collaborate

A guide to successful UC collaboration with Microsoft Teams

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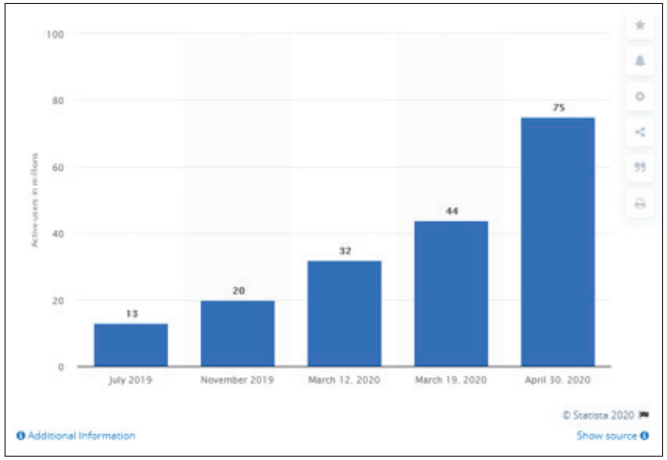
Microsoft Teams tools to elevate your workplace collaboration

Since March 2020, the number of workplaces who now use Microsoft Teams has increased exponentially. The number of daily active users has more than doubled in twelve months, increasing from 32 million users in March 2019 to 75 million as of the end of April 2020.

No surprises that this increase is due mainly to the impact of COVID-19 and the growing worldwide adoption of remote working and social distancing.

It's estimated, however, that the Microsoft Teams free app would have most likely seen a huge increase in usage anyway, when you consider its flexibility and value as a premier hub for collaboration and teamwork.



With built in features like Microsoft Teams Planner, Microsoft Teams Whiteboard and Microsoft Teams SharePoint, collaboration and communication in an evolving workplace has never been easier.

One of the many advantages of Microsoft Teams is its ability to allow the integration of new capabilities and functions. This means organizations can have multiple applications – all in one place – that support the different working scenarios and routines of their individual teams and departments. The best part is that users never have to leave the Teams application.

Microsoft Teams is 'teaming' with benefits, including:

Enriched productivity and communication capabilities:

Teams helps to increase productivity by making conversations, meetings, shared files and tasks available within a shared interface.

Keeping everyone in the loop:

With Microsoft Teams, you can easily create a group and post your message to the relevant channel. There's even the option to @mention, certain people, to give them instant notifications.

Easy knowledge sharing:

With Microsoft Teams, employees can share content from the tools that they're familiar with, like Microsoft Word and Excel.

Security and privacy:

Microsoft Teams was built from the ground-up, for enterprise users. This means that organizations can be assured that they're getting the right solutions for security and privacy built into their file-sharing and communication tools.

Extendibility:

One of the main reasons why Microsoft Teams stands out as one of the best collaboration tools today is its willingness to work with other brands. Recently, Microsoft announced a collaboration with Cisco to ensure that businesses could continue to use Cisco endpoints for Microsoft Teams meetings. There are also plenty of apps and integrations that can be added to enhance every Microsoft Teams task.

Another advantage of Microsoft Teams comes from a user standpoint. Teams is very intuitive, and the learning curve is quite small compared to more complicated collaboration tools.

Ensuring the success of your UCC environment with Microsoft Teams

While there are quite a few apps for team collaboration out there today, according to a Forrester report in 2019, for every dollar invested in Microsoft Teams, and Office 365, the return was 10-fold. The cost benefits encompass a wide range of areas including:

- Less time wasted in meetings
- Reduced need for business trips
- More efficient use of business applications
- Faster onboarding
- Much improved communication and collaboration

Getting things done with Microsoft Teams

In addition to merging collaboration tools on a single platform, Teams is tightly interwoven with Microsoft Office 365. So, it's no surprise that many enterprises see Microsoft Teams as the simplest way to integrate their productivity software and collaboration tools for seamless unified communications and collaboration.

Let's do a quick overview of some of the key features of Microsoft Teams collaboration tools. The scenarios below are not just cool features - they represent real dollar value and positive bottom-line impacts.

Integrating chat sessions with work sessions

Colleagues can be engaged in a chat session and need to access a file to work on in collaboration. With Microsoft Teams, it's easy to attach the file within the chat, open it within the Office application, and initiate a voice or video call to discuss the file or schedule a meeting. All this happens without having to switch between applications or leave the chat.

More streamlined meetings

With discrete collaboration tools, users may have files like agendas, pre-meeting reads and post-meeting actions in various emails. With Microsoft Teams, all files are in the same place. As soon the meeting is created, collaborators can chat about the agenda and share essential files. As the meeting proceeds, it's easy to keep track of the meeting notes and actions, as well as including a complete recording of the entire proceedings.

With Microsoft Teams Screen Share, for example, any number of users can see content on an open discussion program.

Microsoft Teams Whiteboard allows users to share ideas, graphics, and drawings on a digital canvas, even using digital inking if your PC supports it.

Ending excessive emails

Many a meeting has come to grief due to important emails ending up missed, or in a junk folder. Microsoft Teams can obliterate the need for endless email threads, reply-alls and attachments that clutter everyone's inboxes. Microsoft Teams tracks and holds conversations and files in a structured way in a central place.

Stay constantly connected while mobile

Through the Microsoft Teams mobile phone app, members are always connected with handy access to all apps, documents, and resources. Microsoft Teams makes it easy to chat, take part in conversations and attend meetings while they're on the move anywhere.

The role of cloud collaboration in business continuity

In the wake of ongoing global disruption, businesses are learning fast about disaster recovery, organizational resilience, and enhanced business recovery strategies.

Migration to the cloud has been underway for at least a decade, albeit in a somewhat uneven and fluctuating trajectory. But as a tool for risk mitigation and crisis management, those businesses that had already embraced cloud enterprise solutions realized some advantages over those still operating on more traditional networking and collaboration platforms. Those advantages include:

- **More dependable and secure backup and data restoration**. Storing data in the cloud gives organizations the assurance that their valuable data is backed up and protected in a safe, secure location. Data can be accessed quickly in an emergency, ensuring faster business recovery, minimizing loss of productivity and lessening downtime.
- **Improved team collaboration.** The cloud supports the efficiency of collaboration and increased flexibility of work practices that would probably not be possible in scenarios like the current crisis. As long as employees have connectivity, they can access data, communicate easily and share work without in-person interaction. Even those based in different locations can collaborate with shared access to the same files.
- **Creating infrastructure and scalability in a flash.** While the current crisis has negatively affected many businesses, others have seen the opposite. Businesses using systems connected via the cloud provide a way for users to access data simultaneously and consistently. Cloud technology gives online retailers and web streaming services, for example, the ability to scale on demand, creating more satisfied customers.

As it's a completely cloud-based app for team collaboration, it means that to use Microsoft Teams, organizations will need to revisit their UC strategies and move at least some of their infrastructure to the cloud.

Migrating to Microsoft Teams from other collaboration platforms

Microsoft's decision to retire Skype for Business Online by July 2021 initially left many organizations a little confused about where to go next. But any business previously using the Skype application could soon see that Teams is a much further advanced collaboration tool.

Since Teams is a fully cloud-based solution, the move to the cloud becomes seamless. Being able to search for and access information from anywhere on any device is a huge benefit for any business, allowing users the benefits of big data processing and artificial intelligence to work smarter.

Teams is now at the core of Microsoft's vision for efficient, intelligent communications. It brings together conversations, meetings, files, Office 365 apps, and third-party integrations, providing a single hub for teamwork. With added features like enhanced file sharing, wide search capabilities, recording and sharing meetings, auto-transcription, improved security and more, Microsoft Teams communication tools help businesses with better management of their everyday UC demands.

But for those organizations still transitioning from Skype for Business Online, or other collaboration platforms into Teams, there are steps you can take to ensure a successful deployment.

Deciding which deployment is best

New communication and collaboration technologies can be deployed in many ways, and each has associated benefits and challenges. Your long-term IT strategy comes into play when deciding on the best course of action for your organization. Determining whether your collaboration solution deployment will be on-premises, hybrid or cloud is the first step in a successful transition. But as mentioned earlier, more and more businesses are either already in a state of transition to the cloud or have completed their migration process.

Ensuring user adoption

One of the most important considerations for businesses is the people aspect. Many employees may be resistant to the introduction of new technology, as they're comfortably familiar with using other web conferencing facilities. So how will the integration of Microsoft collaboration tools affect the daily life of your employees? Microsoft has taken significant steps in greatly improving and simplifying the user experience with Teams, but there is still plenty to consider. Fast, seamless user adoption ensures rapid return on investment, but to achieve it, IT departments must plan well and be in control every step of the way.

The right tools for a seamless transition

Managing a communications system transition is always complex. IT teams must orchestrate numerous components – often in a multi-vendor environment – to ensure they're all compatible and can work seamlessly together. To support this complexity, you need the right monitoring tools to see your entire environment. You need to have the capacity to view each component in detail, and understand the relationship between components, as well as end users.

Having these tools in place is not a 'should we or shouldn't we?' decision. Businesses need these tools to proactively anticipate and resolve issues, collect data and analytics, plan precisely for upgrades, migrations and changeovers – and ultimately to protect their whole UC investment.

Optimizing Microsoft Teams performance

We've already talked about the massive increase in usage of Microsoft Teams tools for meetings, making it somewhat of a lifeblood for many organizations worldwide. This huge uptick has put big strains on organizations using Teams with potentially less-than-optimized paths from the endpoint to the Microsoft Teams service.

Internal IT is always under pressure to deliver a good user experience, but there are complexities to consider. Internal network routing can include proxies, security services, central internet bandwidth, backhaul multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) circuits, network address translations,
and more.

When users work remotely, Microsoft Teams (as well as all of Office 365) becomes harder to support in the event of a performance issue. IT teams need to first understand the scope of the problem, then consider its origins before they can act. For example:

- Is it just the one user having issues?
- What is the root cause of the problem?
- Is it the internal network?
- Could it be the user's home wi-fi?
- Is the problem related to the user's laptop?
- Is it the VPN?
- Or is it something to do with Microsoft itself?

Network preparation for Microsoft Teams

Many organizations fall flat by failing to assess their network environment prior to rolling out and adopting new collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams. Unfortunately, it's not until after the rollout that they discover their network is unable to cope with the new demands – and they experience problems like dropped calls, latency, jitter, echo, and poor video connectivity. The Microsoft Teams Roadmap allows IT staff to plan for new Microsoft launches, updates, applications in development and previously released apps for general updates.

Pre-assessing and testing your UC infrastructure is the best way to find potential performance issues before they result in a bad user experience. Network assessments also provide visibility so that you can quickly identify weak points and trouble areas in your complex network configurations.

Proactive monitoring is vital for Microsoft Teams deployment

As well as assessing and testing your UC infrastructure, you'll need to proactively manage the user experience of your new collaboration tools all day, every day. Proactive monitoring, data correlation and usage analytics is a critical part of every network's communications environment.

Monitoring puts you in the driver's seat – and in the prime position to troubleshoot issues as well as isolate problems before they can have a negative impact on user experience. This translates to more efficient teams and a more productive company.

How consistent monitoring helps prevent Teams usage problems

Given the rapid acceleration in the use of Microsoft Teams, organizations are realizing that there is no 'set and forget' default for their Teams deployment. Sometimes, Teams could be stuck loading, or your webcam or microphone might not be working properly when on a call, or you may not be receiving notifications. With any UC tool within your communications environment there are bound to be issues.

Monitoring ensures Microsoft Teams security

Microsoft Teams is a powerful tool for supporting cross-functional and cross-organizational collaboration for users. Its openness, however, raises concerns about security.

Unrestricted file and data sharing between an unlimited number of users can present IT professionals with security challenges. With Microsoft Teams' open permissions model, it means that users can add apps, tabs, bots, or connectors that potentially open the door to improper transfer of sensitive information to external third parties.

While Microsoft Teams does have its own built-in security features, data leakage, data life cycle management and other issues can – and do still happen. Consistent monitoring can help to prevent, predict, or troubleshoot all the problems associated with any UC service. At the end of the day, the aim is to ensure that all users have a great experience.

Using analytics to track the progress of Microsoft Teams

Information and insights gained from using analytics is essential in understanding where your organization is headed on your Teams journey. Factors to consider are:

- How many people within the organization are using Teams daily?
- How many Teams and Channels have been created?
- How many meetings are being held per month?
- Who are the top users?
- Where are your top users based?

The answers to these questions are all essential to establishing your ROI. Without the right UC performance management tools, you can't gain these insights with any degree of accuracy. Teams does come with an out-of-the-box reporting tool, but for a deep view into this and all other data, to provide meaningful, actionable insights, you need specialized monitoring and analytics capabilities. This is especially important if you run a multi-vendor UC environment.

Microsoft Teams governance considerations

Managing a Microsoft Teams environment throughout your entire organization comes with plenty of challenges. You need to ensure that you're able to contain sprawl, keep internal data safe and have everything functioning as efficiently as possible for your end users. This requires some often-complex governance measures.

Who should be allowed to create collaboration spaces?

The more your business stakeholders have ownership over provisioning, the more successful your implementation of Microsoft Teams will be. However, creating collaboration spaces is a process that requires control, which needs to be relegated to the appropriate people. Usually, it's business owners themselves who issue approvals, but IT teams play an important part in approving what is accessible to a subset of users.

Just because stakeholders and content owners understand the processes and information in their collaboration spaces, they may not necessarily know how to manage the complex governance and security aspects of Microsoft Teams.

Enabling guest access

You need to have the appropriate resources to monitor and keep track of Group and Team roles and access. Everyone needs to understand the roles and limitations of Admin, Owners, Members and External members.

Depending on the scope and type of your project and the nature of your industry, enabling secure collaboration with partners or vendors may be an essential capability you want to include. You can limit who can add guests to your Teams implementation by using the appropriate tenant controls.

What apps and services can users add?

You can control which applications and integrations you can add to Microsoft Teams at Team level. Many external apps can enhance the use and connection of cloud applications and platforms, but it's important to consider the enablement of Shadow IT, and the increased risk that comes with it.

While Shadow IT can help to improve employee productivity and drive innovation, it can introduce potential risks through data leaks, compliance violations and more. It's important to implement planning policies and a process that enforces them.

Naming conventions

You need to consider controlling how people name Groups and Teams, and be able to apply properties based on how people are using Microsoft Teams and other collaboration spaces. This is important when it comes to maintaining the lifecycle of your data and alleviating the burden on IT teams of having to sort through superfluous content and clutter.

One option is to use a group naming policy to enforce a consistent naming strategy for groups created by users in your organization.

A naming policy can help you and your users identify the function of the group, membership, geographic region, or who created the group. A naming policy can also help categorize groups in the address book.

Saving, archiving, and deleting Teams content

The classic, ongoing questions around content lifecycle, records management, and data protection/DLP will still exist, even in Microsoft Teams.

Users will still be sharing files and documents back and forth, and those files will still be stored within the SharePoint sites that support the Team. It's important therefore, to label documents accurately, enforce content-level security, taxonomy, and disposition, and ensure that labels and classification accurately reflect the information within documents and files.

Getting new users up to speed with Microsoft Teams

As Microsoft Teams is set to replace Skype For Business, it's important to have a management strategy for training new users and implementing new processes. With business needs changing and new application features being added constantly, it's critical for businesses to understand the needs of day-to-day users.

Monitoring a hybrid, multi-vendor environment

As we've already discussed, UC environments vary, but are gravitating towards a greater use of the cloud. But they also differ in which vendors they use in their UC deployments. It would be safe to say that Microsoft, Cisco, and Avaya are the top three players in the world of unified communications today.

While Cisco and Avaya have dominated the market for many years, Microsoft has changed the game drastically with its introduction of Microsoft Teams.

One of the main challenges with successfully and seamlessly managing a UC system is interoperability between multiple vendors. An organization may have Cisco or Avaya in its contact center and Microsoft Teams for real-time communications like video conferencing.

If you're in the process of migrating to the cloud, or operating in a hybrid environment, as well as using multi-vendor UC solutions, there are some crucial, and non-negotiable factors to consider.

Visibility into your multi-vendor UC environment

You need one, all-encompassing tool that can give you a clear, comprehensive view into all vendors, servers, applications and network devices. In a multi-vendor world, there is no single out-of-the-box solution. You need a powerful third-party tool that can give you insights, analytics, and data from a single pane of glass.

Proactive UC troubleshooting and alerting

Every business needs to be able to identify and resolve issues fast. Your bottom line relies on it. This means you need visibility across the entire UC ecosystem, and not just for one vendor. You need one tool that spans multiple systems, can detect and notify your team when conditions are ripe for problems to arise, and can proactively troubleshoot your entire system. Even better if one tool can predict when anomalies are likely to occur in the future.

Dealing with the cloud

We have established that the UC industry is moving towards the cloud. But a hybrid approach adds complexity and raises questions about where problems are occurring. Does a call fail because of a device or on-premise application? Or is it a problem in the cloud? For this reason, proactive performance management tools are even more important in a hybrid environment.

How IR's solutions can help

We can help you migrate seamlessly to Teams by:

- Bringing better insights to your collaboration environment
- Improving productivity through seamless collaboration
- Proactively solving problems to enhance employee engagement

Through proactive monitoring, IR's Collaborate suite of solutions can assess, test, troubleshoot, and resolve problems across all your platforms before, during and after deployment.

Constant monitoring is not just about creating an alert when something goes wrong. With constant monitoring across your existing platform and your Teams environment, we create a window that gives you full visibility to identify, troubleshoot and resolve issues as they occur. This reduces downtime and ensures business continuity.

Translating user experience

In-depth conversation details, call quality data and customized reports provide better insights to proactively address problems. This level of insight ultimately improves user adoption and maximizes your return on investment.

Identifying voice and video issues outside of Teams

We can help you gain system and network visibility, deep SBC and SIP support, outside-in testing, and Voice Quality 360, across Microsoft Teams and other platforms.

While Microsoft's in-built tools focus on their own platform, IR's solutions are a third-party solution, providing full visibility across your entire ecosystem to quickly pinpoint issues and decrease your mean-time-to-resolution.

Visibility of your UC environment through a single pane of glass

IR Collaborate can collate data from multi-vendor technologies, right across on-premises, cloud, and hybrid environments. This means you gain end-to-end visibility of your ecosystem with the ability to drill down and identify issues from a single pane of glass.

Collaborate delivers complete experience management solutions for Microsoft Teams. This gives you the flexibility to manage your evolving collaboration journey and deliver a superior user experience across all platforms, IR provides a complete solution, that can be deployed on-premises or in the cloud.

Here is a quick overview of what you can do with IR Collaborate.

Proactive monitoring and alerting of the end user experience and fast identification of problems.

- ✓ Identify Microsoft 365 services and eco-system issues
- ✓ Flexible and configurable alerts for call quality, Microsoft service, Microsoft Rate My Call, Meeting and large conferences failures, VIP/Executives, and more
- ✓ Identify problems affecting remote workers

Remedy issues quickly, improve call and meeting quality, and maximize productivity

- ✓ Complete visibility into call and meeting quality across users and locations
- ✓ Search and drill down into users, calls, meetings, and more
- ✓ Diagnose problems across SBCs, Microsoft Direct Routing, network, Wi-Fi, devices, headsets.
- ✓ Prescriptive network troubleshooting and resolution guidance

Gain insight into engagement, adoption and impacts of potential issues

- ✓ User experience feedback to understand systemic issues
- ✓ Quickly detect issues across all areas through trends and visual alarms
- ✓ Track devices, clients and software versions and their impact to experiences to facilitate maintenance and roll outs
- ✓ Analyze user experience and performance before, during and after migrations

Outside-in testing for external facing experiences

- ✓ SBCs, Microsoft Phone System, Auto-attendant, IVR systems, integrated Contact Center systems, and more

Performance management and monitoring across major collaboration platforms

- ✓ Cisco, Avaya, Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business Online and more
- ✓ Zoom and Cisco Webex Meetings (coming soon)
- ✓ Single solution across collaboration and Contact Center solutions
- ✓ Analyze performance & user experience
- ✓ Test and validate collaboration solutions end to end
- ✓ Troubleshoot and diagnose root causes quickly
- ✓ Monitor alert and identify across entire collaboration ecosystems

Key takeaways

IR's next-gen solutions for Microsoft Teams have been designed to ensure a consistent, positive user experience with a higher rate of uptime, faster problem resolution and consistent level of satisfaction.

Microsoft Teams consumes a great amount of network and bandwidth capabilities, so you need to make sure that your UC environment can handle the load.

Continuous Teams monitoring ensures smooth deployment by testing your route to the cloud as well as end user experience.

Teams monitoring can also prevent unexpected issues and delays, as well as spotting any critical service delivery issues before you onboard new users.

Consistent monitoring and troubleshooting using IR's leading third-party monitoring tools will put your organization on the path to a prosperous digital transformation.

Who are IR?

The modern world relies on a complex array of technologies to keep turning. IR's aim is to simplify that complexity.

We provide insights, monitoring and support to keep your business-critical systems running as they should.

More than 1,000 organizations in over 60 countries rely on IR's experience management solutions.

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