stick with their existing provider. However, several of the legacy service providers have networks and services that were optimized for the client/server era and not for cloud services. Kinetic Business by Windstream is an example of a communications service provider that has designed all of its services for cloud-first, digital businesses.

Kinetic Business is focused on solving its customers complexity challenges by delivering the responsiveness and agility that is required to transform digitally. Kinetic Business differentiates itself by being responsive and agile, offering the ability to deliver innovative network, communications and collaboration solutions that are secured for cloud-centric companies.

Kinetic Business OfficeSuite UC® combines all of a company's communications tools—calling, voicemail, faxing, instant messaging, conferencing and more—into one solution that is acces-sible from anywhere, on any device. Key solution features include the following:

- Unlimited local and long-distance calling
- Runs over any internet connection
- Encrypted calls, messages and meetings for high security
- High-definition (HD) video, audio and web conferencing
- Real-time presence and company-wide chat

- Online portal to manage auto attendants and call routing
- Features offered in three bundles (basic, standard and advanced) to meet the needs of different workers

The choice of communications network provider is critical to the ongoing success of businesses of all sizes.

Kinetic Business Class Fiber Internet is a futureproofed internet connection that expands as the business grows. The future of business is built on fiber because it can meet company demands to-day but scale easily as things change. Therefore, fiber should be considered the foundation of digital organizations. Key solution features include the following:

- Flexible speeds up to 1 gigabit
- Scalable for future business growth
- Symmetrical upload and download speeds
- Highly reliable, futureproofed technology
- No data caps
- Static IP addresses available

Kinetic Business Wireless Internet Backup enables companies to be always on and always available. This service gives business leaders peace of mind that even when the primary connection fails, the business can keep running. Key solution features include the following:

- Automated switchover to wireless internet backup in the event of a primary service failure
- Immediately reverting to primary internet once service is restored
- No manual intervention required for peace of mind
- 99.999% internet uptime service-level agreement
- Revenue protection at an affordable price
- No business disruption

All services include Kinetic Business's 24x7 dedicated customer support and a 30-day satisfaction guarantee. Businesses should expect more from their service provider, and Kinetic Business is aligned to be a partner that responds to the unique needs of every customer and helps businesses navigate through technology transformations.

SECTION IV: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The cloud continues to have a disruptive effect on business IT. To date, it's reshaped the way applications are consumed and the way people work. If organizations are to realize the full benefits of the cloud and digital transformation, they must align their network and communication strategies with the cloud to achieve levels of agility and productivity never seen before in business. Therefore, the choice of communications network provider is critical to the ongoing success of businesses of all sizes.

ZK Research makes the following recommendations to help decision makers navigate the selection process:

Fully embrace the cloud era. Most organizations have partially embraced the cloud as a new way of doing business. The cloud brings unparalleled levels of elasticity to organizations with new consumption models that enable businesses to optimize utilization levels and IT budget dollars. ZK Research strongly urges all businesses to fully embrace the cloud to shift into the digital business era.

Shed conventional thinking about the network. Historically, the network has been considered "the pipes" and a non-strategic asset. Consequently, best-effort services and rigid architectures were the norm. However, the cloud is a network-centric compute model, and network strategies must now change. In the cloud era, "good enough" is no longer good enough, and businesses must now consider the network a strategic, cloud enabler. This isn't your father's IT environment, and it shouldn't be your father's network.

Choose your service provider based on cloud-buying criteria. Old decision criteria for network services, such as incumbency and market share, will not be sufficient in the cloud era. Evaluators of network services should align their decision-making criteria with cloud enablers such as agility, quality of service and flexible bandwidth.