

How persistent collaboration tools can help remote workers thrive

Tools to help keep your teams on track even when they're apart



If your organization has employees working from home now, as many do, you need to be sure they have the right tools to keep productivity and morale high.

Modern unified communications and collaboration (UC&C) tools, used correctly, are perfect for this moment. Not only can they erase distance, but by combining all the elements of a project—group chats, meeting recordings, shared files and more—into searchable channels, they can help teams be more productive and collaborate more effectively.

You may already be using a UC&C platform like Microsoft Teams®, Cisco Webex® or Slack®, but you may not be getting the full benefit. And if you haven't yet adopted UC&C, now is the time to do so. In this article, we'll talk about UC&C's capabilities and some best practices for getting the most out of the tools.

The benefits of “persistent collaboration”

UC&C tools like Slack, Cisco Webex and Microsoft Teams provide multi-use platforms where you can do everything from chat to video conference to group edit in real time. Organizations can set up multiple groups or teams—for instance, by project, discipline, subject, client and so forth.

The “persistence” of that communication is where you see real benefits. All the actions you perform in a team—the files shared, the threaded chats, the meetings recorded—form a historical record for a project.

Team members can look back and see what has been accomplished, why decisions were made and what needs to happen next. A scan through the channel can help new team members get up to speed. The search function helps everyone find project information they need. So teams spend more time accomplishing tasks and less time looking for files and asking questions.

Presence indicators—which show whether you're at your computer, in a meeting or offline—also boost efficiency by letting team members know who is available.

If you set up and use your UC&C system properly to take advantage of all these capabilities, you can reap the benefits of greater productivity, more efficiency and easier collaboration—whether your employees are in the office or working remotely.

If you're just getting started with UC&C tools

If you're not already using a UC&C platform, now is the time to start.

All of these platforms are user friendly and affordable, so even if your organization is small, deploying UC&C is not out of reach. You could launch it quickly and fine-tune as you go. Each platform is slightly different, but they have the same basic capabilities, including presence indicator, individual and team chat, video and audio calling, meeting scheduling, file sharing, and search capabilities

Most of the major UC&C platforms can be integrated with dozens of other tools as well. Depending on the platform you choose, you could integrate with Dropbox®, Google Drive™, Microsoft Office® programs, Basecamp, Trello®, Asana, Marketo®, Lucidchart®, Zendesk® and many other apps. That makes it even easier to keep all the moving parts of a project together and on track.

If you're already using UC&C tools

While you might already have a UC&C platform, you might not have had the opportunity to create best practices. One key to remember is that you're not only using the tools in real time, you're also creating a searchable project master file. So set up your channels and use them in a way that includes as much relevant information as possible.

Here are a few more tips to using UC&C tools effectively.

Send less email.

One of the key advantages of UC&C is keeping all your project communication in one place. If you send emails instead of keeping conversations in the project channels, that correspondence won't surface when a team member searches for it. So stick to your project channels as much as possible. In general, email is best reserved for formal company-wide communication and formal external communication.

Use the video capability.

Actually seeing your coworkers on screen and hearing them talk can help build the connections that make strong teams. If you were working in an actual office, you wouldn't get to wear an invisibility cloak, so try to get over your discomfort at appearing on video. No one looks as good as they'd like, but everyone looks fine. If you're too busy to tidy up your home office, some applications allow users to blur the background.

Manage your notifications.

If you are in so many teams and channels that your computer or phone is pinging constantly, adjust your notifications so you're hearing about only the most critical issues and can focus on actual work. You can go back later and see what you missed. If someone has an urgent need to reach you, they can tag you personally or send a direct message.

Mute or leave irrelevant channels.

If you're no longer part of a team, don't let their discussions distract you from your current work. You wouldn't keep showing up at their meetings, so shut down that channel. Archive channels when they're no longer needed.

Adjust UC&C to fit your organization's needs.

A UC&C platform can work wonders for connecting workers and organizing projects, whether people are working remotely or back in the office. To get the most out of your tools, periodically take a look at what's working and what's not. Then come up with your own best practices to keep your teams moving in the right direction.

Additional help

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