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Introduction

Midsize companies—those with between 250 and 2,000 employees—are taking center stage in the economy. Growth at Fortune 500 companies has leveled or dropped during the past few years. Midmarket firms, on the other hand, have been an engine of growth, with companies increasing their sales and hiring.¹ As they earn a well-deserved spotlight, midsize firms are also realizing that the stakes are higher and the competition is fiercer. To address that while boosting their margins, midsize firms are investing in information technology,² especially collaboration and communication platforms that help drive productivity and speed the decision-making process.³

Midsize businesses are adopting collaboration solutions because they deliver relevant business value. According to the Sage Mid-Market Business Index, core priorities for midmarket firms are winning new customers, growing revenue, and increasing profits. At the same time, their biggest challenges are winning new customers, attracting and retaining the right employees, and increasing customer loyalty.⁴

Communication and collaboration can give your midsize business an advantage, enabling you to compete against much larger companies. Superior tools can help your organization excel in customer experience and employee satisfaction while consistently improving the bottom line. Importantly, better collaboration can have a positive impact on other key midmarket trends: the support for mobility and bring-your-own-device (BYOD) policies, a dispersed workforce, and changing communication patterns.

BYOD is moving from permission to a mandate. Experts say that by 2017, half of employers will require employees to bring their own devices.⁵ In midmarket companies, this shift is already underway. Your peers are embracing BYOD as a less expensive option for bringing mobile devices into the workplace without increasing capital costs.

¹ National Center for the Middle Market, "3Q 2013 Middle Market Indicator," 2013.

² KPMG, "Mid Market Outlook Survey: Executives Ready to Spend to Spur Growth Amid Lingering Concerns Over the Economy," 2012.

³ Forrester 2013 survey.

⁴ Sage, "Business Index 2013."

⁵ Gartner, "Bring Your Own Device: The Facts and the Future," April 2013.



Mobility is the freedom for you to work from anywhere: branch office, home, on the road, at a client site, and beyond. 1.3 billion people (37.2 percent) will work outside the office by 2015,⁶ and 45 percent of employees will typically work outside the traditional office for a minimum of eight hours per week. They will work anywhere—on the devices of their choice, perhaps their own devices—and interact with peers, customers, and providers through multiple channels: text, email, voice, social media, and video conferencing.

Collaboration overcomes the gaps, waits, and confusion caused by multiple locations, different devices, and changing communication types. Collaboration lets distributed, mobile teams and individuals work together across regions and time zones—sharing documents, manipulating content in real time, and having conversations as if they are in the same room.

SEVEN COLLABORATION TIPS

Effective collaboration has known best practices that lead to valuable business results. These seven collaboration tips will improve collaboration throughout an organization. Once collaboration is underway, businesses such as yours can quickly begin seeing improved responsiveness, better relationships, and improved productivity.

1. Create first impressions that last. Midmarket companies are seeing competition from both large, well-established corporations and new faces that want to break from tradition. In the midmarket sector alone, competition is amping up with the addition of 1.17 million new workers in 2012 and a 7 percent increase in gross revenue.⁷

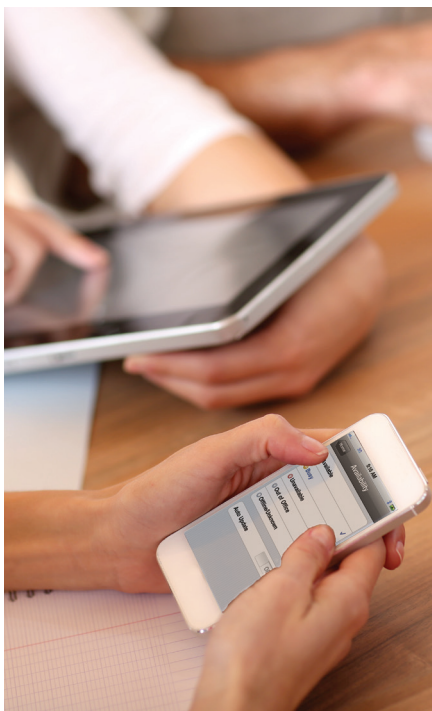
To meet this increased competition head-on, businesses want to make an impression as good as—or even better than—one made by a company many times their size. When your customers can use a single number to reach the person they want to talk to, that's a good start. And when your employees can instantly check the availability of their peers and talk, instant message, or use video to quickly get answers and resolve issues, your business will get high marks for responsiveness and innovation. Collaboration gives midsize companies an edge over those stuck with voice-only options.

Collaboration tools also make a big impression when hiring and retaining great talent. They attract workers who are accustomed to communicating over many

⁶ IDC, "Worldwide Mobile Worker Population 2011-2015 Forecast," December 2011.

⁷ National Center for the Middle Market, "4Q 2012 Middle Market Indicator," 2012.

A conversation that started as a text should move smoothly to voice, then to video and content sharing, without starting and stopping applications.



channels with different devices. For recruitment, an interview held via video conference could favorably sway that new hire who has exactly the skill set required.

2. Let employees work where and when they want, using the device of their choice. Supporting mobility has to be a component of your collaboration project because it's how people work. Going into the central office is no longer the standard. Employees are distributed across branch offices, homes, on the road, and at client sites. While they are working, your employees and co-workers move constantly between devices to complete projects and communicate with each other, customers, and suppliers. And they expect transitions to be seamless. A conversation that started as a text should move smoothly to voice, then to video and content sharing, without starting and stopping applications.

A collaboration platform addresses all of this, giving employees the communications resources they need to be as effective and productive out of the office as they are in the office. Communication is fluid across different channels and across laptops, deskphones, smartphones, and tablets. Productivity improves, decisions are made faster, and customers are more satisfied. Plus, a collaboration platform lets your midsize business avoid risk and stay mobile with built-in security features that prevent hacks, data leaks, and network downtime.

3. Ensure that communications of every type and on every device work the first time and every time with a common interface. Employees detest unreliable business communications. They expect voice communications, email, and video conferencing to be readily available whenever they need them. And as communication patterns change, they want to shift easily between these different channels.

An integrated platform gives your employees flexibility and reliability. Alternatively, communications can get tricky—and risky—when collaboration tools are mixed and matched from different providers. If one component vendor upgrades to a new version, it may no longer work with the others. Troubleshooting puts huge demands on your limited IT resources, and waiting for your providers to come together for a fix can leave wide gaps of communication throughout your organization.



4. Choose security that is right for collaboration.

VPNs and firewalls provide excellent protection for data traffic. You'll need additional security for voice and collaboration, though, because VPNs and firewalls do not handle the real-time requirements of voice and video well. Session border controllers (SBCs) work well in real

time and reflect call states, guarding against denial of service attacks, call hijacking, and toll fraud. They can provide always-on security for your remote devices without a VPN tunnel.

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Identity engines protect your business with role-based access. The type of access for each user is based on who the user is, where the user is located, and what device is in use. That aligns perfectly with your collaboration needs today and can adapt to changes as the tools and features are improved.

5. Understand and prepare for new collaboration traffic loads. What runs underneath your collaboration platform is vitally important to your effectiveness. You need to prepare your network for different types of traffic and random, unexpected patterns. Does your network have the capacity to support 50 to 100 video users? Can you prioritize voice traffic over IM or video? Your network may need a refresh to handle the increased data, mobile, and video traffic. A preliminary assessment will help you understand how your network will handle your investment in collaboration.

6. Trust that you're ready for video conferencing ... really. Some employees may balk when you mention video conferencing. Help them get over their fears, and you will start seeing a significant uptake in collaboration—fast. Video conferencing provides the face-to-face interaction and personalization that turns a boring conference call into a productive, interactive meeting. It supports distributed teams and lets everyone connect anywhere, anytime on the devices of their choice.



7. Provide ongoing training—even when the collaboration is easy to use. Employees will get more out of your new collaboration platform if they understand all of its features and functions. Successful collaboration projects include workshops and demos to help employees overcome any hesitations they may have.

Look for collaboration platforms that are simple to deploy, easy to use, and easy to manage. The first two factors encourage fast adoption, and IT will appreciate straightforward administration tools that help them stay productive. Easy administration is especially important for smaller IT teams.

THREE MIDMARKET SCENARIOS

Now that you understand the best practices for successful collaboration, you may be wondering how it can help your company. The following scenarios illustrate how firms similar to yours are putting collaboration to work and improving one-to-one and group interactions.

1. Speeding decision-making in a distributed workforce.

Coordinating everyone's schedules for the quarterly meeting is next to impossible. The product manager is booked for calls every day, the marketing director has an intense travel schedule, and the sales rep is constantly out with clients. Since the team can't find a time to meet in the conference room, they turned to a collaboration platform that gives them the freedom to meet from any location.

The product manager connects from his office, the sales rep joins from a coffee shop on his smartphone, and the marketing director dials in from her mobile phone and shares the Q3 agenda, launch plan, and timeline spreadsheet from her laptop while waiting for a train.

This integrated, mobile-friendly collaboration solution lets these three team leaders connect and fits seamlessly into their busy work schedules. They can



share materials and discuss upcoming plans, making crucial decisions in real time as if they were sitting together at a conference table.

2. Driving new sales with better customer relationships.

Improving customer satisfaction and loyalty is a priority.⁸ Every interaction with a customer can lead to a sale or deepened relationship. Field technicians, sales reps, and contact centers are on the front line of customer relationships. Armed with the right collaboration platform, they can be much more responsive. A quarterly client meet-and-greet, for example, can become a long-term multiproduct contract.

Recently, a sales rep went on site at a fitness center for her usual touch-base meeting. While catching up, the fitness center's business manager mentioned that one of the machines was not working properly and maintenance staff were unable to fix it. The sales rep identified who was available at the company using presence, then made a quick call to the internal expert, who agreed to help them solve the problem by video conference. The sales rep, the business manager, and maintenance staff walked to the malfunctioning machine and a maintenance worker demonstrated the problem on video. The internal expert had seen the problem before and was easily able to walk the maintenance technician through the fix.

The business manager was clearly impressed with the responsive customer service, and the sales rep knows she's secured a long-term contract with this client. The video, mobile, and voice capabilities helped the sales rep look professional and a step ahead of the competition.

3. Responding to the steady stream of incoming customer calls, emails, and website comments.

Customers love the new germ-resistant stainless steel water bottles released six months ago. Orders are up 400 percent and the company's offer to engrave logos and text is getting an incredible response. As sales increase, so does the volume of incoming calls, emails, and website comments from existing and potential customers. Unfortunately, this leads to increased wait times and response times—resulting in increasingly frustrated customers.

This two-year old company invests in a collaboration platform to help them respond quickly—and with the right information—to their growing customer

⁸ Sage, "Business Index 2013."

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base. Now, incoming calls are routed to the correct person, emails are distributed among internal staff for quick responses, and website comments are organized and monitored to provide prompt replies. Upgrading to a multichannel contact center solution may be a consideration for the future, but for now the collaboration platform meets the company's needs.

Customers are much less frustrated now that the company replies more quickly, and they are ordering more water bottles due to easy access to the right information and the right people to address their questions.

ENTERPRISE COLLABORATION ON A MIDSIZE BUDGET

When researching collaboration platforms, consider how you can put them to work in your organization. The use cases described earlier are just food for thought. You are sure to have many more ideas for how your organization can improve how it collaborates.

Most importantly, know that the power of collaboration is no longer only available to corporations with big budgets and large IT staffs. Midsize companies can have the benefits of a business-ready collaboration platform without paying big bucks or hiring new resources. You can enjoy the same great features and functions that Fortune 500 companies do—and begin realizing the ongoing business improvements that start with simple, effective collaboration.

About Avaya

Avaya is a global provider of business collaboration and communications solutions, providing unified communications, contact centers, networking, and related services to companies of all sizes around the world. For more information please visit avaya.com.

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