AI made easy: The essential IT guide for transforming your small business phone system

Table of contents

Demystifying AI in business communications
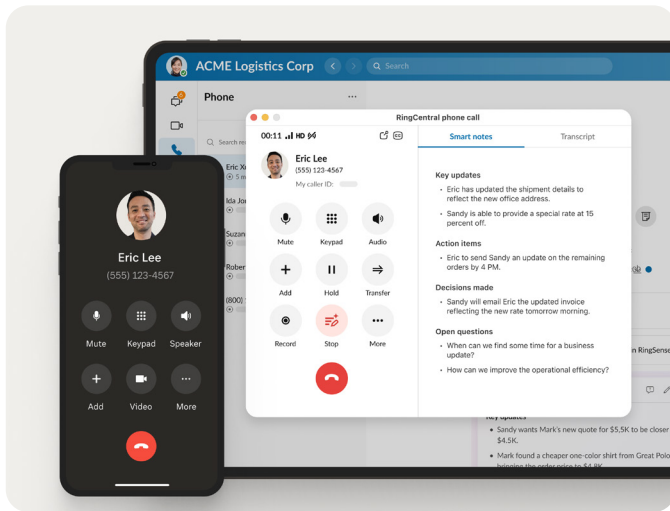
Not long ago, email and traditional phone systems were practically the only means of communication. Telephone communication still plays an important role, of course. We will always need that person-to-person connection with the synchronous communication that phones provide.

However, as mobile apps, social media, and other digital channels have skyrocketed in popularity, businesses have adapted by extending their reach to new modes of communication. Companies that use unified, cloud-based, multichannel platforms to incorporate and manage all those various modes of communication can experience a 14% decrease in costs[1], and a nearly 100% revenue improvement.

Most companies now use one or more online meeting platforms, SMS text messaging, email, chatbots, and a handful of the most popular social media channels. They rely on various apps and supporting technology to make it all work. That often consumes much time and effort, as users toggle back and forth between platforms, trying to keep track of all their interactions. HBR research[2] revealed that, on average, the cost of toggling in time is a little over two seconds, and the average user toggles between different apps and websites nearly 1,200 times daily. That's just under four hours a week reorienting themselves after toggling to a new application—a huge drag on productivity.

Many business leaders have responded by shifting to unified communication as a service (UCaaS) platforms that offer a holistic user experience along with advanced features that improve productivity, enhance customer experiences, and increase organizational agility.

1. Integrated Unified Communications/Contact Center Drives Measurable Business Metrics," Metrigy, 2021.
2. Murty, Rohan, Dadlani, Sandeep, and Das, Ralph. "How Much Time and Energy Do We Waste Toggling Between Applications?", Harvard Business Review, August 2022.

Forward-looking businesses recognize the value of UCaaS, and with the advent of AI, the shift to these new technologies is now imperative. AI can enhance traditional communication channels in ways we might never have imagined a decade ago. It can listen, summarize, organize, and create reminders. AI can detect sentiment, identify areas for improvement, and offer guidance.

It can even aggregate historical information, combining that with current data to offer real-time insights. A healthcare provider, for example, can get a quick summary of previous visits, recommendations from other providers, medications, and follow-up reminders. A financial advisor can easily pull up a client's history, getting immediate access to important information before an advisory meeting.

AI can improve collaboration, enhance sales performance, increase customer satisfaction, and help employees do their jobs more effectively. SMB owners, senior IT leaders, and other decision-makers need to familiarize themselves with UCaaS and AI because, together, these technologies will have a profound impact on the way we do business.

AI in UCaaS platforms

UCaaS combines phone, video conferencing, instant messaging, online events, chatbots, social media, and more in a single cloud-based platform. It's highly efficient and scalable. It's also especially well-suited for organizations whose employees work remotely because it allows workers to participate fully from anywhere in the world.
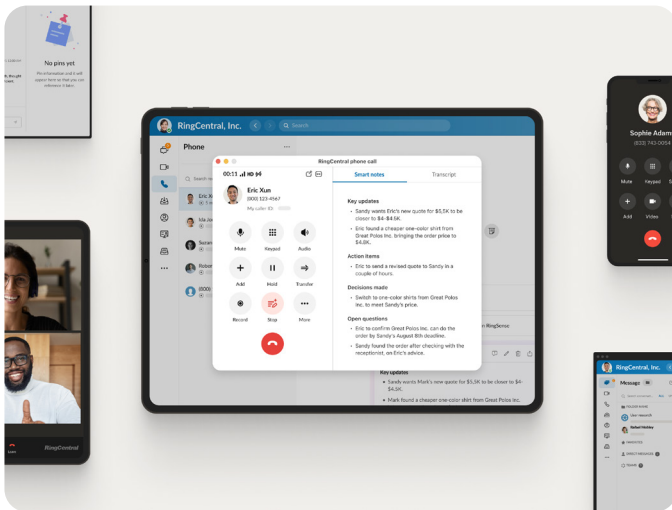
Together, AI and UCaaS can elevate the way employees communicate and collaborate. AI-based speech recognition, for example, offers call transcripts, summaries, and follow-up lists. Virtual assistants can schedule meetings, share notes, and trigger automated workflows. Customer-facing AI tools can detect sentiment, track trends, and provide valuable insights to decision-makers.

AI is revolutionizing customer experiences. Today's technology can call up a client's detailed history from a customer relationship management (CRM) system, giving employees immediate access to the information that matters most. AI can present a summary of the customer's record, look for solutions to common questions or problems, and suggest the best responses.

AI can also highlight potential revenue opportunities for your business. If a customer is struggling with an older version of your company's product, for example, AI can suggest a trade-in offer to upsell them to a more modern replacement product.

Today's organizations can even use AI to enhance employee training. By monitoring outbound sales calls, for example, AI can suggest ways an employee might adjust their approach, leading to higher revenue (and increased commissions for the salesperson).

For example, RingCentral offers revenue-enhancing capabilities and AI-driven soft skills training assistance that enhances workers' leadership, communication, and collaboration abilities.

One of the key benefits of AI lies in its ability to unify and summarize communications across multiple channels and users. It brings together data from multiple silos in various applications to deliver insights that incorporate all touchpoints. That results in a seamless flow of conversational intelligence, helping businesses to identify patterns and trends. This can reveal common questions about product features, for example, or recurring obstacles to purchase.
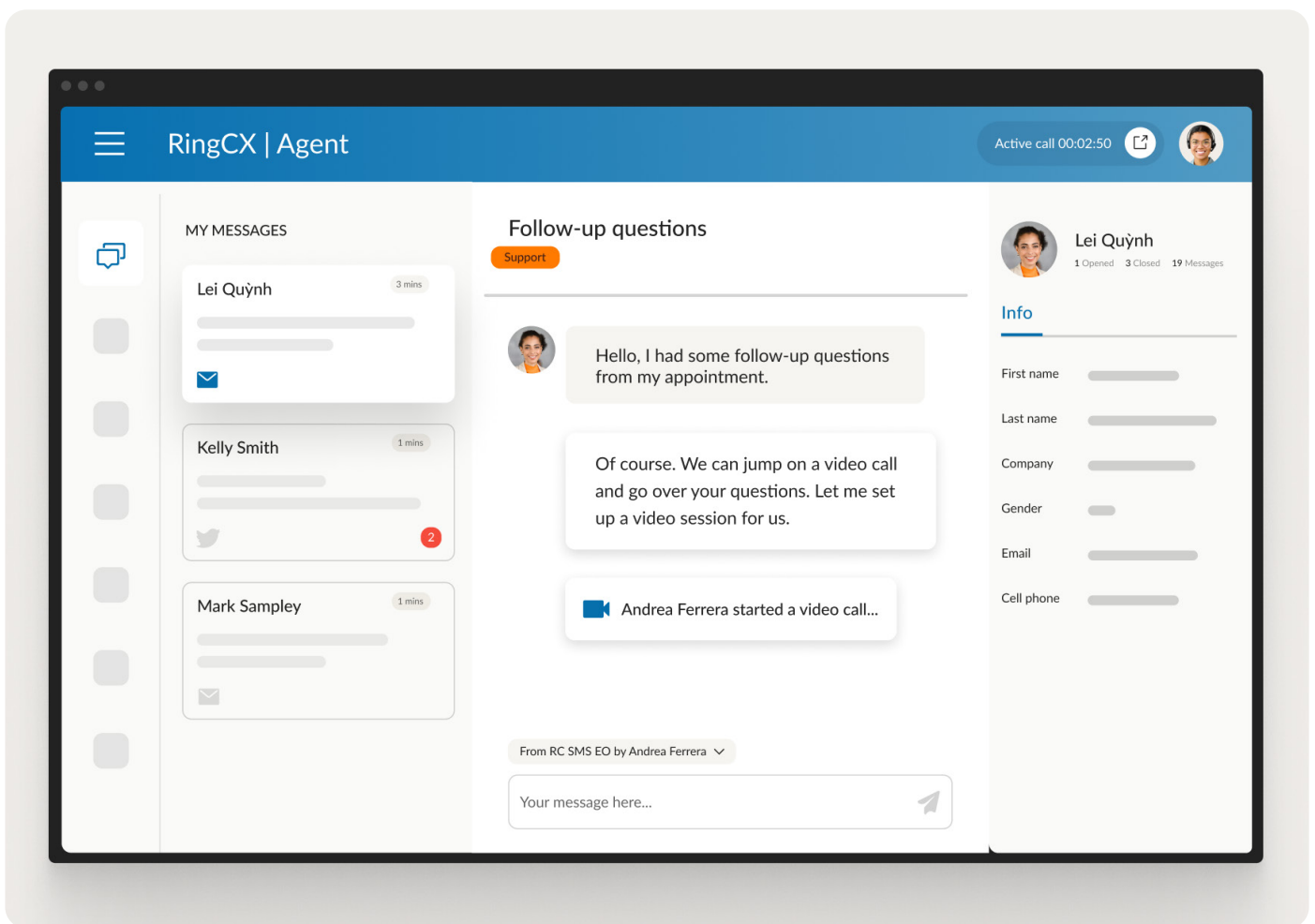
Benefits of AI-powered UCaaS for your business

Let's explore the benefits of using an AI-powered communication platform:

- **Improved efficiency and productivity up to 40%[3]**: Imagine if every employee in your organization could get back three or four hours a week, freeing them up to focus on high-value work. With an AI-powered communications platform, employees save time and can be more productive. AI automates tasks, captures meeting notes and organizes them into categories, summarizes information from multiple conversations and channels, and routes each customer service call to the person best suited to solve the problem.

- **Enhanced data-driven decisions**: AI presents call analytics and sentiment reports to inform decisions about products, pricing, sales tactics, customer service, and more. When your team only has visibility to fragmented feedback scattered across multiple channels of communication, it's hard to identify clear patterns. AI unifies that data to inform better business decisions.

- **Increased sales success**: By detecting a prospect's sentiment and receptivity in real time, AI can deliver in-call coaching to help salespeople set more appointments and close more business. When faced with questions or objections, AI offers instant access to product and client information to support successful outcomes. It can also track competitive mentions, key concerns, and other trends that point to the best way to handle objections and close the sale.

- **Cost savings**: AI-driven efficiency and automation naturally lead to lower costs. Unified, cloud-based communications are also less expensive than traditional phone services.

- **Higher customer satisfaction**: AI helps customer service agents focus on what matters most and resolve issues quickly. It can also tailor customer communications to the style and preferences of each client.

- **Simplified security and compliance**: AI detects anomalies and alerts employees to potential fraud. In addition, automated call recording provides an auditable record of communications for compliance purposes.

3. Somers, Meredith. "How generative AI can boost highly skilled workers' productivity," MIT.edu, October 2023.

Implementing AI in your communication strategy

How can small and midsize businesses get started with UCaaS and AI? As with most other technologies, it starts with defining your objectives, finding a vendor that matches your needs, and laying out a strategy for implementing the new systems.
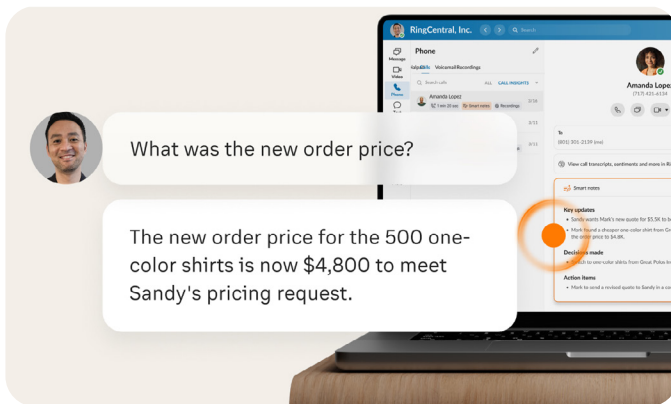
Identifying your business needs

Begin by assessing your current communications setup and your organization's key pain points. What are your strategic objectives, and which barriers stand in the way of achieving them?   What role does communication play in your key business processes, and how might multimodal conversation intelligence improve outcomes?

Here's an example. Suppose your IT team is working to resolve a particularly thorny technical issue. Via generative AI, your IT personnel can quickly access a centralized knowledge base of past incidents and solutions. For IT troubleshooting sessions, AI-enabled collaboration tools give teams real-time note-taking capabilities, ensuring that the team captures new issues and resolutions quickly. They can focus their attention on the problem and the people they're working to help, knowing that AI will capture every detail of the interaction for future reference. Conversation intelligence can analyze support calls to improve IT support strategies and training. AI-powered message summaries help IT teams address critical alerts and updates promptly.

The same AI capabilities can enhance marketing, sales, or customer service processes. What if your newly hired agents could come up to speed faster? What if they could get personalized, targeted coaching to improve their cold-calling, customer outreach, or handling of inbound calls?

Virtually every aspect of your organization involves communication and collaboration. AI-powered UCaaS saves time and increases efficiency with meeting notes, summaries, and workflow automation. Look for areas where AI will have the greatest impact and make that your initial focus. By zeroing in on a high-potential use case, you can concentrate your energy on a single realistic, manageable goal.

Evaluating UCaaS platforms with AI functionalities

Next, look for UCaaS platforms that incorporate AI and fit your organization's strategic goals.

Start by comparing key features, pricing, and security of different providers. Do they have limited AI capabilities, or do they offer innovative features that can truly help you improve efficiency and grow your organization? Are they designed for businesses of all sizes, or are they really only intended for large enterprises with deep pockets?

As with so many other change initiatives, it can be very helpful to try out a new technology before adopting it wholesale. Look for a vendor that can offer a limited-scale pilot based on a single location, department, or use-case. In doing so, your team can experience the benefits, identify potential roadblocks, and set the stage for a successful launch at scale.

As you explore different vendors, you should also consider their approach to data security. Could they potentially expose your trade secrets and customer information to third parties? Are they using their own AI technology, or just plugging into a third-party tool that they don't control? If a vendor isn't proactively attending to security and privacy, cross them off your list.

Look for an AI-powered UCaaS platform that can scale up as you grow. Can it handle hundreds of concurrent users? Or thousands? Can it integrate with your existing technology stack to unify workflows and experiences across your entire organization?

Quality of service, vendor reputation, and support are also critical. Research each provider's track record, customer support offerings, and commitment to innovation. Look for reviews, case studies, and testimonials from customers with similar business needs.

By carefully evaluating these factors, you can select a UCaaS platform that meets your current needs and positions your company for future growth and innovation.

Getting started with AI

Once you've chosen the right vendor, begin working with your team to prepare them for the transition to the new technology. It helps to approach this from both a technical "how to" perspective and a change management point of view. Plan to train employees in using AI effectively and help them through the change process by setting clear expectations and educating them about the benefits of the new technology.

A phased approach can also be beneficial for many organizations. By starting with a small group of employees, for example, you can try out new features, track feedback, and learn more about optimizing the platform. As you do so, you will create success stories from which to launch the next phase and build up a group of evangelists within the company.

Develop a plan to monitor and measure the impact of AI on your communication goals, quantifying the impact through defined metrics that align with the objectives you set out at the beginning of this process.

Real-world case studies

Companies of all sizes use AI-driven communication technologies to produce better outcomes. Here are just a few examples:
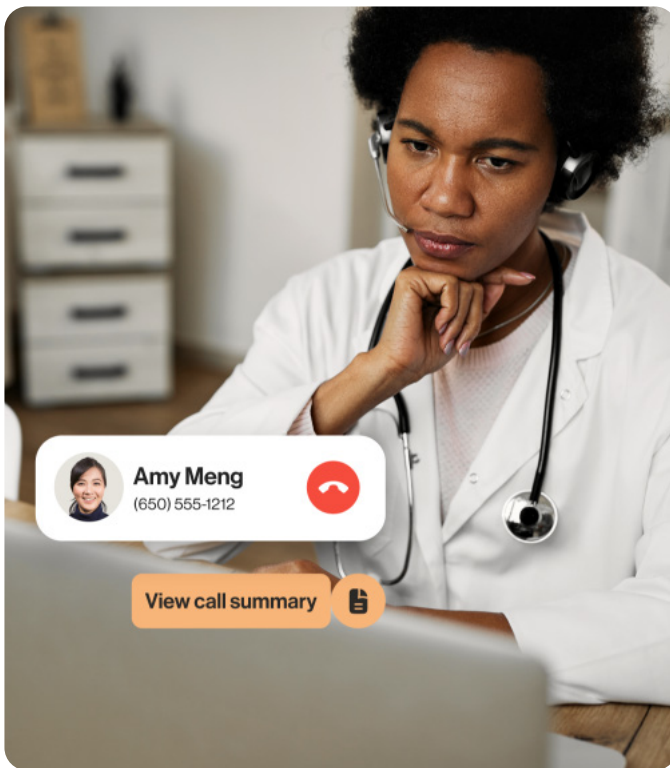
InsuranceHub provides insurance to individuals, families, and businesses. Initially, the company used RingCentral because of its need for mobility, reliability, and sophisticated calling and reporting features. When RingCentral introduced RingSense for Sales, executives at InsuranceHub jumped at the opportunity to integrate conversation intelligence into their strategic toolkit. The product has transformed customer interactions, enabling managers to coach their teams more effectively and productively. Keyword search has become a favorite feature as well, saving time and increasing sales effectiveness.

Eclipse Insurance is an independent agency with just 15 employees. The company's owner uses RingCentral's AI-driven insights from RingSense to gain visibility into what's working and not in the agency's sales and client-service practices. The system identifies words and phrases that resonate with customers and prospects, allowing the agency to capture and document best practices. It also highlights areas that need attention, alerting management when an employee may need some extra coaching.

Let RingCentral AI transform your business
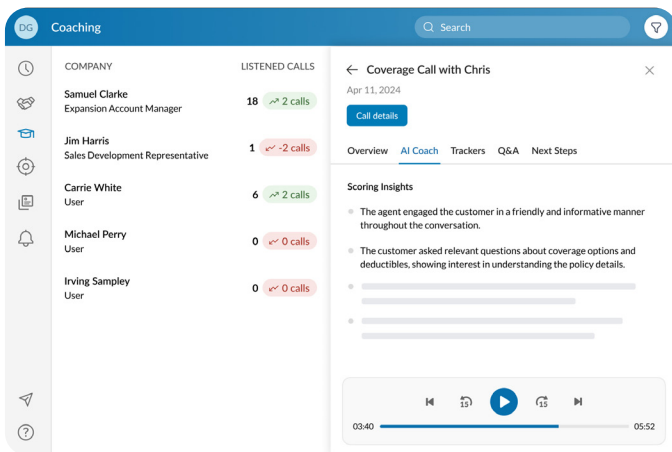
AI and unified communications are a powerful combination. Growth-oriented companies looking for agility and competitive advantage can deploy these technologies to increase efficiency and productivity, improve customer experiences, and grow their revenue.

SMB leaders who proactively explore and embrace AI will discover new opportunities to outpace their competitors by working smarter, not harder. They'll also be setting themselves up for future success, ready to explore emerging AI features that can take them even further along the path toward their goals.

RingCentral combines best-in-class UCaaS with AI technology to provide the tools you need to transform and grow your business. Learn more about RingCentral's AI solutions today.

Disclaimer

This information is for collaboration purposes and based on trends we have gathered from the industry. It is the sole responsibility of each organization to review their legal and regulatory obligations to ensure compliance with all laws and regulations enacted by the federal, state, and local levels, as well as industry governing bodies. This ebook should be considered as a resource to learn and collaborate, not legal advice.

About RingCentral

RingCentral Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of AI-driven cloud business communications, contact center, video and hybrid event solutions. RingCentral empowers businesses with conversation intelligence, and unlocks rich customer and employee interactions to provide insights and improved business outcomes. With decades of expertise in reliable and secure cloud communications, RingCentral has earned the trust of millions of customers and thousands of partners worldwide. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.

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

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