Supercharge Teams with Integrated Global Voice Communications Capabilities

Insight® · 8x8

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Introduction

In March 2020, hybrid working went from niche to normal in days, and it was the fastest change to our working behaviour we have ever seen. This unprecedented event has led to a shift in priorities – not just for individuals but also for organisations. For many organisations, the remote working experiment has been a success. According to a McKinsey survey, nine out of ten organisations will continue to combine remote and onsite working in the future.

Hybrid working is here to stay, so businesses need to focus on optimising their technology investments and delivering an appropriate level of business value. At the same time, organisations need to be mindful that their employees can effectively communicate and collaborate, thus ensuring increased productivity and a better workplace experience.

Are you suffering from 'tool sprawl'?

Tool sprawl is when organisations build their tool stack until it costs more money and time spent filtering through the tools than the return value. It is debilitating to organisations as it creates inefficiency across the entire development lifecycle.

We used to have separate physical devices for phone calls, email and chat, and video conferencing. Over time, communications become consolidated into a single physical form factor: a smartphone or a desktop computer.

And while the trend of "work from anywhere" continues to grow exponentially, we also recognise a second parallel trend where organisations aren't just expecting employees to communicate from any geographical location. They expect them to communicate from any contextual application as well. For instance, if you are a salesperson and spend your day in Salesforce.com (SFDC), you want to be able to make customer calls right from your SFDC application. You don't want to have to exit SFDC to make that call, and you want to use the application you are in to do your work. You may also like to have that call recorded and made available for later reference in the context of the respective customer or prospect.

People want additional capabilities. They don't want more tools.

So, if users have the communications capabilities in the tools they already use, they are more likely to take advantage of those capabilities. Whether they are the tools used for your business processes like Salesforce, ServiceNow, or Microsoft Teams, you want new functionality to be available in the most convenient context for the job you are doing at any one time.

We call out those three applications because they represent millions of active users every day. Microsoft Teams alone has 270 million[1] active daily users. And those users don't just need to communicate with other Teams users. Sometimes they must talk to people who are not using Microsoft Teams and need the convenience of making a phone call from Teams to a non-Teams user, anytime, anywhere in the world. User communications traverse geographical borders and cross contextual boundaries.

Communications strategy has become increasingly critical to every organisation. That may seem like a silly statement. Haven't communications always been critical? Of course, they have.

Forward-thinking organisations are not just implementing work from anywhere policies but broader work from anywhere strategies that also consider the importance of the convenience of communications within the context of how employees spend their time at work.

How to evaluate voice services for Microsoft Teams

Suppose you have standardised employee communications on Microsoft Teams. In that case, you are already thinking about how to streamline further and allow users to accept and make phone calls directly from the Teams user interface. They already spend a large part of their day in Teams collaborating and getting work done.

What kind of telephony coverage do you need?

The answer here may seem obvious. But the reality is that many voice services for Teams give you limited coverage of the worldwide public switched telephone network (PSTN).

If your business is primarily local, this may not be a problem, and you can use the services provided directly by Microsoft.

But suppose you require global reach or call centre/CRM integration. In that case, you need a more sophisticated solution that takes advantage of Microsoft Teams Direct Routing capabilities, connecting to worldwide PSTN networks. The good news is that sophisticated does not need to mean complicated.

Is it complicated to set up?

There are three main approaches to providing voice capabilities to Teams.

The first is to use a bot requiring users to learn new commands to initiate Team calls or join meetings. This approach disrupts the regular Teams workflow and creates user apathy and confusion. There are also user training implications of this approach. The administration can be complex because it requires installing and configuring those bots on every desktop or smartphone.

The second is with Microsoft Operator Connect, where an organisation can connect to their provider and assign numbers to their users through a Teams admin "Operators" tab.

However, Microsoft does not provide any commerce or billing capabilities within the Teams admin centre. You need to buy phone numbers directly from the participating operators before adding them to Teams and then manage separate commercial contracts with the operator.

The third is to use Microsoft Teams Direct Routing. This may be more complicated on the back end, but there is no reason your voice for Teams vendor should share that complexity with you. With a cloud vendor, you should expect no Teams downtime to bring voice services online or port telephone numbers, and users should be able to keep their existing phone numbers.

The bottom line is that when adding voice to a Microsoft Teams environment, you can have full functionality and low complexity of deployment.

Will it require user training?

Again there are three options.

Option One

Option One is the bot-based option discussed earlier. While typically less expensive or even free, this approach is onerous for the IT (Information Technology) administrator. It starts with a bot installation on the user's desktop and an associated 3rd party app on their mobile phone. If you have hundreds or even thousands of users, this option stretches IT resources. Users also need to learn new commands to make calls, disrupting the Teams user experience on the desktop and fragmenting the mobile experience. This approach requires additional user training for both devices adding further strain on IT. The result is confused users and excess calls to the IT support desk. Remember, bots require regular updates to support new Teams features and can cause service disruption if not updated on time. So while this might be a reasonable approach for small deployments, it is hazardous for larger implementations.

Option Two

Option Two is Operator Connect is an "operator-managed" service which allows enterprises to "bring their own carrier" or "operator" to power Teams calling. Remember that Operator Connect is relatively new, with few known challenges, but do you want to be among the first adopters? Calling in Teams is an institution at this point, and Operator Connect is just an improvement of Direct Routing, which has been a trusted option for years. Using Operator Connect also means you are tied to the operator you select. Generally, they cannot support complex communication requirements and may not have dedicated support staff to respond to difficult questions.

Option Three

Option Three is the direct routing approach that fully embeds telephony inside the Microsoft Teams app, desktop or mobile, lighting up the Microsoft Teams native dialler. It also enables native features like ring groups, calling queues, call forwarding, and voicemail. Users need no additional training for this approach. The downside? It is slightly more expensive on a per-user basis when compared with the bot or Operator Connect approach but results in much fewer end-user calls to the IT support desk. The bottom line is that this approach is designed for mid-market to enterprise-class organisations and is more cost-effective for mid to large-scale implementations with more complex needs.

Can I use Teams with my call centre software?

Suppose you have a call centre and are using Microsoft Teams. In that case, you will want to natively support ring groups and call queues and the ability to have full call analytics while your users are dialling from the Microsoft dialler. Consider how your call centre app and analytics are integrated with Teams.

As with any technology decision, you need to consider the pros and cons of each approach and how it fits your environment. Think about your needs first, and then determine which technological approach outlined above is best for your environment.

Introducing 8x8 Voice for Microsoft Teams

8x8 Voice for Microsoft Teams is a cloud-based direct routing solution providing global enterprise-grade telephony and a Microsoft Teams solution certified contact centre with a native Teams user experience. It removes the complexities of setting up on-premises equipment, SIP trunks or end-user software.

8x8 enhances the Teams user experience through better call quality, advanced phone and contact centre features, and economical calling plans that complement Teams-to-Teams calling, expanding Teams PSTN calling and customer engagement workflows globally.

Real-world success | Learn how companies have already supercharged their Microsoft Teams

The challenge

The client was a global transportation company headquartered in London. Employees used Microsoft Teams to speed international collaboration between colleagues, partners, and customers. Employees shared files on the go, stayed up-to-speed using chat, and connected face-to-face with one-click video calls to support and respond to dynamic customer needs.

Company leaders saw an opportunity to connect staff with third-party transport agencies and partners worldwide, leveraging their existing investment in training their employees to use Teams to communicate. Unfortunately, Microsoft calling plans were unavailable for the countries where the customer had offices.

The company decided to seek a third-party telephony provider for Teams to handle local and national numbers and PSTN calling services.

The requirements

As a global business, they required a single-vendor telephony provider, offering a one-stop shop for number porting, provisioning users, a single bill, local support, accessible across all their international operations. Most importantly, a native Teams user experience was vital for their users. They had already invested quite a bit in Teams and training their employees to use it. It was not an option to teach them to use a separate dialler, where they might have to constantly copy and paste phone numbers or <alt-tab> between applications. They wanted a seamless user experience.

Improved responsiveness helps manage customer expectations

The customer was an early adopter of the 8x8 Voice for Teams solution and used it to communicate globally with agencies and partners, securing efficient cargo transport to their destinations. Their staff are in daily contact with internal and external offices, transport authorities, and clients to coordinate the most economical transportation routes.

With 8x8 Voice for Teams, they can now connect a client in Malta, a sales manager in Chile, and a rail operator in Malaysia, all using 8x8 Voice for Microsoft Teams directly from the Teams interface to discuss transport routes and delivery lead times or status of shipments. Direct voice routing for Teams provides the flexibility their business needs. Now, their Teams users can make any number of calls to any destination with complete PSTN telephony replacement in 50 countries. They can use existing phone numbers ported to 8x8 or get new phone numbers, including national, local, and non-geographic numbers.

By improving responsiveness to customers and ensuring accurate on-time pick-up and delivery, this international transportation organisation can maintain strong customer relationships while minimising any disruption to how their employees work, thanks to the easy implementation and use of 8x8 Voice for Microsoft Teams.

Employee Experience

Earlier on, we discussed the importance of reducing the number of user interfaces your employees use to limit the frictional cost of context switching.

If your company uses Microsoft Teams as its primary communications tool, you don't want employees to have to leave Teams to use a 3rd party dialler such as 8x8.

Your employees' comfort is a priority, so the 8x8 solution looks like Microsoft Teams with a dialler.

That is the point. 8x8 built this unique solution, so you do not have to. When you receive a call, make a call, forward a call, put someone on hold, or have a call go into a calling queue or ring group; behind the scenes, it is handled by 8x8. But what do your users see? They see the native Microsoft Teams interface. The result? There are no retraining or special codes to learn. Your users keep using Teams as they always have done.
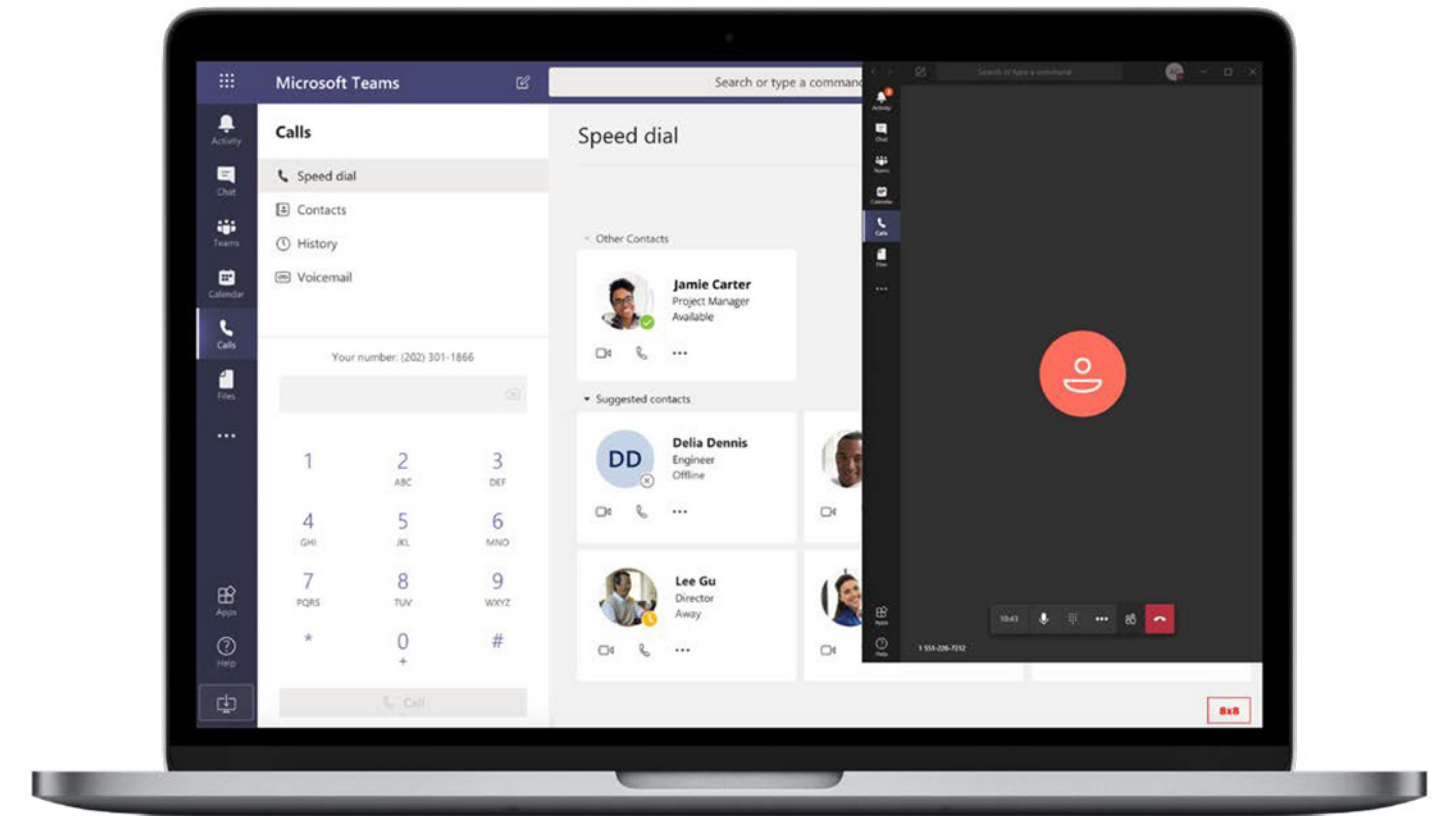
What about Mobile?

Once again, 8x8 has gone to great lengths to make our user experience your user experience. Or rather, your existing Microsoft Teams user experience.

Call centre integration, variable calling plans and worldwide connectivity.

The advantages go far beyond native dialler integration. With 8x8 supporting telephony through Microsoft Teams, you can now mix your calling plans with complete PSTN replacement in 50 countries. In addition, we have 35 globally redundant data centres that provide seamless connectivity and built-in disaster recovery.
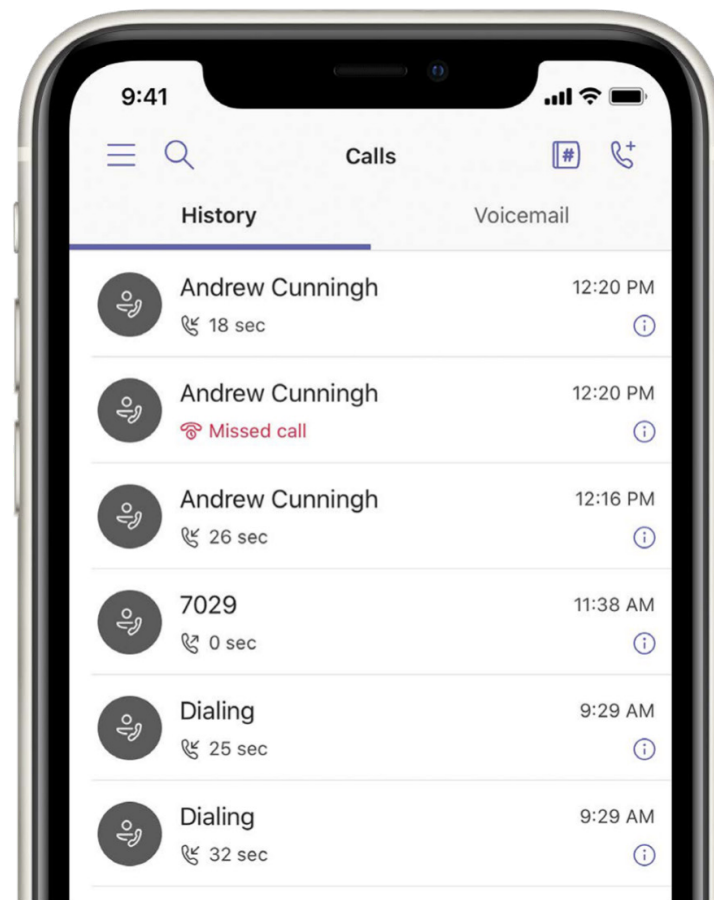
8x8 delivers the flexibility of virtual number support in over 120 countries. This includes adding national toll-free or geography-specific direct inward dial (DID) numbers and local emergency services. In addition, in a subset of over 40 key markets, 8x8 can also port existing numbers to its services. All numbers are enabled via Tier 1 carriers and provide distributed businesses and multinational organisations with the combination of robust connectivity and efficient call coverage worldwide.

Suppose you have a call centre and are using Microsoft Teams as well. In that case, we natively support ring groups and calling queues with full call reporting and advanced speech analytics while your users are dialling from Microsoft Teams. Once again, you do not have to worry about training your users on a new UI (User Interface).

Improving how your Microsoft Teams users communicate could not be easier than 8x8 Voice for Microsoft Teams.

Insight has extensive experience in driving value realisation from Microsoft Teams. We will help you build a culture of collaboration that empowers your employees while adhering to growing security and compliance requirements. We work closely with each client to understand their specific technical needs and requirements and provide an in-depth statement of work detailing our proposed solution.

Together with our partner, 8x8, we deliver sophisticated voice and telephony solutions and have vast experience with legacy PBX systems. This enables us to provide tailored, in-depth advice and assistance at every step, from pre-sales, design and architecture to implementation and support.

By integrating your telephony system with your internal collaboration software, such as Microsoft Teams, you can cut down on the number of channels your employees need to monitor and allow them to manage all their communications through a single app.

Benefits of 8x8 Voice for Microsoft Teams

- Risk-free, simple setup without changing the Teams user interface or user experience.

- Instant PSTN calls, faxes and easy access to 8x8 voice calling settings in Teams.

- Global coverage for Teams with full PSTN replacement in 50 countries, toll-free and DID numbers in 120+ countries.

- Unlimited calling plans for up to 48 countries provide predictable operational costs.

- 8x8 Contact Centre certified for Microsoft Teams routes calls directly to Teams-powered support staff, improving customer service and supporting omnichannel interactions, call recording, etc.

- See the presence status of Teams and non-Teams users and get real-time reporting and speech analytics of Teams and non-Teams calls traversing the 8x8 voice network.

- Support for non-Teams endpoints and analogue phones or devices such as doorbells.

- 3rd-party verified security and compliance certifications help organisations comply with strict standards, protect their reputations, and secure their customer data.

- Brings access to the native integrations with 50+ business apps, including Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics, and ZenDesk.

How other organisations are using Microsoft Teams

8x8 ran several online surveys to find out how organisations like yours were using Microsoft Teams and how they are using it to serve broader telephony and connectivity needs.

The results are exciting and make a solid case to re-evaluate integrating collaboration tools into the broader enterprise ecosystem.

84%	80%	61%
of companies want more comprehensive communications features with Teams.	of organisations are likely to integrate Microsoft Teams with 3rd party telephony providers.	of respondents prefer to use the native Teams dialler for all phone calls.

Next Steps

Please contact your Insight Account Manager for more information

0344 846 3333 | uk.insight.com