

ESG SHOWCASE

Supporting Hybrid Work with Cloud Collaboration Solutions

Date: November 2021 **Author:** Bob Laliberte, Senior Analyst and Practice Director

ABSTRACT: Organizations need robust unified communications and collaboration solutions to ensure a distributed workforce can remain productive. Ensuring this requires a service that is properly scoped, implemented, and integrated into existing business processes. The service also needs to be highly available and performant to ensure optimal user experiences. ePlus, partnered with Cisco, delivers a managed Collaboration Cloud platform capable of meeting those requirements.

The Demand for Collaboration Solutions

The shift to long-term hybrid work environments requires organizations to reevaluate legacy collaboration solutions. In fact, according to ESG research, more than half of the organizations surveyed (53%) are spending more of their IT budget now to implement long-term technology strategies to provide a more flexible and resilient IT infrastructure in the event of future major business disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

One of the areas over half of the respondents (55%) indicated they would increase spending is on communication and collaboration solutions. Clearly, this is an important area, as it ranks in the top three considerations for justifying IT investments to business management teams, only trailing improved cybersecurity and increased employee productivity.

This means that organizations are actively looking to find and implement new unified communication and collaboration solutions for their distributed workforce. Again, the research reinforces this shift, as the broader use of online collaboration tools as part of daily work patterns ranked as the most significant impact that the pandemic (25%) will have on their longer-term IT strategy.

However, supporting these new, distributed environments is not easy. Currently, 97% of respondents stated that they were still requiring at least some of their knowledge workers to work remotely.² Not surprising, three quarters of respondents also stated that their IT environment is now more or significantly more complex than 2 years ago, and 49% of respondents indicated that the increase in remote workers due to COVID-19 work-from-home mandates is one of the biggest reasons for that increased complexity (see Figure 1).

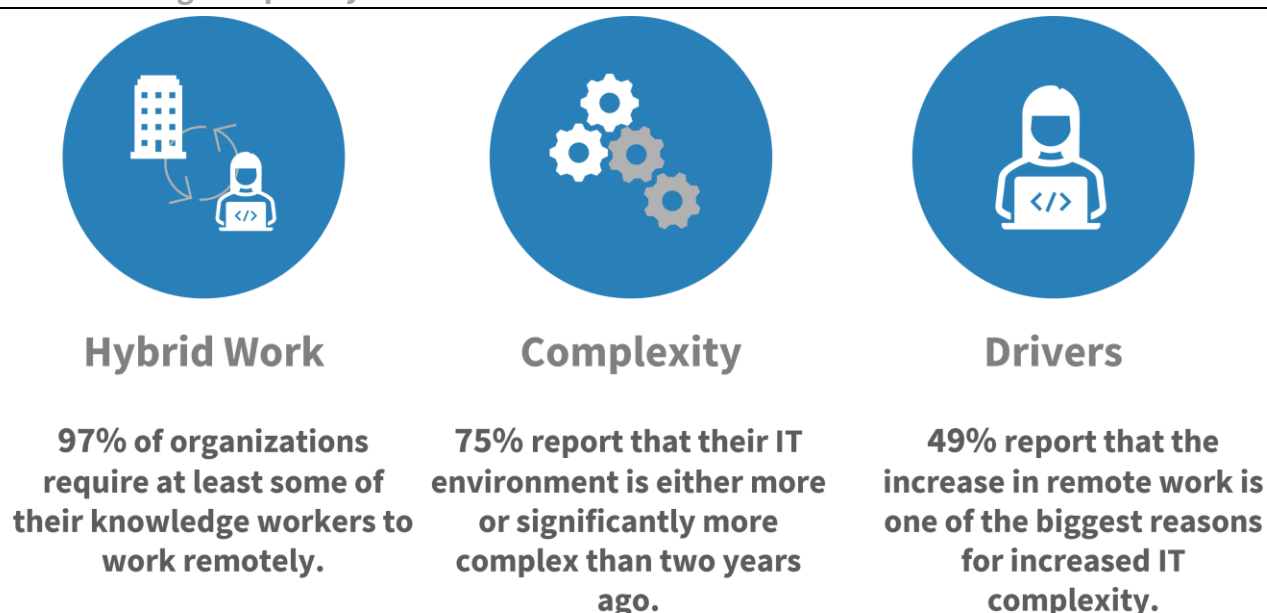
¹ Source: ESG Research Report, [2021 Technology Spending Intentions Survey](#), January 2021. All ESG research references and charts in this showcase have been taken from this research report, unless otherwise indicated.

² Source: ESG Master Survey Results, [2021 Technology Spending Intentions Survey](#), December 2020.

This ESG Showcase was commissioned by ePlus and is distributed under license from ESG.

© 2021 by The Enterprise Strategy Group, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Figure 1. Increasing Complexity from Distributed Worker Environments



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group

This increased complexity is creating the need for organizations to work together with partners that can help them overcome this complexity and accelerate the time to value when deploying long-term collaboration solutions.

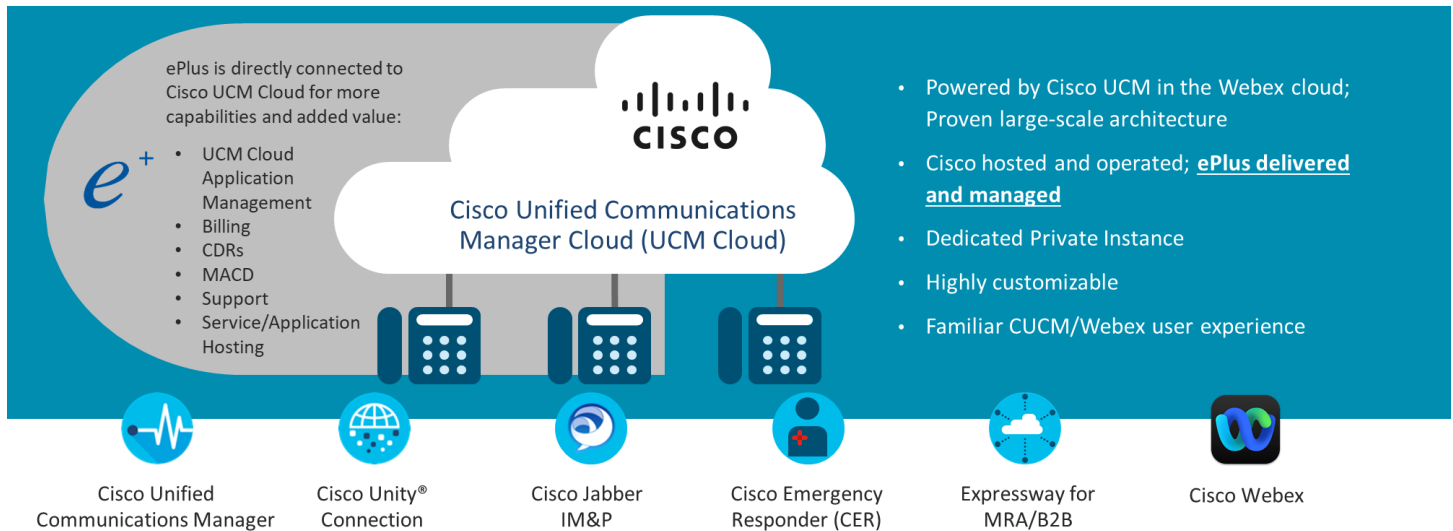
ePlus has established itself as an expert in the unified communication and collaboration space and can enable organizations to securely deploy managed collaboration solutions to accommodate hybrid work environments. Its partnership with Cisco provides access to the latest cloud-based technologies and solutions, including the Cisco UCM Cloud.

ePlus Managed Services and Cloud Collaboration Solutions

ePlus has been providing organizations with a range of managed services since 2005. In that time, they have built up significant capabilities, leveraging four US-based managed service centers (MSC) that provide 24x7 monitoring and support. These centers are staffed with hundreds of professionals delivering managed services, with access to more than 650 ePlus certified technology professionals who collectively hold approximately 2,200 certification titles, across more than 60 vendors, with a heavy concentration in top vendors like Cisco. ePlus's experience and expertise related to Cisco products have been validated by the certifications they have achieved, including Cisco Gold Certified Partner for Cisco Master Collaboration Specialization, Security and Cloud; Cisco Master Managed Services with Master/Powered Services for Unified Communications (UC) and Security; Cisco Master Enterprise; Cisco Master Security Specialization; Cisco Master Collaboration Specialization; and Customer Experience/Lifecycle Authorization.



This has enabled ePlus to deliver Cisco unified communication and collaboration solutions as a managed service—both on-premises and in the cloud. For organizations looking to transition to cloud-based collaborations services, ePlus has partnered with Cisco to provide ePlus Cloud Collaboration, or ePCC. This solution integrates Cisco's Unified Communication Manager (UCM) Cloud with ePlus onboarding, integration/migration, and ongoing operations support into a single, easy-to-consume service (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. ePlus Cloud Collaboration with Cisco UCM Cloud


Source: ePlus

Leveraging its decades of experience working with Cisco collaboration solutions, ePlus has developed a detailed methodology to mitigate risk and streamline the migration to cloud-based collaboration services. The onboarding process involves collecting detailed information regarding an organization's specific environment and utilizing that information to properly design a robust and fully integrated solution. Armed with this detailed information, ePlus professional services will implement and stage the solution, verify data migration, and ensure a seamless transition. This includes deploying ePod collectors to monitor the on-premises environment and provide end-to-end visibility. ePCC can be deployed across one or more of the regional data centers (6 total across North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific) hosting Cisco's UCM Cloud to ensure optimized experiences based on user locations. Typically, organizations would connect by taking advantage of Equinix Cloud Exchanges and Meet Me Rooms.

Once live, the ePlus team continues to add value by providing support for day two operations. This includes handling both a wide variety of day-to-day moves, adds, and changes through a simple change request process and performing advanced troubleshooting and problem remediation to ensure availability. The MSC engineers' extensive training and experience, as well as access to ePlus professional services engineers, allow ePlus to take first- and second-level calls and resolve 94+% of all cases without having to escalate to the Cisco TAC. This ensures the collaboration environment is always available and optimized to deliver positive user experiences.

ePlus Value

For organizations looking to deploy long-term cloud-based collaboration solutions, the ePlus Cloud Collaboration solution delivers. It provides:

1. **Predictable monthly costs.** Organizations can transition from CapEx to OpEx and scale up or down as needed. It also has its own Capital Finance division to support customers and provide flexible financing options.
2. **Experience and expertise.** ePlus has over 650 employees that collectively hold approximately 2,200 certification titles, across more than 60 vendors, with a heavy concentration in top vendors, including Cisco.

3. **Global scale and support.** The ePCC solutions can be deployed in six data centers located in three regions to provide global coverage and scale. ePlus leverages its North American Managed Service Centers (MSC) to provide support and works with an established partner network to provide onsite support globally if required.
4. **Enhanced visibility and integration.** ePlus provides an executive dashboard as well as the ability to drill down into the environment. This includes integrating with ticketing software and even eBonding with OEM partners like Cisco as well as directly with customers.
5. **Risk mitigation.** In addition to unified communication and collaboration knowledge, ePlus also has robust security and networking practices to ensure every solution is securely and properly connected.
6. **End-to-end intelligent management.** By taking letters of agency with telecommunication providers, ePlus can provide full end-to-end management and eliminate finger pointing. Leveraging its years of experience, ePlus provides intelligence into the tickets themselves, outlining historical events, providing recommended actions to resolve issues, and accelerating the time to resolution.

The Bigger Truth

Organizations need to ensure effective communication and collaboration tools to adapt to and empower modern, hybrid workforces. This goes beyond the stop gap methods organizations deployed at the start of the pandemic. Moving forward, long-term solutions are required to accommodate both current and future needs. Hybrid work environments will be the new reality for companies with knowledge workers, as it will be imperative to deploy solutions to ensure employees can collaborate and remain productive.

While the adoption of cloud services continues, some organizations are hesitant to move their critical unified communications and collaboration solutions there. That is where working with a trusted partner with experience in both on-premises and cloud-based solutions can help them evaluate their options and accelerate their migration to the cloud, securely and as a fully managed service.

ePlus has been effectively designing, implementing, and managing on-premises-based unified communication and collaboration solutions for over 20 years and offers the cloud-based ePlus Cloud Collaboration based on Cisco UCM cloud to enable organizations to migrate quickly and securely. This enables ePlus to help your organization choose the best solution for your environment and accelerate the migration to a cloud-based platform with a fully supported managed service.

All trademark names are property of their respective companies. Information contained in this publication has been obtained by sources The Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG) considers to be reliable but is not warranted by ESG. This publication may contain opinions of ESG, which are subject to change. This publication is copyrighted by The Enterprise Strategy Group, Inc. Any reproduction or redistribution of this publication, in whole or in part, whether in hard-copy format, electronically, or otherwise to persons not authorized to receive it, without the express consent of The Enterprise Strategy Group, Inc., is in violation of U.S. copyright law and will be subject to an action for civil damages and, if applicable, criminal prosecution. Should you have any questions, please contact ESG Client Relations at 508.482.0188.



Enterprise Strategy Group is an IT analyst, research, validation, and strategy firm that provides market intelligence and actionable insight to the global IT community.



www.esg-global.com



contact@esg-global.com



508.482.0188