Cloud Communications: a Methodology for Successful Deployment

White Paper
Transitioning to the cloud to improve clinical operations

Thanks to the tremendous cost-saving opportunities, many group practices and medical clinic networks are choosing to deploy cloud-based communications platforms over on-site systems. Not only does a cloud-based delivery model ensure organizations always have the latest multi-modal collaboration tools (such as voice, video, conferencing, and messaging), it also frees them from the recurring expense of hardware and software updates required by hardware-based technology.

Cloud-based communications solutions offer obvious benefits over traditional on-premises PBX systems, including peace of mind, unsurpassed scalability, and overall cost effectiveness. But while cloud technologies can drastically reduce management and implementation complexity, the transition from legacy PBX solutions to cloud-based solutions can still involve unforeseen complications and challenges. The secret to a successful deployment is a well-planned implementation designed to align with your practice’s business requirements, objectives, and outcomes.

Keeping up with industry requirements

With the ongoing strengthening of privacy and security regulations mandated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), any cloud-based communications solution must align to these vigorous regulatory requirements. But patient information security priorities must not eclipse your organization’s focus on providing more patient-centered care.

Accountable care has also had a deep impact on practice operations. For instance, if your organization has acquired additional clinics as part of its overall ACO program participation, your staff must routinely shift across multiple clinic locations. This makes your workforce more mobile, distributed, and connected than ever before.

Outdated PBX equipment and disparate meetings and team messaging solutions restrict the ability of mobile teams to collaborate around time-sensitive patient care coordination activities. In fact, the simple act of switching between disparate applications can hinder team productivity significantly. With a cloud communications solution, group practices companies can meet these demands today, while preparing for expansion in the future.

The case for making the transition to cloud communications

There are six top benefits for making the transition from on-premises PBX to cloud communications:

1. Increase reliability
   Reliability is a serious consideration when physician practices transition their communications to the cloud. When clinicians can
easily reach each other, remote specialists, and other stakeholders, patient evaluations and treatment decisions can become more informed and efficient. Care teams can instantly initiate secure care-planning meetings that bring together staff using diverse mediums on equally diverse devices from any location.

If an aging PBX or connection to a PSTN fails with an on-premises system, so does the service. Localized services are also susceptible to natural disasters. In the past, cloud services worked much the same way; if the local area network or data center went down, so did the service.

Today, cloud applications are supported by multiple geographically redundant data centers, with flexible, highly reliable connectivity options that are available from anywhere, anytime. With as high as a 99.999% reliability rating, the cloud has supplanted on premises as today’s most reliable option.

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**Five key capabilities to look for in a cloud communications solution**

Look for multi-modal collaboration capabilities that enable your practice to collaborate with the same user experience across desktop, smartphones, and tablets:

- Team collaboration applications that use defined teams, dashboards, file sharing, and task assignment to simplify clinical workflows that require frequent collaboration
- Team conferencing applications that support participation using voice, video, and text
- Secure messaging applications that align to HITRUST/CSF standards
- Schedule-based routing capabilities to direct urgent calls to assigned on-call staff
- Solutions that support end-to-end encryption to ensure secure data transmissions always

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2. **Innovate and scale quickly and efficiently**

Innovation and agility are critical as large group practices or hospital-affiliated practices continue to expand and acquire practices as a part of their accountable care reimbursement programs and business strategy. The ability for a group practice to open or consolidate clinics, move locations, or innovate how communications are used across their clinic networks can have a direct impact on practice revenue and operational success.

Providers today are looking to the cloud to provide the competitive edge in improving clinical workflow, care team productivity, enhancing patient engagement, and adapting to the changes in practice operations.

3. **Consolidate vendors**

The cloud enables healthcare providers to consolidate and deploy a single phone, SMS, fax, web meetings, video, and audio conference solution across the entire organization. This not only centralizes collaboration management, but eliminates shadow IT tools and applications to help mitigate cybersecurity risks across the primary facility and all practice sites.

4. **Lower costs**

Healthcare IT leaders are often asked to deliver technology that both improves productivity and reduces total cost of ownership (TCO). Cloud communications allows companies to simplify equipment, management, service, and ability to scale while also improving end-user productivity. Typically, enterprise organizations have lowered total cost by 30–40% in the first year alone.

5. **Integrate with other clinical business applications**

 Nearly 60 percent of ambulatory providers surveyed for an IDC Health Insights report indicated that they were unsatisfied with their utilization of electronic health record (EHR) technology and the impact on their clinical workflow productivity. Whether integrating click-to-call features within web-based clinical applications, leveraging web chat features within patient portals, or presenting scheduling teams with basic patient information as supportive screen pops, cloud communications can recoup overall clinical practice productivity.

A recent study by RingCentral and CITE Research shows that knowledge workers lose up to 32 days per year in productivity by simply switching between applications. With the average enterprise using over 1,000 cloud applications, integrating even just some
of these solutions can not only save time and money, but create greater business insights over what’s possible with on-premises communications solutions.

6. Gather business insights
Telephony analytics empower IT teams by providing access to reports on real-time inbound and outbound calls. This feature helps optimize the advantages of a cloud communications system by presenting usage analysis and trending metrics in an easy-to-read graphical way.

Teams tasked with migrating systems often cite several concerns:

- How do we migrate from legacy to cloud seamlessly, including number porting?
- How do we successfully deploy this new technology?
- How do we implement in a timely manner across multiple practice locations?
- How do we drive adoption?

Cloud communications takes your patient portal to the next level
Enhancing your patient portal with web chat and other cloud communications features can help you maintain the 5 percent patient portal utilization threshold required to meet Stage 2 of the meaningful use incentive program.

Online bill payments using web portals with telephony features shorten accounts receivable timelines and improves the patient experience and satisfaction with this common patient touchpoint with your group practice.

Four Stage Deployment Methodology

Stage one: multi-site qualification
Any methodology and strategy plans must consider your existing clinics, as well as any future expansion or practice acquisitions. Project management requirements must be carefully outlined for each stage of the implementation, including the ultimate onboarding of end users unfamiliar with the new solution.

Before implementation, your organization must first gain a thorough understanding of where the cloud service will be used, the network conditions at each location, and user profiles for those using the service. This 360-degree approach is useful in gaining a complete picture, including any yet-unidentified limitations that could impact usage or quality of service.

Site expansion strategy
For group practices with multiple clinic locations, IT teams may choose to identify and select locations for a phased rollout strategy. Often the primary medical office building or location headquarters and one additional clinic location will be selected for immediate implementation, with a second and third clinic phase of development to follow as time and resources dictate. With this approach, it is important for those managing the team to clearly identify the strategy and communicate with all practice stakeholders to understand their unique requirements (i.e., front office practice reception vs centralized patient scheduling).

Network-readiness assessment
A network-readiness assessment allows IT teams to understand constraints on network capacity, quality of service, firewall configurations, plus supported devices and configurations. Often cloud providers recommend that an enterprise network and soft-client computers support a minimal set of features to ensure high-quality VoIP, video, and communications services. For this purpose, requirements and recommendations are provided for some type of routers, DNS, NAT, etc.
Stage two: planning and design

Frequently, one of the triggers in adopting cloud communications is the digital transformation of both the practice staff and patient customer experience initiatives and clinical workflows. Therefore, a successful transition plan must reconnect the project to the principles of the new user experiences it aims to support.

Call routing and IVRs future state

At the center of the voice channel is the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. This solution enables practices to quickly connect patients to staff or to assist with automated, non-live services such as prescription refills or co-payment fulfillment. The IVR gives group practices the flexibility to create structured, multiple-layer call menus that efficiently connect patients to staff, call queues, or contact center locations seamlessly and quickly.

To further enhance the patient experience, organizations can take advantage of multi-level IVRs that enable them to design, deploy, and modify custom intelligent inbound call flows that simplify call routing management for multiple locations. This type of IVR typically offers connections to the dial-by-name directory, system extensions, voicemail, or external phone numbers.

Designing the new IVR is a critical task that can undermine the expected financial upside of your cloud transition project if not executed flawlessly. During this phase, a successful large cloud deployment relies on experts that can map out the desired call flow routes, central and local IVR menus, and connections to external numbers that will optimize the IVR. Teaming up with product experts who can identify your organization’s customer experience principles and match them to the right numbers, product features, and settings will ensure a flawless deployment and execution.

Integration opportunities

When organizations migrate to cloud communications, they have an opportunity to align business communications with their larger digital transformation goals through integrations. As part of mapping out the new system, organizations should team up with project experts to identify what workflows can be further improved with the addition of integrated communications features.

Common candidates for enhancement are patient billing, scheduling, and other practice departments that encounter frequent and high volumes of repetitive inbound and outbound call types. These can be optimized through integration-driven information exchange (i.e., screen pops) between the UCaaS platform and your practice management system (PMS) or electronic medical record (EMR) platform.

Practices that have migrated patient portals or their PMS and EMR workflows to the cloud now have a chance to further automate processes and make agents more productive—and patients more satisfied. These could include automatic call logging, screen pops showing patient appointment histories, automatic text notifications about prescription refills, and two-factor authentication via SMS. Whether your workflow is powered by a public or custom-built application, the possibilities are virtually limitless. And engaging the right project experts can result in incremental productivity gains to your cloud migration project that will further improve the return.

Business requirements documents

Once the design of your new cloud communications system is complete, be sure to record all the requirements in a formal project document that lists specific dates and owners. Known as a Business Requirements Document (BRD), it should include covered locations, network connectivity, user profiles, number porting, IVR designs, custom app integrations, and phone hardware requirements. The BRD becomes the blueprint for your implementation and provides a clear overview of project timelines, required resources across the organization, roles, and responsibilities.

Cloud communications can help your clinical practice maximize patient revenue

Missed patient appointments average 23 percent to 34 percent for medical practices nationwide, with a significant loss of income as a result. Automated outbound patient notification calls and texts reduce patient no-shows by more than 30 percent.

Source: Medical Group Management Association (MGMA)

Stage three: managing deployment

For a successful project execution, your organization should work with your vendor to ensure you have unique point of contact for the duration of the implementation phase. Successful deployments rely on a designated project manager who takes over from your account manager as your primary point of contact for the project and coordinates the work across your organization and your cloud vendor. Based on your BRD, your project manager should identify the different stakeholders, manage both internal and external resources, and establish project milestones with timelines. Ensuring
a clear and constant flow of information across both organizations is a critical pillar of successful deployments as it avoids last-minutes surprises, provides complete project transparency, and ultimately demonstrates full accountability for the commitments established in your BRD.

**Stage four: implementation and adoption**

Once your group practice is ready to start implementing your cloud communications migration project, three main workstreams lie ahead. First, your cloud communications vendor will build your account. This includes creating individual users, assigning the correct user entitlements, and implementing your billing rules. Next, your legacy numbers must be ported (or transferred) to your cloud communications provider. Finally, a project manager will oversee the entire number-porting process and ensure that on the day your account is ready to go live all numbers are properly ported to your new cloud vendor.

It is critical during implementation to create new IVRs. The new IVRs are frequently at the center of your cloud communications transition and successful deployments rely on your vendor to execute it as part of implementation. As with number porting, this can become a complex and lengthy process that might delay your live date and erode the return expected from your project. Partnering with your cloud communications vendor will accelerate your live date and remove the complexities associated with it. Your organization can at any point after live date easily modify and edit each IVR as needed.

One of the key reasons organizations migrate to cloud communications is to consolidate all communications applications into a single platform and eliminate unnecessary spend in redundant tools. Therefore, successful deployments must incorporate training and adoption initiatives that focus on both end users and administrators. These can be done either in person or remotely, and eventually on-demand with pre-recorded videos. Ensuring your organization has been trained on the new system is very effective in preventing users from bringing in new applications or communications vendors that will erode the financial benefits of your cloud communications transition project.

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**The cloud is on the rise in healthcare**

- 42 percent of hospitals now invest in cloud-based implementation.
- Between 2014 and 2015, the number of healthcare organizations using cloud-based applications jumped from 8 percent to 37 percent.
- Of 5,700 practices surveyed, 83 percent of respondents indicated that cloud-based electronic health records (EHRs) are the single biggest tech trend.


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**Implementation partnership**

RingCentral Professional Services™ engagement is ideal for customers looking for support to implement RingCentral service in complex or multi-clinic environments. Featuring a committed team of experts, RingCentral Professional Services will deliver a premium onboarding experience and extensive support to drive your business success.

- Pre-deployment consultations to understand your unique environment and requirements
- Personalized implementation and deployment plans designed specifically for your business needs
- Worry-free experience—industry experts design best-practice processes to eliminate business down time
- Hands-on training for administrators and users to ensure smooth onboarding
Summary

A cloud-based communications solution offers a number of benefits, from increased reliability to the ability to scale quickly and consolidate vendors. Additionally, your organization will experience greatly reduced management and implementation complexity from these solutions.

The secret to a successful deployment is to start with a strategy that considers the entirety of the current and future states, plans and designs to the specific needs of the user, guides optimal deployment, and ensures end users can access and use the product as needed.

Large group practices with multiple clinic locations, complex network infrastructures, limited in-house IT resources, or those requiring minimal business disruption may want to partner with a professional services team to drive all stages of migration to ensure the planning, designing, project management, implementation, and ongoing support will deliver the best results possible.

Physician practices have their own unique challenges

Leverage cloud communications solutions that can solve your unique collaboration and real-time information exchange demands:

• Multi-professional care teams spend at least 25 percent of their time on communications-based activities.
• First attempt voice-only calls fail 85 percent of the time in healthcare environments.
• 90 percent of staff bring their personal smart devices to work.
• 73 percent of staff send and receive work-related texts.
• Of 1,000 physicians surveyed, 95 percent frequently use text messages.


For more information, please contact a sales representative. Visit ringcentral.com or call 855-774-2510.

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