

Online Team Collaboration: Reaching New Levels With an All-In-One Platform

WHITE PAPER

With today's stratified business communications, small to midsize companies face challenges as they try to modernize their online collaboration workflows. They're frequently stitching together discrete, ad hoc communications tools to perform a variety of team-based tasks, but the limitations of this approach quickly become apparent as projects grow more complex.

These organizations desire a single platform for all their communications needs, from team-based messaging and private chat to instant video meetings, where they can securely share ideas in real time; create, edit and archive content and conversations; and access integrated tools unconstrained by schedules and start-stop times.

In this white paper, we look at the obstacles small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) face as they rely on disparate communications tools and the value of an all-in-one platform for messaging, meetings and calls that modernizes today's collaborative workflow and ensures secure, end-to-end communications encryption.



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The problem with diverse communications tools

Corporate communications has evolved into an array of different applications, platforms, and services, meaning IT leaders must frequently manage multiple communications vendors and services. Meanwhile, individual team members often use their own preferred messaging tools within their smaller workgroups. Some also rely on desktop phones and conference rooms with video and audio, while others still prefer email.

To further complicate matters, recent trends such as bring your own device (BYOD) and the consumerization of IT have resulted in users relying on an assortment of devices to interact, from smartphones and tablets to laptops and PCs. And they now frequently collaborate in transit, from remote locations, and outside traditional business hours.

Across this complex environment, the common requirement is realtime connection, where business conversations can happen instantly, ideas can be exchanged easily, and decisions can be made quickly. This requires integrating the traditional ways people work together in a business setting with modern messaging, calling, and video to make secure, seamless team collaboration possible.

Business benefits of a single platform

A single, all-in-one platform guarantees a new level of communications flexibility. Team members, both internal and external, can have near-constant access and the ability to choose the most effective collaborative tool from wherever they are and whatever device they are working on. With accessible and simple to use features at their fingertips, users spend less time getting up to speed and more time being productive.

Employing a real-time collaboration platform ensures that both internal and external team members have access to the same tools. There are a number of reasons why SMBs are turning to all-in-one team communications in order to:

- Access team messaging, private chat or one-on-one messaging
- Securely collaborate via video chat
- Use screen sharing to create and edit content
- Archive and search for files, messages, conversations and people
- Ensure fully encrypted communications, whether messaging, calling or video

These efficient, contextual and powerful team-based workflows more accurately reflect how SMBs and startups actually operate today. For example, group messaging on a single platform means all team members receive project activity alerts and can instantly respond to updates via messaging, phone call or video interaction. Every stakeholder, including remote internal team members and external clients and partners, can instantly access all project assets in one place. Secure, persistent chat enables team members to speed up their collaborations and reach decisions more quickly, with always-on, in-the-moment discussions that aren't limited by finite meeting times.

Today, short-term business opportunities demand quick decisions, reflecting a competitive challenge many SMBs face. For smaller, more agile workgroups, a single mobile-first team collaboration platform makes communications seamless and offers new possibilities for meeting the near-constant demand for critical decision-making with tools that are efficient, always accessible, and easy to use.

Cisco Spark: A new standard for all-in-one messaging, calling, and video

By making team-based communications simpler, Cisco Spark can provide you and your team with a secure online environment for collaborating at a moment's notice. Consider this scenario:

You're kicking off a new project that relies on several key stakeholders, including the customer's external management team as well as an internal project manager, content developers, and designers—all collaborating remotely from different locations.

Once a meeting room is created with a Cisco Spark account, the team leaders can meet virtually to set project goals. As participants are added to the new Cisco Spark room, content and assets are instantly shared online to reach benchmarks and meet deadlines. Over the following days and weeks, copy and design assignments are rendered, creative advice is shared, and document and visual revisions are completed. All this takes place through a series of online meetings, group messaging, and virtual discussions that team members can access either with a mobile device on the road or from an office desktop.

Since the customer has been collaborating and reviewing content with internal team members throughout the creative process, the final product can be quickly confirmed by the management team. Internal team members can continue to have room access if there's a need to revisit the project in the future. This successful scenario demonstrates the advantage of a single all-in-one platform over an often confusing mix of unconnected tools.

Team members who collaborate via messaging and video meetings shouldn't have to stop to consider where they are or what device they're using. Whether it's a room-based video conferencing system, desktop phone, or mobile device, ease of access should be the same. With Cisco Spark, you can turn a phone call into a virtual meeting with one tap, or move a video call from a conferencing room to your mobile phone and then to a new meeting room. Such ease eliminates the often cumbersome steps required to toggle between disparate messaging and video apps or to join conference calls and video meetings.

Moreover, with Cisco Spark you can create new virtual rooms and invite any combination of internal and external collaborators, confident that all shared workspaces will be protected from unauthorized access. Every Cisco Spark room

comes equipped with secure persistent messaging and file sharing to accelerate collaborations. In addition to having one place for organizing all project assets, team members can keep a record of discussions and search as needed.

End-to-end encryption: The key to reliable security

Cisco's substantial history and reputation ensures a high level of communications and collaboration security. For example, the Cisco Spark platform maintains systemwide encryption in addition to providing IT-based and end-user security controls. By contrast, standard business messaging apps have significant limitations.

For example, to provide popular features such as message search or to offer integration with third-party applications, business collaboration apps routinely expose end-user content, potentially compromising sensitive company data. By contrast, consumer-based chat apps that do offer security lose the ability to provide other valuable features.

In comparison, Cisco Spark's open architecture enables the secure distribution of encryption keys. Customers can have confidence in data integrity by gaining exclusive control over key management. Data that resides on the Cisco Spark client-side app (data at rest) as well as data in transit between users and devices (data in use) always remains encrypted through state-of-the-art cryptographic algorithms to ensure communications integrity. Secure HTTP (HTTPS) protocols further protect the identities of both the senders and recipients of content and messages.

In terms of end-user controls, Cisco Spark room moderators have the ability to lock rooms, control messages and files, add and remove room members, and assign other moderators. IT has similar capabilities to enhance security through the use of single sign-on, which allows team members to enter a single credential to access all aspects of the platform. Using directory synchronization with applications such as Microsoft Active

Directory, IT can also be certain that only current employees have access to the platform. Such all-encompassing security features represent the level of consistent protection that Cisco is known for.

Conclusion

As the pace of business transactions increases, team members require a communications platform that offers seamless access to efficient, contextual workflows.

By combining persistent group messaging, private one-on-one chat, voice telephony, and video conferencing in a single unified experience, Cisco Spark enables end users to communicate in real time and collaborate using sophisticated yet easy-to-use tools.

The platform offers a one-touch experience for messaging, meeting, and calling that leaves behind outdated, complex, and difficult-to-use collaboration tools. Every Cisco Spark room comes equipped with secure, persistent messaging, voice capabilities, and content sharing so that team collaborations are accessible at any time from any device.

For further information on how to achieve the business benefits of a fully encrypted, all-in-one communications platform, please visit www.ciscospark.com.
