

**YOUR GUIDE TO
SECURE HYBRID WORKING**

APRIL 2021

As lockdown eases, it's time to take stock and see what we can all learn from a year of considerable disruption.

Perhaps most importantly, we've learnt just how tough UK businesses are. Many organisations switched to remote work almost overnight, making the best of a bad situation. It's been a struggle, we can all attest to that! But, the wheels of commerce have continued to turn.

Here at Unicomm, we've learnt that, despite reservations, remote work has its advantages. For a start, employees like it. In one recent survey, 18% of respondents said they wanted to work entirely from home when the pandemic ends, and 57% favoured a mix of home and office working.

Interestingly, more than half (55%) shared that their loyalty to their employer may depend on being offered some form of flexible working in the future.

Cutting a long story short, offering flexible options could have significant benefits for your ability to recruit and retain your best employees. But there are other advantages too. Equipment, office and utility costs can all be reduced through hybrid working.

It's no surprise that, according to some estimates, three or four times as many people could be working at home after the pandemic than before it began.



75%

*of employees favour
some form of remote
or flexible work*

4 X

*as many people
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THE FUTURE IS HYBRID

Of course, there are benefits to being in the office too, with teambuilding being chief among them. That's why many businesses may favour a hybrid model after the pandemic, letting employees split the working week between the office and home.

The move to hybrid is going to be popular. A report for PwC found that less than one in five executives say they want to return to the office as it was pre-pandemic and many major corporations are already adapting their operations for a hybrid future.

The rest may be struggling with the finer details of how to share employee time between the office and home, but if they hold out too long, they risk losing talent, credibility and relevance.

However, for hybrid work to become permanent, it has to be an effective alternative to spending every day in the office and must ensure the same (if not greater) data protections and efficiency.

Quite simply, how do businesses ensure hybrid working models are as secure, efficient and productive as working entirely 'in-house'?

THE TOOLS FOR THE JOB

It's clear that IT infrastructure and communications are at the centre of your transition to hybrid working. Temporary tools (often bolt-on video conferencing), implemented as a Covid emergency, may no longer be enough.

Communications are becoming increasingly digital and, with the 2025 PSTN Switch Off fast approaching, operations must adapt quickly to ensure their team members remain contactable wherever they may work.

This e-book discusses the factors IT teams need to take into account as they equip remote workers for a new world of seamless communication and secure hybrid working.

SQUARING THE HYBRID CIRCLE

For IT teams, hybrid is a conundrum. You need to give teams access to a full suite of digital applications. You need employees to be able to communicate effectively and collaborate as a team. You need to keep the organisation's data and services secure. And all that is true whether dispersed teams are working in the office, at home or in a coffee shop down the road.

It's a big ask, but the right tools can make it much simpler than it sounds. Here are five factors to take into consideration as you equip a hybrid workforce.

THE 'WORK ANYWHERE' MENTALITY

For hybrid strategies to succeed, teams must be able to work as well from home as they can from the office. That means giving employees access to the communication tools that provide the right experience wherever they work.

For example, a good cloud-based communications and collaboration platform will let staff access voice, video, IM, chat and conferencing at home and in the office, from any device. It should also come with advanced collaboration tools, like presence-based awareness, visual voicemail, attendant console and more.

Hybrid teams have to be able to communicate freely, from anywhere, in the way they want.

CONSISTENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

A successful hybrid model also needs a consistent - and consistently excellent - customer experience. Dispersed teams need to make and take professional calls, alongside the information they need to answer customer questions and solve issues.

Again, cloud-based solutions are perfect for this. MiCloud Flex, for example, integrates with many popular CRM platforms and other business applications to deliver real time customer intelligence.

Built-in contact centre features are also great to route incoming calls to the right agents or resources and keep on top of performance.

DEPLOYING NEW TECHNOLOGY

At the end of the day, these solutions still need to be cost effective, both to deploy and to maintain.

The good news is that home-based staff only need an internet connection to access cloud-based communications. A feature-rich softphone app means they can make and take calls from any smartphone, laptop or tablet, with no need for dedicated handsets.

Cloud services are also simple to deliver from the business' point of view. With no on-site equipment to house, cool, protect and maintain, IT time is freed up and costs are reduced. Connecting multiple sites is as easy as adding new seats to the licence, while scaling up and down is achievable in a couple of clicks.

A pay-as-you-go pricing model means never paying for capacity you don't use, and a BYOD policy can help you reduce costs even further!

SECURITY AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY

One of the biggest considerations though, is security.

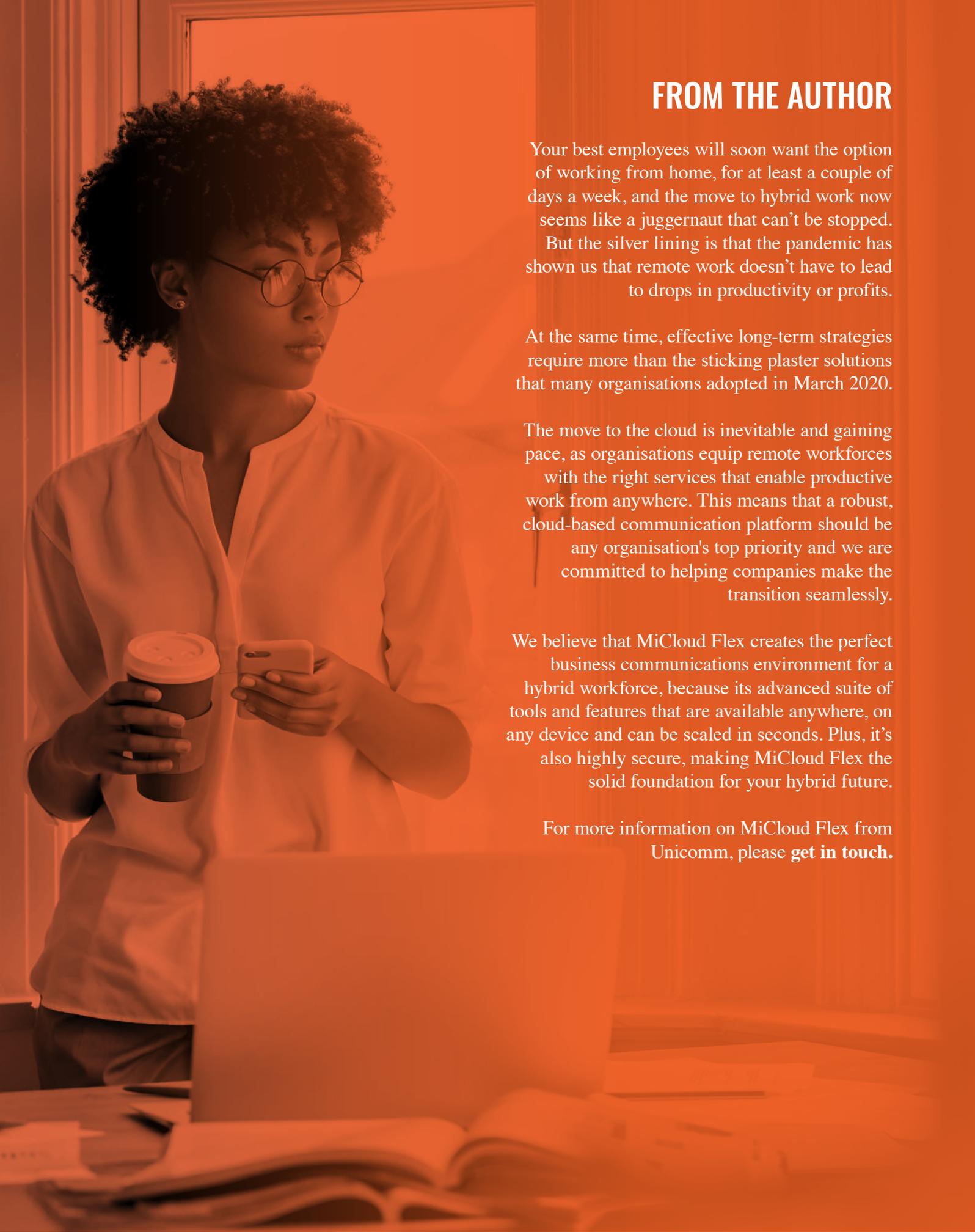
Hybrid workers will be connecting to your network regularly from beyond your office firewall and sensitive customer data will be passed between colleagues using consumer-grade internet connections. This means that the tools you equip your hybrid workforce with need to have security built-in.

MiCloud Flex features security credentials that match or surpass any on-premise equivalent. It's hosted in secure data centres with advanced multi-layered security measures including full end-to-end encryption. Plus, the data centres themselves are built to satisfy the most stringent security standards and are fully certified to meet SOC 2, HIPAA and many other compliance requirements.

MiCloud Flex is secure in another way, too. By including everything they need to communicate effectively in one place, employees won't be tempted to bolt on third-party tools and apps that may open backdoors to your data.

And if disaster does strike (whether fire, flood, theft, cybercrime or even another global health crisis!) MiCloud Flex helps to keep you up and running. The platform features dual data centre failovers to keep your business connected.

Should anything happen to one data centre, your service will simply start running from another in a matter of moments.



FROM THE AUTHOR

Your best employees will soon want the option of working from home, for at least a couple of days a week, and the move to hybrid work now seems like a juggernaut that can't be stopped.

But the silver lining is that the pandemic has shown us that remote work doesn't have to lead to drops in productivity or profits.

At the same time, effective long-term strategies require more than the sticking plaster solutions that many organisations adopted in March 2020.

The move to the cloud is inevitable and gaining pace, as organisations equip remote workforces with the right services that enable productive work from anywhere. This means that a robust, cloud-based communication platform should be any organisation's top priority and we are committed to helping companies make the transition seamlessly.

We believe that MiCloud Flex creates the perfect business communications environment for a hybrid workforce, because its advanced suite of tools and features that are available anywhere, on any device and can be scaled in seconds. Plus, it's also highly secure, making MiCloud Flex the solid foundation for your hybrid future.

For more information on MiCloud Flex from Unicomm, please **get in touch**.