

Not All Cloud-Based Unified Communications Vendors are Created Equal—What You Need to Know

Executive Summary

Effective business leaders understand that a company's success is gauged by its ability to remain competitive in an ever-changing marketplace. To accomplish this, companies must possess a willingness to embrace cutting-edge techniques and technologies as well as innovative business practices which continue to propel their organization forward through an increasingly unpredictable, unstable and volatile economic environment. The day of building your company on a static infrastructure that doesn't change for years is a thing of the past. Indeed, your company will soon be a thing of the past if you continue to think that way.

The challenge of being more competitive and responsive while improving productivity and cutting costs is by no means a new concept within the business world. It is, however, a key concern when trying to meet customer demand and maintain a healthy bottom line. Nowhere is this philosophy more evident than in the world of cloud-based unified communications. True, cost and efficiency are certainly important factors to consider when deciding to embrace cloud-based unified communications. But perhaps more important are the other factors surrounding the pivotal role cloud-based UC vendors ultimately play in supporting and evolving your communications infrastructure.

Beyond the features offered, cloud communications vendors must; deliver reliable operations; Quality of Service (QOS) management; scalability and deployment coverage; disaster recovery; security; and continuous, high level, responsive support. Anything less and you risk building your communications infrastructure on a thunder cloud on the horizon instead of on cloud nine.

Features Offered by Most Cloud-Based UC Vendors

Unified communications has certainly revolutionized the way businesses communicate. And as more and more enterprises come to understand the power and possibilities that cloud-based unified communications can offer, their success and their bottom lines appear to be on the rise. Managers are now free to do what they do best—drive business. They no longer have to worry about obsolete and cumbersome communications infrastructures, sustaining an in-house IT system and dealing with the inherent challenges associated with system maintenance and upgrades.

The concept behind cloud-based unified communications is solid. Cloud-based UC offers an off-site communications center that provides a versatile single-source hardware/software platform capable of delivering real-time communications, messages and information to users in any location no matter the medium. The management, security and distribution of any company's information are, by necessity, key elements to its success.

Cloud-based Unified Communications offers a number of vendor options such as services accessible on private networks or via the Internet, internal enterprise communications architectures based on vendor clouds and hybrids which are a blend of internal cloud architectures and classical IT infrastructure and vendor cloud services.

The key difference between on-premise solutions and cloud-based solutions is the cloud-based services are delivered by the vendor continuously. This means that your company depends on the reliability of the UC vendor's service at all times. Essentially, the vendor becomes a part of your company, which makes selecting the vendor as important as the service itself. And while there have been a proliferation of cloud providers, not all offer viable choices compatible with specific business or technology

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requirements. Again, choosing the right cloud-based UC vendor is a crucial and challenging business decision.

Features to Look for in a Cloud-Based Unified Communications

While most cloud-based UC companies feature the standard offerings, you need to look at what sets those companies apart. Cloud-based UC is more than just the services they offer. Their importance to the structure and day-to-day operations cannot be underestimated. Featuring instant messaging, telephony, video conferencing, data sharing, call control and unified messaging (integrated voicemail, email, SMS and text), unified communications are the ways you and your employees communicate. And not just with each other, but with clients and partners as well. PanTerra offers all these features (and more) in its cloud-based Unified Communications services. Because your business essentially depends on your cloud-based UC vendor, the quality and competence of your vendor are essential. Some areas to examine when choosing a cloud-based UC vendor involve carrier-neutral datacenters, redundant and auto-recovery architecture, 24/365 monitoring of datacenter and carriers, N+1 scalability, a proven operations track record and more.

Carrier-Neutral Datacenters

A single carrier datacenter located in a single carrier's facility has serious limitations. It lacks the ability to deal effectively with that particular network's connectivity should it fail. On the other hand, carrier neutral datacenters can react to and recover from a failure more effectively because of equal access to multiple tier 1 and tier 2 carriers. The inbound and outbound traffic is therefore not reliant on one single Internet Service Provider. There is a growing awareness of the considerable costs involved in tethering data to an in-house facility with the necessity for expensive disk arrays, servers and ancillary equipment. The problem will be further exacerbated as data volumes grow, which according to industry analysts, doubles every two years. Added to that is the imperative to carefully govern data, update and patch software systems, meet legal requirements and corporate governance all of which require data to be readily searchable in a manner that allows critical information to be recovered in a trice. The ability to transfer and alternate between carriers provides users with seamless uninterrupted service. This ability means your business stays up and running even if your cloud-based UC vendor is experiencing technical difficulties. PanTerra offers carrier-neutral datacenters to eliminate the potential for carrier failure and price hikes and to provide your business with uninterrupted service so that you never face downtime due to carrier failure.

Redundant and Auto Recovery Architecture

Dramatic advances in technology have revolutionized the way data is created, stored, shared, and used. And businesses thrive or die by industry-specific information. It is therefore imperative that such important content be protected and secured within the system. Consequently, a redundancy and auto recovery architecture protocol needs to be put in place. All information should be auto recoverable and with redundant architecture. This service feature is more than simply backing up files on an external hard drive. It involves a duplicate set of equipment to handle the operations should the first set-up fail. A redundancy set-up is a more secure way to protect your data, but not every cloud-based unified communications vendor offers it. PanTerra boasts both a redundant and auto recovery architecture. Should equipment or network failure or even human error cause a loss of service or saved messages, PanTerra's auto recovery and redundancy architecture set-up ensures your service and communications data are recovered and restored to your network in a seamless, seemingly effortless manner.

24/365 Monitoring of Datacenter and Carriers

A reliable cloud-based Unified Communications vendor services should allow for ease of use, be user friendly, and allow clients

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to accelerate their workflow thereby providing maximum return on investment. To that end, carrier and datacenter monitoring 24 hours a day, 365 days a year should be priority number one. The idea that cloud-based unified communications is a set-it-and-forget-it technology applies only to the customer, not to the UC provider. A hands-off approach to monitoring datacenters and carriers can result in a web of problems and thousands of unsatisfied clients.

All of the features available - redundancy, carrier-neutral datacenters, etc. - aren't effective if the datacenter and carriers aren't monitored. A UC vendor should provide monitoring around the clock to stay ahead of potential disasters and to ensure clients that their networks are in competent hands.

PanTerra monitors its datacenter and carriers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Such a dedicated commitment to customer service ensures that your business communications are always up and running. PanTerra monitors not just for current problems, but potential problems and otherwise unnoticed incidents that may compromise the quality of service for which PanTerra is known.

N+1 Scalability On All Services

Business goals usually include growth, so you need a system that will grow with your business. Since cloud-based unified communications require no on-site hardware and no on-site software installation, the potential for scalability increases proportionally to the decrease in obsolescence of equipment. Because there are no physical machines or equipment to install in your offices, there will never be a forced upgrade requiring more money just so your technology can keep up with your growing business. But some vendors lack the ability to expand as your business expands, and signing with a cloud-based Unified Communication vendor that doesn't offer scalability ends up hampering your business. N+1 capacity allows an unlimited number of connections, with seamless additions and automatic configuration of additional hardware. N+1 systems enable load balancing and provides protection against hardware or software failure in addition to the benefits of adding on following growth and expansion. Some cloud-based unified communications vendors offer N+1 scalability on select services, but to really be Future Proof, look for a vendor that offers N+1 scalability on all services the vendor offers. The potential for growth is supported in all facets of cloud-based unified communication services with a vendor offering N+1 scalability on all services. PanTerra offers N+1 scalability on all its services, which gives you the freedom to expand as far and as fast as your industry's market will allow. The possibilities are infinite with PanTerra's N+1 scalability.

Proven Operating Track Record

With the emergence of cloud-based unified communications, many companies have entered into the market. Information is power, so the more you know about a potential vendor, the better the decision you'll make for your business. However, not all companies have a proven track record of dependable service and continuous monitoring of the datacenters and carriers. Worst case scenario is you sign with a fly-by-night UC vendor only to experience problems accessing your information or even losing your service, both of which can cost your business time (to reestablish the network) and money (lost business due to lack of availability). PanTerra boasts a proven track record with a consistent 99.999% uptime since 2008. This solid track record is in part thanks to the other features that PanTerra offers above and beyond other cloud-based unified communications vendors.

Service Level Agreements (SLA)

Service Level Agreements are crucial to spelling out exactly the services you're paying for when contracting with a cloud-based Unified Communications vendor. You need to know what type of service you're paying for, what constitutes that service and what rights you have if the vendor doesn't deliver. SLAs benefit the customer, so searching for a cloud-based unified communi-

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communications vendor that openly designates protections for you in the SLA is a smart decision. For example, PanTerra guarantees voice and non-voice data services have a 99.99% uptime and this pledge is stated in PanTerra's service level agreements with customers.

Telecommunications Experience

Many cloud-based unified communications vendors only understand the cloud computing side of the equation. You want a company with telecommunications experience plus cloud computing experience to give your business the well-rounded benefits found in a company that fully understands the needs of your business. A company versed in telecommunications will understand and anticipate your needs and be able to provide the appropriate solution. Companies that only know the cloud computing side tend to be hit or miss with solutions, taking more time and expense to fix. PanTerra has years of telecommunications experience to deduce your needs and fix your problems the first time. This kind of experience cannot be underestimated in real life situations.

Quality of Service

While most cloud-based unified communications vendors offer support for their services, there is a fine line between the minimum amount of service necessary to function and the high level, quality of service you need to feel confident that you've placed your business's communications needs in the right hands. Quality of service (QOS) is a guarantee by the UC vendor to address any and all concerns, problems and glitches in a timely and satisfactory manner. You shouldn't feel like you're bothering your UC vendor when you call with a question or concern. A vendor that offers a high level of QOS, like PanTerra, provides continuous monitoring of the carriers and datacenters and redundant and auto recovery architecture to ensure clients receive the highest level of quality customer assistance to back top tier level services.

100% Cloud Storage

All things change over time and communications and IT are no exceptions. With a vendor that boasts 100% cloud storage, you can avoid the increase in costs and time associated with upgrading your on-site equipment. Not only will it not cost you more to upgrade, you'll automatically enjoy the newest technology thanks to easily upgradeable cloud-based systems. Cloud-based storage through companies like PanTerra provides all the benefits of a unified communications set-up without the tedious upgrades and obsoleting equipment that stems from desktop storage.

Carefully choosing your cloud-based unified communications vendor is as essential to your business as choosing your employees. Because all of your communication will be conducted through the vendor, your chosen vendor is essentially a part of your company: a major part of your company, when you consider the importance of communications to your business. When shopping around for the right UC provider, you must keep in mind the lifeblood of your company—its communications—will be continuously delivered every day by this company. Do you feel confident that the vendor will come through? Will they answer your questions thoroughly and efficiently? Does the vendor understand your business needs and have viable solutions? When asking yourself these questions and researching cloud-based unified communications vendors, consider PanTerra.

PanTerra Advantage

Ultimately, it is customer satisfaction that matters. PanTerra Networks offers solutions to help you achieve that satisfaction. PanTerra provides a plethora of global multi-media communications which empowers your business to be more responsive and more competitive, especially in the realms of sales, productivity and customer satisfaction. 100% cloud-based solutions offer

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reduced Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), increased business process organization and enhanced flexibility and scalability. PanTerra's cloud based solutions are highly available, and provide N+1 scalability on all services, which allows your business to grow as needed without the exorbitant costs—downtime to upgrade, replacing hardware and software—associated with expansion.

PanTerra's cloud-based UC solutions address all aspects of Total Cost of Ownership toward a reduction of operating costs which, in the current economy, can be an overpowering encumbrance. Businesses can expect to find savings of as much as 75% on monthly communication bills when the system is fully deployed. While technology can play a noteworthy role on operating cost reduction it cannot, by itself, drive down TCO which is impacted by several other attendant costs. On-site setup and up-front capital costs are not an issue because all services are cloud delivered, requiring no hardware or software expenditure, not even on the desktop. Cost saving is an on-going feature with PanTerra's Future Proof Guarantee which provides free of charge all maintenance, support and upgrades during the guarantee's tenure.

Flexible infrastructures are critical in today's world of commerce and companies with an intransigent attitude run the risk of early closure. Cloud-based UC solutions afford a business the adaptability and two-dimension scalability necessary for success. On-premise expenses stand eliminated as does the specter of obsolescence. PanTerra's 100% cloud based service requires no special on-premise hardware or software without in any way compromising client data security. Its UC solutions and services can be deployed at the click of a mouse and, since the data is 100% cloud storage, with nothing installed or secured on the desktop, secure communication access is available from anywhere on Planet Earth.

All PanTerra's services are backed by a Service Level Agreement (SLA) which provides a customer with security and satisfaction and is comparable with the best in the industry. With a 99.99% uptime guarantee on voice services, a customer is assured that all services are up and running whenever required, leaving you to focus on growing and expanding your business instead of dealing with communications snafus and systems.

PanTerra is the best choice for cloud-based unified communications because they boast telecommunications experience, offer the highest level Quality of Service and monitor carriers and datacenters 24 hours a day, 365 days a week. These features set PanTerra apart from other cloud-based UC providers. PanTerra's services are ideal for your business. You can outsource your unified communications with PanTerra and be confident that you are receiving a quality service for a remarkable price.

About PanTerra Networks

PanTerra Networks, Inc. delivers the most comprehensive cloud-based unified communications service through its Streams solution. Streams makes companies more competitive by making them more responsive and includes all services and unlimited usage for unified business communications including voice, unified messaging, fax, video, instant messaging, email and calendaring, file transfer, mobile text messaging and presence integrated into its Unified Command Center (UCC). Streams also includes group communications including desk sharing, web conferencing, IM conferencing, and audio conferencing. Streams also integrates with Outlook and Salesforce as well as other commonly used CRMs through its included application programmers interface (API) enabling communication-enabled business process (CEBP) environments to flourish.

Being fully cloud-based, Streams stores all your communications in the cloud, allowing you to access them with just an Internet connection and browser. The company is privately held and is headquartered in Santa Clara, California, with Research and Development based in Hyderabad, India.

For more information, please visit <http://www.panterranetworks.com> or call us at +1 800.805.0558. Or email us at info@panterranetworks.com.

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