i7 Technologies Limited

NFON
Cloud Telephone System

Securing a competitive edge with cloud communications.
How adopters of cloud services can exploit their advantages over competitors.

The new freedom in business communications.

It has often been said that technology is an enabler – setting people and organisations free to improve what they do and how they do it. But for every business liberated by technology, another experiences inertia. Time gained versus time lost. Money saved versus money wasted. Opportunities taken versus opportunities missed. Winners versus losers.

That's because not everyone has adopted the ideal cloud communications service. And until they do, users of communications services will be distinguished by their competitiveness and agility – whether their choice of cloud communications gives them freedom or whether they remain constrained to the old ways, to an inferior standard.

This white paper explores the competitive advantages that can only arise from the adoption of the optimum cloud communications services. What kind of service and service provider delivers the greatest benefits? And what can organisations do to ensure they gain those benefits and exploit competitive advantages over those yet to be granted their freedom?

The competitive advantages of cloud communications services.

The catalyst for digital transformation

The most competitive organisations have the agility to branch out into new directions whenever market opportunities arise. These are the leaders in digital transformation – using the latest technology to improve their business fortunes.

Businesses that embrace cloud communications services are best placed to join them. By harnessing a communications capability that knows no boundaries, these businesses can make digital transformation a tangible reality, rather than a vague aspiration.

Cloud communications services let users use the equipment they want and operates in a technology environment that caters to mobile, remote and office-bound workers on multiple devices, from wherever they are.

Best of all, the services can integrate directly with critical applications and systems, and evolve with new technologies, enabling businesses to be agile enough to respond to market forces faster than the competition.

38 per cent of traditional enterprises and 55 per cent of start-ups have already adopted a digital business strategy.
DX Latest, 2018

Less risk and simple to operate

Cloud communications services let organisations eliminate the risk of technology obsolescence by removing the need to buy and operate infrastructure. They also shift the risk of downtime and disruption onto the service provider, where business continuity safeguards and expertise are greatest and away from the customer, where they are most limited.

Instant access to the latest features and updates are made seamlessly and automatically, while deployment and administration is plug and play. Compare this to legacy approaches that distract scarce IT team resources and necessitate third-party skills for maintenance and training.

With cloud communications, businesses can spend just minutes tending to their technology – never enough to be drawn away from business as usual – and have full control over their phone system without physically being in the office. IT pros are freed up to spend more time on new digital initiatives that take the business forward.

61 per cent of organisations say technology is a barrier to successful internal communications.
Gatehouse, 2018

Lower costs and no billing surprises

All cloud services promote business agility by rewriting the rules of technology procurement and significantly reducing capital expenditures. Cloud communications services are no different and are typically based on a simple, transparent per-user monthly subscription.

From a budgeting perspective, cloud communications services are everything that legacy phone systems are not. While legacy approaches suffer from high upfront costs and often unpredictable charges, cloud communications services do not. No infrastructure, no maintenance costs and hardly any training are required.

All this means a lower total cost of ownership and the ability to simplify budgeting and make fast business decisions based on predictable outgoings. Can the competition say that?

A conventional PBX system costs €800–€1,200 per employee over its lifetime, plus €2,300 upfront to install and €700 per year to maintain.
Market Inspector, 2018

Motivated, energised and connected users

To satisfy the need for continual improvements in efficiency and output, it's important to find opportunities for greater workforce productivity. This rests upon giving employees and other users the features and flexibility they need to impose personal working styles, patterns and practices – independent of device and location.

The world of work is changing – and fast. Without cloud communications services, businesses simply don't have the latitude to enable positive changes to working practices, not without expensive and disruptive changes to their communications' infrastructure.

Cloud communications services are designed to accommodate remote workers and enhance employee mobility options – making workers happier, more productive and better equipped to contribute. You want dynamic people, right? So give them the tools to be dynamic, or risk the best ones choosing to go work somewhere else.

95 per cent of millennials believe productivity is important to happiness.

Microsoft, 2017

Completely secure and reliable

Using a true cloud communications service means being part of something much bigger: something that delivers uptime and safeguards that the average organisation could never afford without using cloud services. While competitors worry about business continuity and the risks of technical failure, your business can plan its future according to continuous operations and high-performance metrics – and enjoy far-greater system reliability.

No evaluation of communications' reliability and uptime could be complete without considering data security – the challenge of preventing data loss, malicious attacks and regulatory compliance failure. Some may argue that an on-site private solution – the legacy alternative to a cloud communications service – is the only way to achieve data security and compliance. But this places an unsustainable burden on all but the very largest of organisations.

Cloud communications services that harness encryption technology, geo-redundancy and the highest recognised international standards for information security can provide all the protection a business needs – at zero incremental cost.

34 per cent of companies cite cybersecurity as a barrier to digital transformation.

Harvard Business Review, 2017

Building a business case for an organisation becoming more competitive with cloud communications.

Transformation and change should always spell opportunity. Yet the wrong communications platform can hold businesses back. Consider the following change scenarios and how cloud communications can empower businesses to confront them as successfully as possible.

Office expansion

Hiring more people means a bigger office or moving to new premises. Additional users will need additional extensions and will need to be trained on how to use them. A company may wish to support hot-desking and more flexible working spaces to make the best use of available space.

Yet legacy phone systems don't like change. At the very least, you face a major project which will consume many hours of admin time. You may even need to completely re-architect or upgrade the phone system infrastructure to cope with the added scale demands.

The contrast with cloud communications services is like night and day. Scaling up is easy because there is no hardware or software infrastructure to manage. You can deploy additional users in minutes, and users need minimal training because it's so simple to use.

Additional offices

Adding additional sites to a legacy phone system might not be possible without buying a new hardware platform to run at each location. Even after navigating that issue, you still need to bring new users and numbers into the corporate phone directory so that the communications experience is consistent for users and seamless to the outside world.

Cloud communications services means no geographic restrictions and no 'truck rolls' to send infrastructure and expertise to remote sites. All extensions are just extensions, regardless of where they are. Managing the process is incredibly simple – even the handsets will configure themselves automatically.

Country expansion

If it sounds challenging to expand or open up additional offices with legacy infrastructure – try adding international growth into the mix. Prepare for possible import restrictions on hardware, new system specifications and other local differences from country to country – everything from electrical power input to environmental controls and emergency calls.

Cloud communications services know no boundaries, but it is wise to ensure that the provider can ensure consistency of reliable and secure service in each country. This is assured with the choice of an international cloud communications service provider with applicable market presence and service-level agreements (SLAs).

Everyday changes

Sometimes the smallest changes can be the most vexing, especially when they add up to an ongoing workload of 10, 20 or 100 minor events that have to be managed every week. Living with a legacy phone system can be an exhausting experience of repetitive admin tasks, each taking valuable time away from more important duties.

Managing a cloud communications service is completely different. Enjoy administration from anywhere, plug-and-play deployment alongside the existing phone infrastructure and zero-touch hardware auto-provisioning. And as it's a service, the business will receive free updates for life!

Competitiveness audit

Get a taste for the digital transformation opportunity your business can achieve through cloud communications by auditing the competitiveness that the current system provides.

This is not a technical assessment, yet it will help confront the challenges and obstacles caused by legacy technology and how these can be alleviated by a modern communications platform.

With legacy communications solutions, employees are often prevented from being productive unless they are at their desk. This is a poor return on the potential of staff, who increasingly seek to achieve a better work–life balance by working from home, or have high expectations for working from mobile devices. This problem only grows with the younger generations coming into the workplace.

Questions to ask	
1	Are employees happy with the flexibility we currently provide?
2	Is it expensive and disruptive to adapt a legacy solution to accommodate remote and home workers?
3	Is it challenging to recruit workers who expect to be equipped with modern communications capabilities?
4	Can our employees communicate quickly and efficiently, wherever they choose to work?
5	Could customer response times be shorter with a more flexible approach?

Legacy phone systems have a reliability problem – frequently failing, interrupting operations and impacting revenues. The older they get, the more frequent these problems become. Many systems require constant maintenance, which gets more and more expensive as legacy skills die out. Many organisations struggle to achieve regulatory compliance because their legacy communications solutions store data in unpredictable environments. All this drives up IT costs and causes frustration for technical teams.

Questions to ask
1 Are our communications tools always up and running to support our business?
2 How much does it affect our business when our communications function goes down without warning?
3 How long does it take to restore full functionality in the event of an outage?
4 Has our phone system become a 'money pit' of maintenance costs and fixes?
5 Is our communications data secure?
6 Does our communications solution comply with data protection regulations?
7 Are we satisfied with owning the responsibility of ensuring the continual uptime of our own phone system?

Instead of making life easier, having multiple phone numbers and communications tools can sometimes make it hard to communicate effectively. Employees fall behind with correspondence and miss important calls and messages. Customers – and even colleagues – waste valuable time tracking people down.

Questions to ask
1 Does our phone system make communications intuitive and simple?
2 Must every user have multiple passwords and logins for different communications tools?
3 Can employees decide how they want to be reached, with just one click?
4 How often do customers get frustrated with not being able to find someone?
5 Are we able to identify priority calls and ensure they get answered?

Setting new expectations

The results of the audit should provide a strong sense of how much further the business has to move before communications' capabilities enable genuine competitiveness. Whatever the expectations were previously, you may need to aim higher. If competitors' aspirations are higher – and they can achieve them – then your business may be left behind.

Flexibility and independence of communications

Imagine the benefits of modern, joined-up communications that enable quick interactions between employees, wherever they are working.

Give employees the ability to use their desktop phones, mobile devices or web browsers to stay in touch at the office, from home or on the move. This will speed up communications, let the business react to new opportunities faster and generate higher revenues. Aspire to offer the best flexible working arrangements to staff – making them happier, more productive and loyal.

To keep costs down, remote workers need to be able to connect quickly and simply, with no extra hardware. When employees can access enterprise-grade communications features from their mobile devices, PCs and laptops, it saves money on additional desk phones.

Reliable, secure and compliant communications

Insist on a communications solution built on fully redundant infrastructure and network connections to eliminate single points of failure. Mitigate risks with end-to-end data protection, audited by trusted third-party security experts.

Store communications data in fully compliant EU data centres. Only then can you be sure the service complies with EU data storage and management rules, minimising the risk of regulatory fines and reputational damage.

And give up on building and supporting all this yourself. With experts backing the service up with 24/7 support, IT can work more efficiently and productively for the business.

Communications that are easy and intuitive to use and manage

Simplify everything for users with a single phone number for every employee – enabling them to be reached wherever they are, on any device. Connecting with employees faster maximises productivity and delights customers. Provide a user interface that makes communicating as simple as possible – and with advanced PBX tools.

Make managing and administering communications easier too, reducing frustration and stress for system admins. Give them less physical infrastructure to look after and an intuitive toolset for adding and managing users to make the whole experience faster and easier.

Planning the migration from a legacy PBX to a cloud PBX.

While start-up organisations can immediately accelerate their growth with cloud communications services, older businesses may have legacy systems to migrate away from. The good news is that, with a little planning and the right approach, this can be very straightforward. Will switching from the legacy phone system to cloud communications be worth the effort? Yes, when you realise just how fast and simple it will be.

The ISDN switch-off

While many are drawn to the attractive benefits of cloud communications services, others feel compelled to act because ISDN services are being withdrawn by their service provider.

All the major incumbent operators have either decommissioned their ISDN service infrastructure already or are implementing a strategy to do so by the 2020s.

This Europe-wide phenomenon from ISDN to all IP is a major driver for the uptake of cloud communications services, which is consistent with a wider trend for the adoption of cloud computing and related IT services.

Upfront considerations

Whatever the deciding factors and context, consider the following:

Conduct a needs analysis

Take the opportunity to understand exactly what the business needs from a cloud communications service – don't assume it's the same as the system set-up you are migrating away from.

Think about reusing equipment

You won't need the legacy PBX system any more, yet existing handsets and other devices could be put to good use with cloud communications services. This will save money as well as being environmentally friendly.

Align processes

Communications are essential to business workflows and processes, yet the business may have suffered from years of using an inflexible legacy system that reduced efficiency and productivity. Map these out and get input and buy-in from all stakeholders.

Try before buying

Don't contemplate a cloud communications service without trialling it first. There are a variety of service providers out there with different capabilities. Ensure you are getting an accurate picture of running the full service before committing.

The action plan

Let's assume you've chosen the preferred cloud communications service. Here is a four-step action plan to ensure that migration is completely non-disruptive and delay-free.

1. Document present and projected status

Collate basic data about present and projected communications usage. This will be essential when transferring from the incumbent provider to the new service.

Details should include:

> Names and locations/addresses of each user.

> List of telephone numbers, correlated to user.

> Details of telecom service provider/s, related to which users/numbers.

> Who at the organisation is authorised to make changes to services held with the incumbent provider?

> Details of any users with exceptional requirements (e.g. users who make very large numbers of international calls as part of their job).

If you keep an IT asset register, use it to list what devices have been provided to which staff. Otherwise, conduct a quick survey of what kind of personally owned devices they use for work purposes. The cloud communications provider should be able to provide softphones that work with major device operating systems to enable maximum workforce mobility.

2. Assess current network infrastructure

Some organisations migrating from legacy TDM PBX systems may not have considered the minimum network requirements that all cloud communications services need to meet to operate effectively.

Check what the chosen service provider recommends in terms of:

> Internet bandwidth to each site.

> Network throughput performance of the core LAN infrastructure, as well as the WAN (network infrastructure connecting up your various sites, if applicable).

> Similarly, for any Wi-Fi infrastructure, if you plan to use this to support voice communications.

> The correct configuration of modems, routers, switches and firewalls to enable QOS (quality of service) and VoIP prioritisation.

> Power over Ethernet, to enable handsets to operate without separate power and connectivity cables.

> The quality of existing cabling within each site.

If the current infrastructure does not satisfy the minimum requirements, you will need to make improvements so that a cloud communications service can become a viable alternative.

3. Motivate and prepare staff

Use of a modern, effective communications platform has been proven to deliver increased productivity, enhanced customer service levels and greater business agility. Hence, employees have good reason to be positive about using a cloud communications service, especially when it helps them work in whichever way they want.

However, some staff find change uncomfortable. The key is to focus on the benefits rather than the underlying technology. Demonstrate how they can use cloud capabilities to the collective advantage of the business, and encourage them to collaborate and experiment with ways of using it to improve workflows and business processes.

Getting staff engaged at the migration stage is vital for maximising adoption and shows them how the cloud service helps them become more productive.

4. Make transition day a success

Migrations shouldn't take long to get organised and executed. Yet, like with any business change, it helps to be prepared and keep everyone within the business informed.

Ensure that you have:

- Communicated the timing of the migration to all affected staff and third parties.

- Designated an individual to take delivery of any new handsets associated with the migration to avoid delays. For multiple sites, prime a designated individual at each.

- Bookmarked service portals for easy reference and circulated relevant documentation to admins and users.

- Informed your email provider to whitelist inbound traffic from the cloud communications service provider to ensure you don't inadvertently block important services notifications or treat new IP ranges as untrusted.

Choosing the right service provider.

The marketplace for cloud communications services can be hard to navigate, even for experienced IT professionals. The challenge is made harder when providers often present contradictory marketing claims and vague service descriptions. In any case, it would be unwise to proceed with a provider without first conducting a trial.

Arranging a trial – or multiple trials with multiple providers – should be a quick and easy process which provides an accurate picture of how a full deployment would work in practice.

Walk away if the trial is not straightforward to undertake or does not offer useful and required insights.All trials should be free, last for at least two weeks and be offered on a no-obligation basis. Use the following items to narrow down the candidates for trialling.

Market position and reputation

Choose a provider with an established market presence and good reputation. Cloud communications services are used across every vertical market sector, yet not all providers will understand or have a strong customer base in the industry.

Questions to ask
1 Does the provider have a positive reputation?
2 Can it reference any independent awards and/or quality certifications?
3 Can it name organisations from the same industry sector as yours as customers? Can it arrange for you to speak with them?
4 Does it have a low customer churn rate?
5 What, if any, industry-specific features or applications are available in support of its core cloud communications service?

Pricing model and charges

Providers' pricing structures should be able to support simple, predictable and transparent budgeting. Many advanced communications capabilities should be available as standard, without hidden costs and long lists of complex add-ons.

Questions to ask
1 Does the provider's service require the purchase of dedicated hardware or software?
2 How are charges accounted for? Do you only pay for what you actually use?
3 Is the cost structure simple and inclusive of most or all available features?
4 Are all costs predictable and transparent?
5 Are feature updates included free of charge?
6 Is the pricing competitive with market rates?
7 Do service roll-outs typically require additional budget, e.g. project management, training and professional services?

Reliability, security and risk

The choice of provider must live up to a significant responsibility to support the continual uptime of business communications and support the business in meeting regulatory compliance requirements.

Questions to ask
1 What types of SLAs does the service provider offer? Is the minimum standard acceptable to the organisation's needs?
2 What measures are in place to ensure the provider can continue to deliver the required standard of service in the event of a catastrophic, unplanned disruption to its core infrastructure?
3 Where are the servers located? Do they comply with the relevant regulations? Is redundancy built in at multiple levels, or could there be single points of failure?
4 Is the QOS independently audited and verified?
5 Does the provider have a strong approach to data protection and end-to-end security?

Scalability

One of the standout advantages of cloud technology is near-limitless scalability. However, don't assume that all providers will be able to support this seamlessly or affordably.

	Questions to ask
1	Can extensions be added/removed quickly to scale?
2	If the business were to double in size, would the provider be able to continue service without re-architecting your telephony infrastructure or compromising its service levels?
3	Can you anticipate the future costs of using more cloud communications services based solely on the increased number of users?
4	Does the provider have enough experience, service staff and resources to handle the needs of large organisations that may be expanding internationally?
5	Does the provider offer additional services to support expansion?

Ease of management

The best cloud communications services offer flexible management interfaces that make it simple to operate and administer. Your expectation should be for a service that requires a low level of input for configuration, deployment and ongoing adds, moves and changes.

	Questions to ask
1	Is it easy for admins to monitor, manage and report? Is extensive training required?
2	Is any development work needed to implement the service?
3	Is deployment plug and play?
4	Can existing handsets be reused as part of the service?
5	Does the provider require manual provision of handsets? Or can they be auto-provisioned for zero touch?
6	Does it automate all feature updates to the service or is manual intervention required?
7	Can most admin functions be easily undertaken without requests to the provider?
8	Are the provider's support resources sufficiently skilled, available and responsive?
9	Are you able to view real-time status of the service, including planned maintenance?

Integration and customisation

Communications are integral to business processes so it is vital that your choice of cloud communications service has the flexibility to enable integration with adjacent systems and customisation to specific needs.

Questions to ask	
1	Does the provider publish APIs?
2	Does it offer sufficient configurability and customisation to integrate with other communications processes?
3	Does it support CTI (computer telephony integration)? Call-recording applications? Contact centre monitoring and analysis?
4	Does it support Microsoft Teams integration without the need for costly development projects and extra licensing costs?
5	Does it integrate with industry CRM applications such as Salesforce.com?

User experience

Choose the service that users will engage with so that full adoption can be achieved quickly and successfully. Empower them with freedom to communicate, independent of device and location. And make it easy for users to maximise their productivity.

Questions to ask	
1	Does the service support all required end devices, including mobile?
2	Are all common device platforms supported?
3	Is the user interface intuitive? Is the experience consistent across all platforms?
4	Is detailed user training necessary?
5	Does the service enable users to consolidate onto a single phone number, across communications devices?

Features and capabilities

Apply your understanding of current and future communications requirements and match this against those on offer from providers. Basic feature sets should be of a high standard, and you also need to be confident that the provider is able to future-proof the service, enabling new and enhanced features over time.

Questions to ask	
1	Does the provider deliver more than just the basic cloud PBX features within its standard service offering?
2	Has it succeeded in innovating and improving its service offering over time?
3	Does it have the internal development resources to continue innovating new features and capabilities in response to customer needs and market changes?
4	Are you confident that it can provide a future-proof communications platform?

About NFON AG.

i7 Technologies Limited

Headquartered in Munich, NFON AG is the only pan-European cloud PBX provider – counting more than 30,000 companies across 14 European countries as customers. NFON, the cloud telephone system, offers over 150 functions as well as a seamless integration of premium solutions. With our intuitive communications solutions, we enable European companies to improve their work a little, every single day. NFON is the new freedom of business communication.

☑ **Cloud solution 'made in Germany'**

€ **High savings potential**

▫ **Unlimited capacity**

⚙ **Intelligent functions**

👤 **Easy to use**

👥 **Network of local service partners**

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