

A Techaisle Cloud Calling & Collaboration SMB Buyer's Guide

# SMB Cloud Collaboration

A Management Checklist for the  
New Era of Work



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## Seven Management Considerations for the New Era of Work

### The flexible work revolution shifting into overdrive

**93% of SMBs have prioritized remote and hybrid workplace technology solution adoption.**

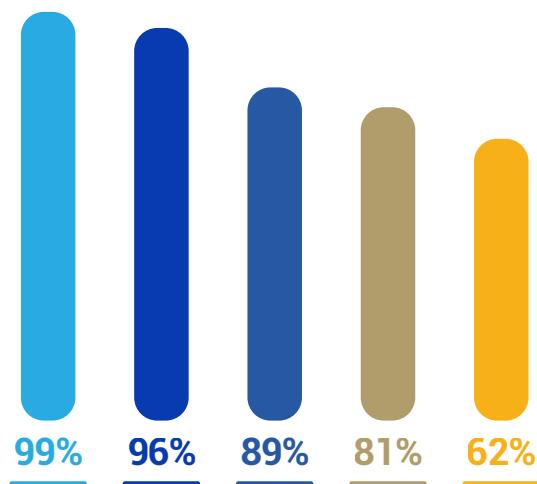
Historically, remote work solutions have been the domain of large enterprises equipped with processes and technology resources needed to support workers in the field. However, driven by both short and longer-term factors, flexible work options are now available to employees in businesses of all sizes. Moreover, as social distance health requirements forced the temporary closure of public office spaces, remote work became a matter of survival for many organizations. The pandemic has also served to crystalize recognition of the productivity benefits of technology-enabled remote work – measured in output rather than hours – which is sure to have a profound and durable impact on workplace behaviors.

**58% of employees in the SMB segment are likely to work remotely.**

Today, work from anywhere is the new normal, enabled by powerful communication and collaboration tools, which draw together workers regardless of physical location, and which are becoming the catalyst for change in large and smaller businesses alike.

What are the primary enablers of this flexible work trend? Data shows a growing commitment to leveraging the power of the cloud and adjacent technologies of mobility, cloud calling, and collaboration - technologies that allow workers and teams to connect, reflect, and share insights and output.

### Top SMB IT Priorities



Cloud

Collaboration

Security Solutions

Mobility

Cloud Communications

Source:

Techaisle SMB and Midmarket Technology adoption survey, N=2135

## Cloud is a top IT priority for SMBs

### 99% of SMBs have prioritized cloud adoption.

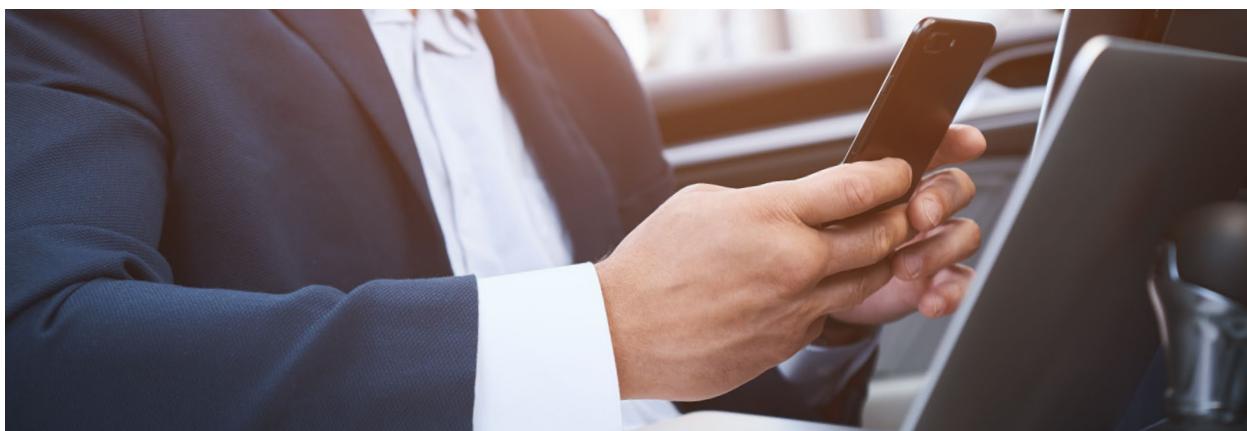
Why are SMBs embracing cloud-based resources? What is driving them to invest in cloud services? The answer lies in the fact that the cloud addresses real-world issues for an SMB organization. SMBs are sometimes seen as "small fish" in a pond that is also home to much larger creatures. They know or have at least a sense of being reactive to change: when business lags, when orders grow sparse, when supplier costs increase, or when the competitive environment changes. The cloud offers direct relief for several of these issues. In a genuine sense, the cloud delivers a degree of certainty and control over cost/performance and time. Cloud infrastructure and applications can be deployed rapidly, shrinking the time between decision and benefit. The cloud's costing model associates payments with use, and the analytics embedded in cloud systems can be used to evaluate and help further reduce business uncertainty.

Cloud is not only an essential IT infrastructure, but it is also an essential business infrastructure. Cloud calling and collaboration are crucial pillars of the business infrastructure of the SMB workforce in the new normal.

## Mobility is empowering the SMB workforce

### 81% of SMBs are adopting mobility solutions.

Windows and walls and common-area couches don't define the workspace anymore. For millions of SMB employees, the "workspace" isn't a physical location – it's a virtual space defined by access from multiple screens used from multiple locations. The increased capability of mobile technology has made it possible for employees to move their "workspaces" to wherever the work takes them – anywhere, anytime. Techaisle's research shows that worldwide 300 million SMB mobile workers use the cloud, mobility, and collaboration to connect with co-workers, suppliers, customers, and partners. Interestingly, this commitment is likely to survive post-pandemic workforce planning.



## Small businesses

### PRE-PANDEMIC



of employees worked from home

### NEW NORMAL



of employees are likely to work  
remotely

## Midmarket businesses

### PRE-PANDEMIC



of employees worked from home

### NEW NORMAL



of employees are likely to work  
remotely

Source: Techaisle SMB and Midmarket Technology adoption survey, N=2135

Not surprisingly, the SMB segment has proved an early adopter of remote work practices. For example, in the pre-pandemic period, **29%** of employees in the small business segment worked from home, compared with **9%** for midmarket organizations. However, these differences dissolve in the face of questions around the post-pandemic workforce setup. Additionally, over **60%** of small and midmarket businesses combined in each size category intend to return employees to the office as soon as it is safe to do so. These results suggest openness to flexible workforce options.

In this context, the simultaneous commitment to cloud calling and collaboration solutions and future planning around a return to the office suggest that something deeper is at play in the SMB communications solution marketplace.

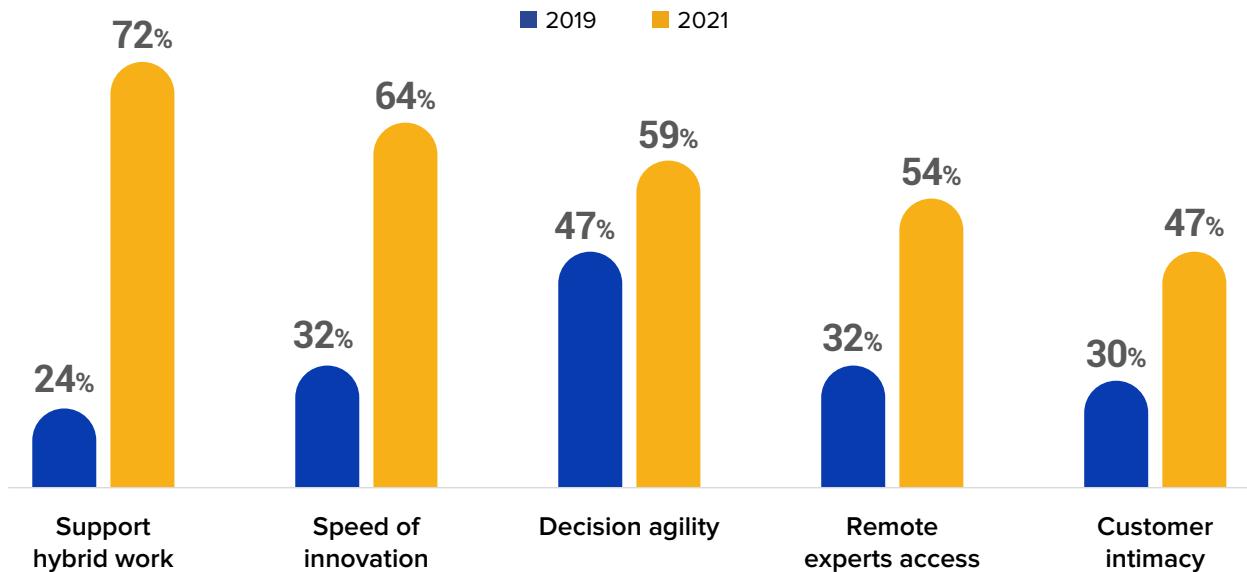
## Cloud calling and Collaboration are central components to virtually all SMB business activities

**79% of SMBs are prioritizing cloud-based communication and collaboration solutions which shows evolving recognition of the value of cloud calling and collaboration.**

The need to communicate anywhere, anytime, also means any type of communication and collaboration – synchronous/asynchronous, serendipitous/scheduled, on-the-go/fixed location, within a virtual workspace/within a specific app, with employees/partners/customers. As the lines of demarcation between tasks have been eroded by the increased pace and changing nature of business activities, SMBs have moved past linking discrete actions through linear, sequential processes. Instead, in today's business environment, SMBs interact at all points in the business cycle: in cross-functional planning and management, within a single co-created document, in the stages and connection points defined by their business processes, in delivering better customer experiences and enabling improved employee productivity.

For many SMBs, buying decisions for collaboration solutions are influenced by a complex mix of factors, including budget, existing technology investment, refresh cycles, end-user maturity, and organizational

## Cloud communication and collaboration solution adoption drivers



Source: Techaisle SMB and Midmarket Hybrid work and collaboration adoption survey, N=1810

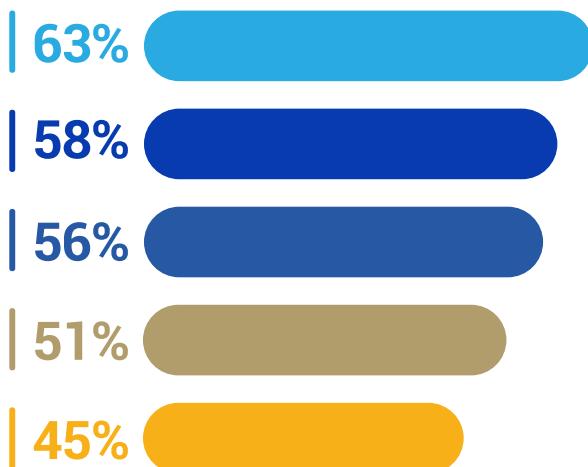
culture, which play into technology needs assessment. However, a shift in perspective is underway as SMBs view technology increasingly to achieve business outcomes that better position the organization in the competitive landscape. This shift is apparent in emerging drivers for adopting collaboration solutions.

From 2019 – 2021, the most significant change occurred in the adoption of collaboration technology to support hybrid work where the employee may work on-site or offsite, and at times that are most productive for the worker. As the data shows, SMBs are also turning to collaboration as a crucial business enabler: over this challenging two-year period, **26%** more organizations identify decision agility as an adoption driver, **57%** more identify customer intimacy, **69%** more focus on access to remote experts, while the proportion of SMBs associating collaboration with improved speed of innovation as the source of value in collaboration solutions increased by **100%**. Thus, while the pandemic has provided an undeniable impetus to a shift towards cloud collaboration solutions, SMBs increasingly view technology as a source of business value.

## The value of unified cloud calling and collaboration

The use of traditional collaboration tools by SMBs is well-established. However, cloud calling solutions are rapidly gaining attention from SMBs. With nearly a hundred percent cloud priority, the shift from on-prem solutions (acquired through CAPEX budget) to cloud-based as-a-service offerings creates a sort of inflection point. As the name implies, cloud calling is cloud-based and available as a subscription. It supports remote work and mobility, provides cash flow predictability, is easily integrated within the employees' workspace, and improves IT manageability and efficiency.

## Reasons for using cloud calling solutions



Location independent deployment

As a service avoids capital lock in

Predictable cost

Integrated end-to-end security

Integration with cloud business apps

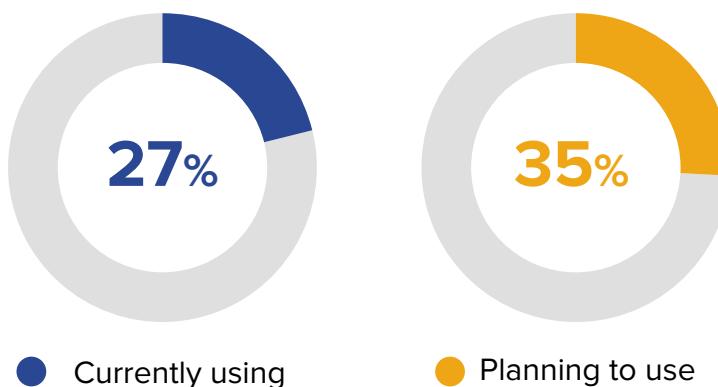
**Source:** Techaisle SMB and Midmarket collaboration adoption survey, N=1730

All the data and insights presented in this paper point to SMBs adopting an integrated approach, such as UCaaS. UCaaS is a cloud-delivered unified communications platform that supports telephony, meetings (audio/video/web conferencing), unified messaging, IM and presence, mobility, and communications-enabled business processes.

A significant collaboration technology shift is SMB's use of a cloud-based communications platform with integrated telephony (audio/video/web conferencing), IM/chat/presence, unified messaging and mobility. Techaisle data shows, today, just under a third (**27%**) of SMBs are using integrated solutions, while over a third (**35%**) plan to adopt the platform in the coming year, a likely adoption growth of over **100%**.

How specifically is a unified communication solution helping to support these SMB business leaders?

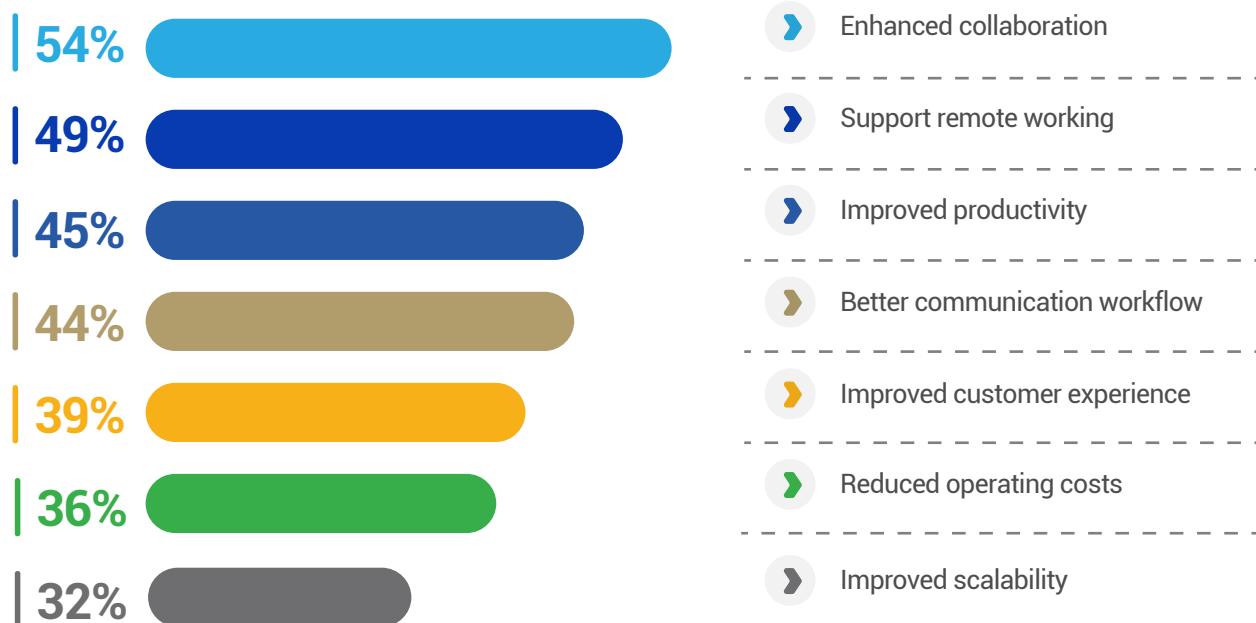
### SMB current and planned adoption of integrated communications and collaboration solutions, UCaaS



**Source:** Techaisle SMB and Midmarket collaboration adoption survey, N=1730

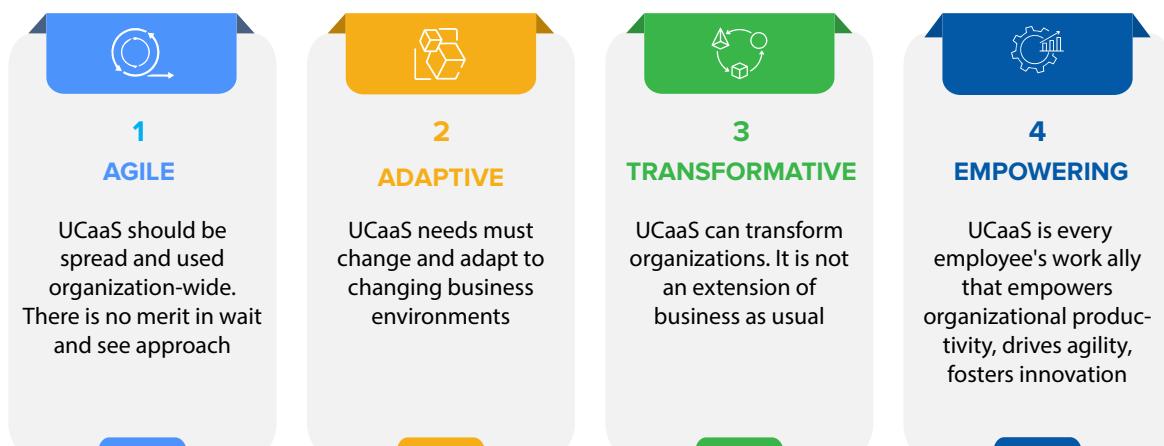
Approximately 45% of SMBs identify productivity as a critical challenge, and integrated communication technology solutions address this challenge. Another crucial issue for the SMB is cost. As SMBs look to reduce overall operational costs, they turn to integrated communication - UCaaS - to help solve this problem. Ultimately, UCaaS provides a toolkit that enables SMB executives to pursue the more broadly-based business challenges that have been outlined as critical by SMBs, including attracting and retaining new customers and increasing business growth and profitability.

## SMB – Reasons for using UCaaS



Source: Techaisle SMB and Midmarket collaboration adoption survey, N=1730

## UCaaS is an essential pillar for future-ready SMB – critical facts that every SMB should know

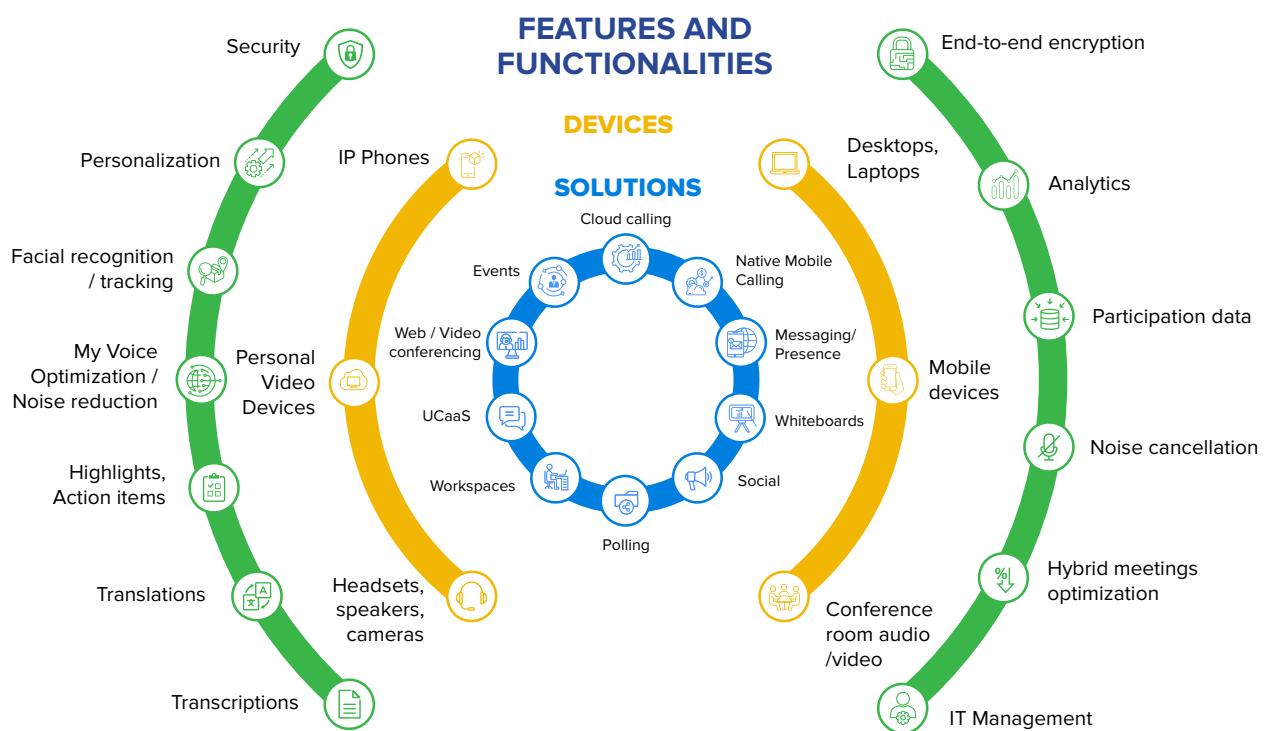


Source: Techaisle

## The Webex integrated collaboration platform

Techaisle survey research data shows that communication and collaboration (UCaaS), by its nature, connects multiple people in the performance of a shared task. It is not a discrete category. It is a technology framework that connects employees and customers and suppliers. Holistically, there are three layers to the framework. The inner layer is the solution layer, the software solution enabler from chat to voice to video. It includes asynchronous functions like file annotation and sharing and synchronous activities like simultaneous document editing. The second layer is the range of devices that have come into prominence in the last year. The outer-most is the evolution layer of enhancements to make communication smart, intelligent, adaptive, and flexible.

Cisco understands the need for a fully integrated collaboration platform. Its Webex Suite, Webex Devices, and Webex Go touch each layer of the framework and offer reduced complexity and choice to the SMB customer. Above all, its integrated admin portal offers SMB customers a holistic view of all the Webex services, including provisioned devices and services, detailed performance analytics and reporting, and the ability to configure security and compliance policies.



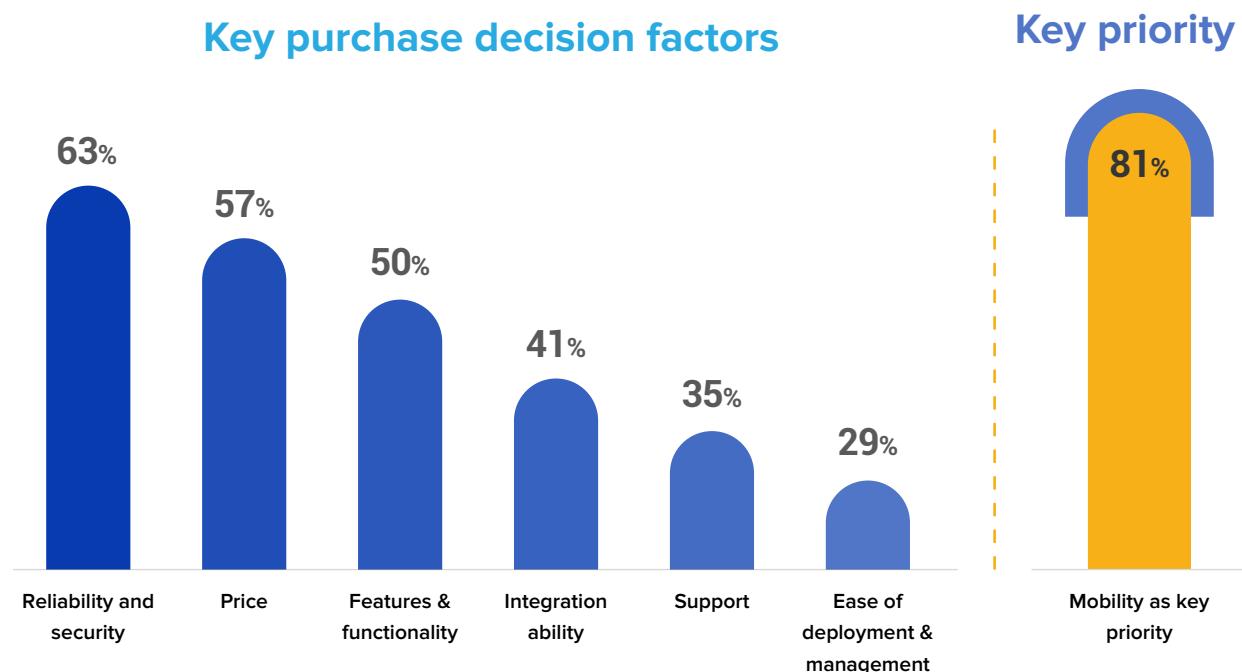
Source: Techaisle

## A management checklist for selecting a communications and collaboration solution

In evaluating investment strategies and priorities for communication and collaboration technologies, SMB executives must stay mindful of the differences between events, trends, and supplier offerings. For example, the data presented in this white paper demonstrates that SMBs have been investing in an ever-richer set of technologies.

The pandemic, hopefully, was a limited-duration event that forced a spike in communication and collaboration tool deployment and use within businesses of all sizes. The gains realized from the forced acceleration of unified communications solution adoption are genuine and will reshape competitive opportunities and pressures for years to come.

As a result, SMB leaders should consider the following **seven strategic purchase decision factors of communication and collaboration technology** as they craft their go-forward strategies.



Source: Techaisle SMB and Midmarket Buyers journey survey, N=2135

### 1. Reliability and security

Webex is widely considered the most secure global cloud platform, with proven maturity and reliability.

- Geo-redundant data centers around the world provide 99.99% committed availability
- Maintains its own self-managed, dedicated global cloud platform optimized for real-time communications
- Security is a foundational element of the Webex platform, includes end-to-end encryption, extensive security controls for guest access, access to personal data, archiving and recording

## 2. Price

Webex offers affordable, predictable monthly billing for all business communications and custom plans for SMBs' needs, regardless of business size.

- Various plan levels for specific business needs
- Calling plans are available directly from Cisco or local PSTN partners
- The Webex App is free of charge with all plans providing messaging, presence, screen and document sharing, group and 1:1 workspace

## 3. Features and functionality

Webex combines calling, virtual meetings, messaging, sharing, and team collaboration to deliver a complete integrated collaboration experience.

- A single Webex App for seamless collaboration experience with persistent chat, file sharing, and whiteboarding with team members or customers
- Enterprise calling features on mobile or desktop with the ability to move a live call between devices and elevate a call to a meeting.
- Enterprise-grade telephone service including phone numbers for every user, unlimited local and domestic calling
- Intelligence such as AI-based background noise removal

## 4. Integration ability

Webex includes seamless integration with many popular business apps

- Microsoft and Google directory integration
- Integration with all popular business apps – Microsoft Office 365, Google Workspace, Salesforce, ServiceNow, Box, plus hundreds of others
- Feature-rich, integrated, and reliable IP phones, headsets, and video collaboration devices

## 5. Support

Webex includes seamless integration with many popular business apps.

- 24-hour support from Cisco included (Free plan is online support; all others are chat and call-in support with Enterprise plans - those higher than 100 seats - offering dedicated support representatives)

## 6. Ease of deployment and management

Webex has a simple setup and management which allows instant scale with easy onboarding/off-boarding.

- Quickly scale up or down as business evolves with a single integrated portal to configure and manage user profiles, features, and permissions
- Add and configure phone numbers in minutes with Webex Calling plans
- Complete performance monitoring and analytics through the integrated admin portal

## 7. Seamless mobility

Full business calling and collaboration on the go are essential elements of hybrid work and mission-critical for many mobile-focused businesses. Webex delivers a completely optimized mobile experience.

- Webex Go provides the option to extend enterprise calling features to employees' mobile phones without the need for a separate app, with calls being charged directly to the business - eliminating the need for employee reimbursements
- Protect employee privacy by keeping their personal phone number separate from a business number
- Calls are routed over the mobile network with no need for data or Wi-Fi
- Webex also offers an easy-to-use App that keeps people and teamwork connected anytime, anywhere, on any device

## Webex Gets It

The essential aspect for purchasing and deploying any UCaaS solution is determining the vendor's depth, breadth, and integrated approach. Such solutions cannot be deployed on stand-alone platforms – they need to be viewed as a framework for integrating multiple capabilities native to multiple applications. Using stand-alone platforms is a good start, but the real benefit comes from combining multiple capabilities.

Webex checks off all the boxes of a management checklist to deliver a best-of-breed, single-vendor solution.

# techaisle

Techaisle is a global SMB, Midmarket, and Channel IT Market Research and Industry Analyst organization focused on simplifying, expanding, and growing clients' share in three of the most complex market segments. Techaisle's premise is that Go-to-Market strategies require insightful research, flexible data, and more in-depth analysis. Understanding the value of data consistency across markets to inform strategic planning, Techaisle is holistic in its approach to insights and provides globally consistent analysis across geographies. Techaisle conducts in-depth surveys with end customers and channels to understand market trends, opportunities, buying behavior, purchase intent, and IT priorities. Besides covering topics such as cloud, managed services, mobility, IoT, virtualization, analytics, artificial intelligence, end-points, collaboration, HCI/converged infrastructure, security, and digital transformation, its channel research coverage provides an in-depth understanding of resellers and channel partners globally. Techaisle provides insights built on a robust data-driven foundation, and its analysts are conversant with primary research and industry knowledge, which is a rare combination. Techaisle offers its clients: Syndicated Research, Custom Primary Research, Consulting Engagement, and Competitive Intelligence.

 [www.techaisle.com](http://www.techaisle.com)  408-253-4416  [inquiry@techaisle.com](mailto:inquiry@techaisle.com)

 5053 Doyle Rd, Suite 105, San Jose, CA 95129