Evolve or Fail

Why More Businesses are
Turning to the Cloud

The Changing Pace of Business

Small and medium businesses have more opportunities for success than ever before. At the same time, they face a number of complex challenges, including competition from rivals that are rapidly adopting the latest technology innovations.

In response, companies of all sizes are making the cloud the center of their operations. With the cloud, they are serving up applications to a distributed workforce across multiple locations. Additionally, they are engaging with customers who demand instant satisfaction from businesses.

But while companies are generally embracing cloud-based solutions, their communications system lags behind. Countless small businesses still rely on aging telephone platforms, including the bane of many companies: on-premises private branch exchanges, or PBX.

Fast-growing companies know that in order to optimize their workforce and their resources, they must eliminate technology that hampers corporate expansion, impedes employee mobility, disrupts productivity and hurts the bottom line.

In fact, in a survey of 130 IT professionals conducted by BizTechInsights for cloud communications and collaboration solutions provider 8x8, 96 percent of respondents agree that legacy business phone systems can't keep up with the constantly evolving needs of today's global and mobile workforce. Nor do these systems support the customer experiences small and medium businesses need to stay relevant and competitive.

Fortunately, businesses are no longer stuck with outdated, on-premises telephone systems that are expensive, difficult to maintain, highly inflexible and innovation resistant.

A cloud communications and collaboration solution is an effective response to today's sophisticated business challenges. And the cloud-based approach is an increasingly familiar option to businesses of all sizes.

More than one-third of survey respondents say it is most appropriate to characterize their organization as being knowledgeable of the cloud—they're currently using one or more cloud applications for business purposes. Only 8 percent of respondents report having any discomfort using cloud solutions for critical business needs (see Figure 1).
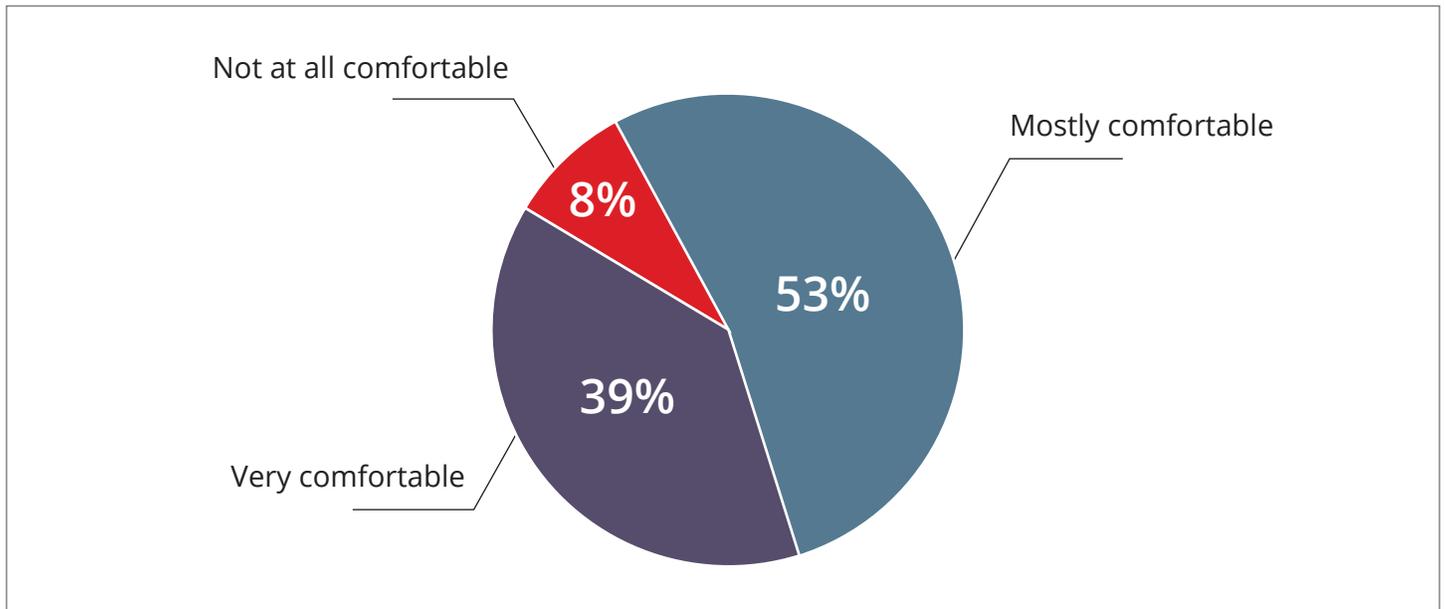

Figure 1: How does your company regard the use of cloud solutions for critical applications?

Additionally, more than one-third of respondents say their businesses operate in multiple regions around the country or world. This means they are likely highly motivated to explore cloud communications to effectively and easily engage with customers and with employees wherever those parties are located. The same can also be said for the 26 percent of respondents who noted that their remote workforces are growing (see Figure 2).
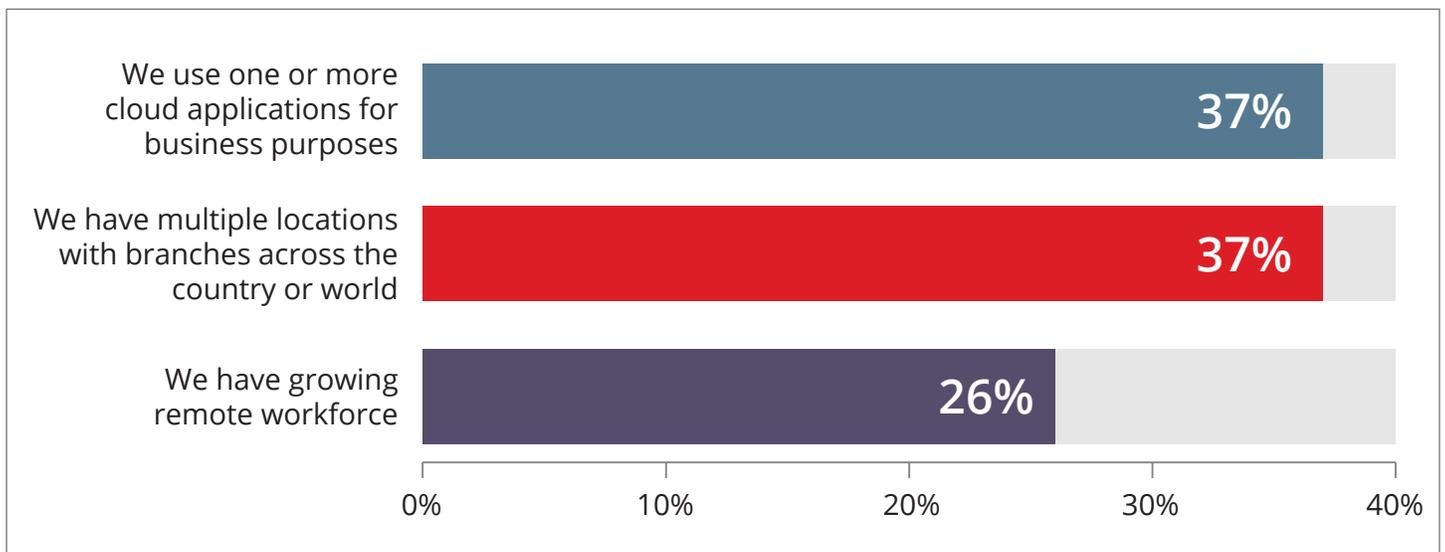

Figure 2. Which statement best describes your business?

Limits of Legacy Hardware

Companies experience innumerable limitations with their current phone systems, but the survey identified four main pain points that stood out above the rest:

1. **Failure to integrate with back-office applications.** Newly added features increase the value of software that small businesses rely upon every day. But legacy PBX vendors no longer update their offerings to include features like seamless customer relationship management (CRM) system integration, which many companies find essential to improving customer service. The absence of back-office application support decreases the value of PBX systems exponentially over time.

2. **Obsolete hardware or discontinued support.** Traditional enterprise PBX and other legacy telephone systems are on a rapid decline. Because many best-selling systems are no longer sold or supported, when problems rear up, companies can't replace critical components or deploy important bug fixes. Equally problematic is that businesses are left in the lurch when new communications features—such as application integration and other capabilities—are required to stay competitive.

3. **IT staff lacks expertise.** Fewer and fewer IT professionals have the knowledge or experience to support older phone systems. That leaves smaller businesses with little choice but to hire outside consultants for updates or installations. And any time spent by IT staff updating and maintaining legacy systems is time they are not dedicating to revenue-producing endeavors.

4. **High maintenance and upgrade costs.** Even if a PBX vendor still offers support and develops new features, maintenance renewal on hardware is costly. Depending on internal IT staff's knowledge or availability, the business might wind up having to regularly foot bills for specialists to handle updates, maintenance, customizations or other services.

Also among survey respondents top concerns is a failure to support business continuity/disaster recovery capabilities and the associated productivity losses that occur when their communications system goes down.

Lack of mobile support is another significant issue for businesses with employees who are on the go and need mobile apps—such as softphone, chat, web conferencing, video calling, business SMS/texting and the corporate directory—at their disposal and preferably at no additional cost.

Decentralized administration across phone branches also vexed respondents. Without the ability to leverage the same communications solution across every business site—and support it via unified administration capabilities—the complexities of deployment and maintenance and the drag on productivity take their toll (see Figure 3).
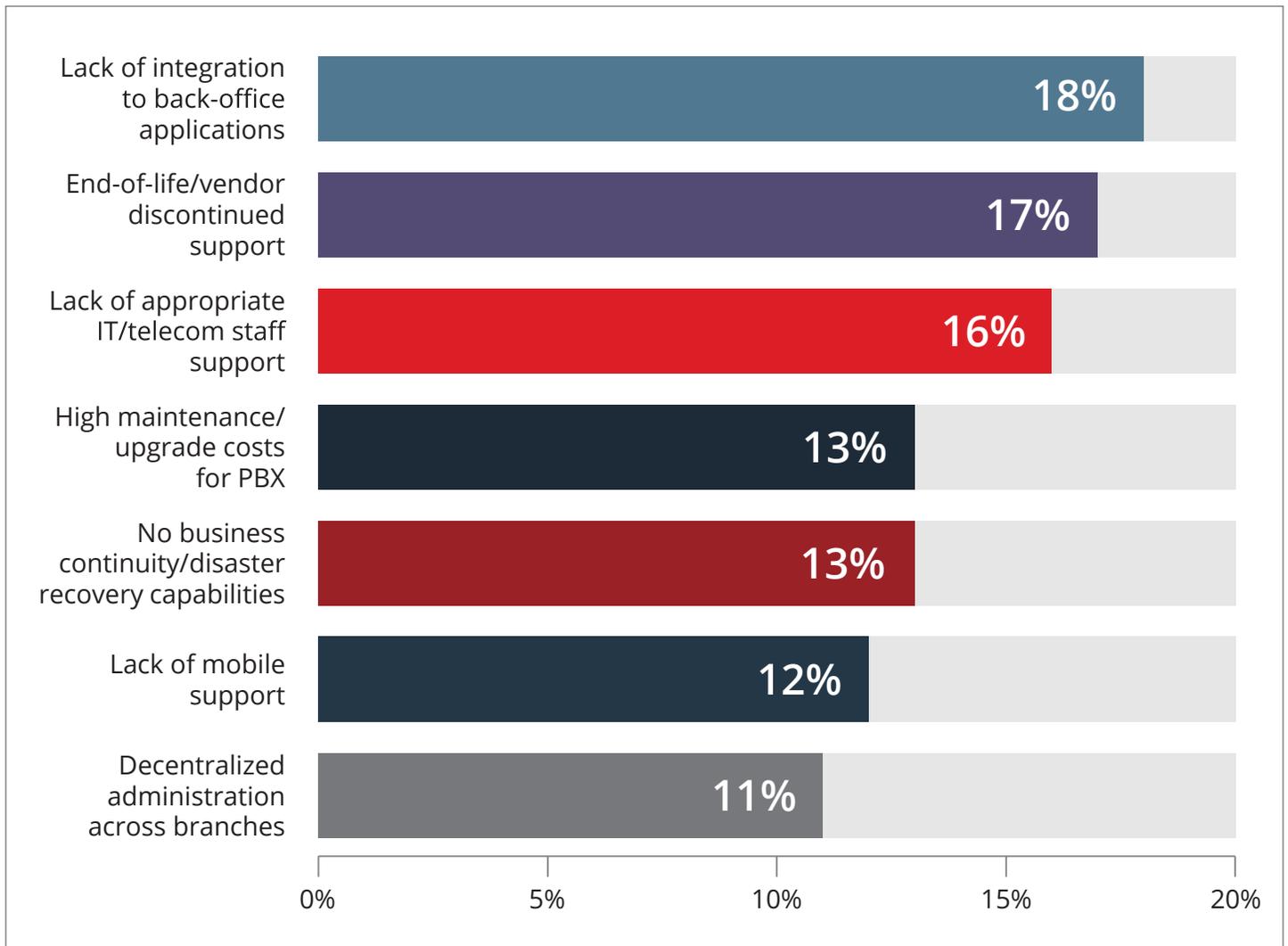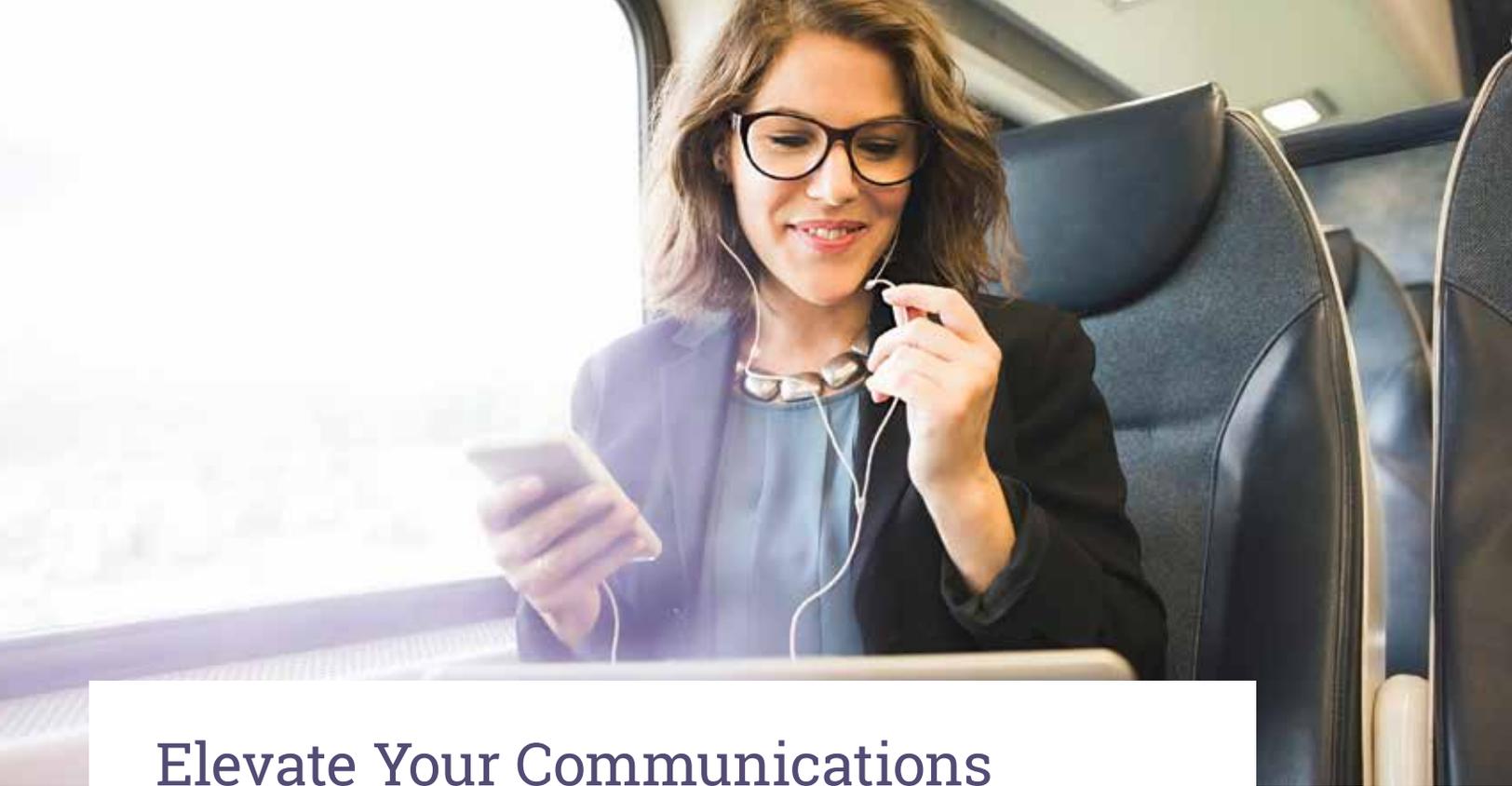

Figure 3. What are the top limitations of your current business phone system?

Elevate Your Communications

More than 90 percent of survey respondents say they are mostly or very comfortable using the cloud for critical business applications. And there is no application more critical than a communications platform, particularly one that lets workers access business collaboration services from any location using a web browser or smartphone app.

It is vital that employees can connect with customers when they're on the road or otherwise out of the office. With cloud communications, workers can configure desk and mobile phones to ring simultaneously, ensuring they never miss a call. They can hold video conferences wherever they are and instantly access information from previous calls by a customer to provide personalized service.

The right cloud communications solution makes these and many other capabilities possible in a holistic and integrated fashion. Users don't need to adopt multiple solutions to achieve the same results, which 85 percent of survey respondents reported they had to do.

Additionally, businesses can access third-party application integration without paying per-seat fees. Scalability limits also disappear, so companies can quickly add new employees to the network to accommodate future growth.

Growth is certainly on the horizon for survey respondents: more than 60 percent expect to significantly increase the number of employees they have across offices over the next three years (see Figure 4).

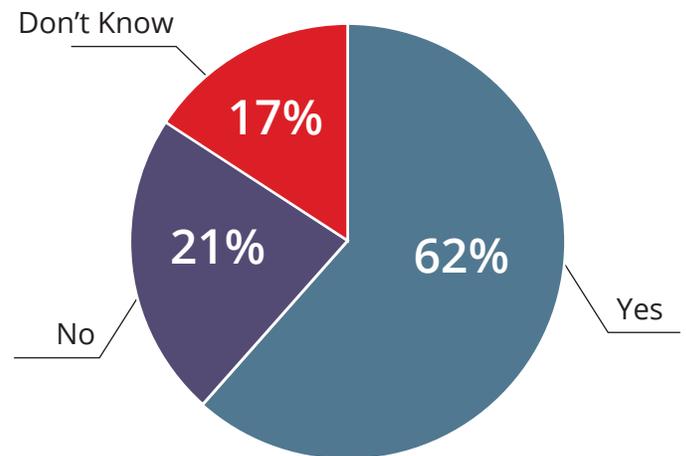Don't Know

17%

21%

62%

No

Yes

Figure 4. Does your company intend to significantly increase the number of employees in one to three years?

Equally important, the cloud provides the resiliency and reliability necessary to keep communications readily available. Businesses can leverage a cloud communications service that runs in data centers located in geographically dispersed sites across the globe. This fail-safe setup supports built-in redundancy and automatic and transparent failover to prevent disruptions in service.

What's more, administrators will have streamlined, centralized access for easy online management of tasks—such as setting up extensions and configuring auto attendants—across multiple sites and as its workforce grows.

Most important of all, the appropriate cloud communications system will address survey respondents' top four concerns:

- **Integration with back-office applications.** Cloud-based solutions often integrate with third-party applications, enhancing the value of the systems that businesses already use or want to add in the future. With CRM systems,

for instance, workers can enjoy single sign-on capabilities and the delivery of critical information with consolidated reporting and administrative information. They can call contacts from online services like their Skype for Business directory using their virtual extension, among other capabilities.

- **Continuing support.** The cloud represents the future of enterprise communications because it is the obvious backbone for driving responsive customer engagement experiences and internal collaboration at scale with flexibility. As legacy phone systems are pushed further into obscurity, cloud-based solutions receive regular updates that enhance their usefulness and help businesses stay competitive.

- **Alleviating IT burdens.** A cloud communications provider will handle ongoing upgrades and maintenance to assure operations are running smoothly, freeing busy IT teams to tackle other tasks.

- **Eliminating maintenance and upgrade costs.** Not having to pay for external third-party services is clearly a benefit when it comes to minimizing and optimizing IT spend.
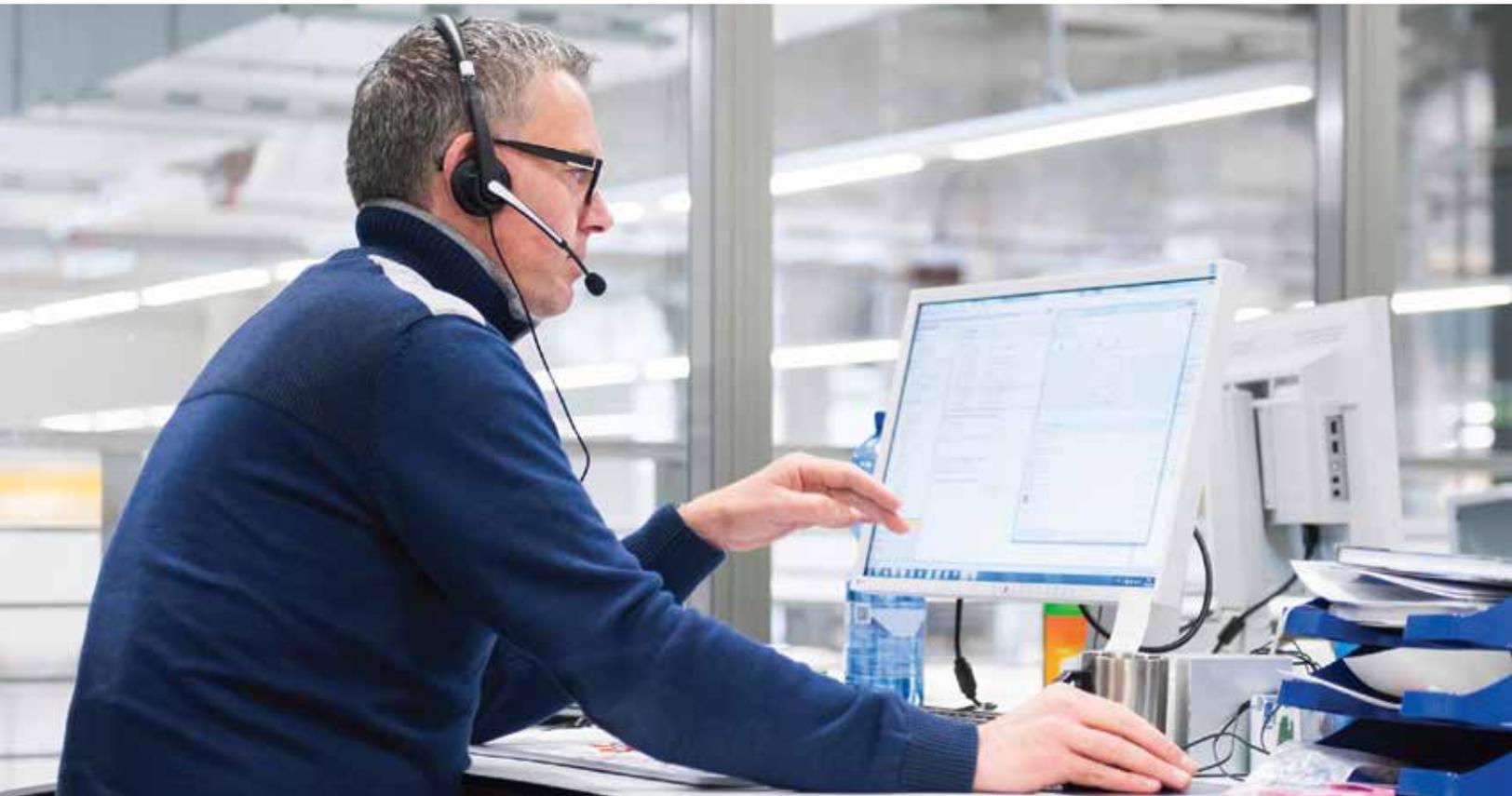
Why More Businesses Choose 8x8

As your business considers switching from a PBX or other legacy phone system, it's important to ensure that the cloud communications and collaboration solution you choose will meet your expectations regarding effectiveness, reliability, scalability, flexibility and cost efficiency.

Many vendors that tout themselves as leaders in the cloud communications and collaboration arena fail to provide packages and capabilities that meet all of these requirements. They may lack, for example, a flexible mix of services. These include offering mobile apps at no additional cost; strong service-level agreements for business continuity by means of multiple, redundant global data centers; or a well-integrated solution comprised of their own products, rather than one built on a mash-up of multiple vendors' technologies.

In addition, some communications systems may not be certified for compliance with federal and industry standards like HIPAA, PCI or FISMA—a requirement for 70 percent of survey respondents (see Figure 5).
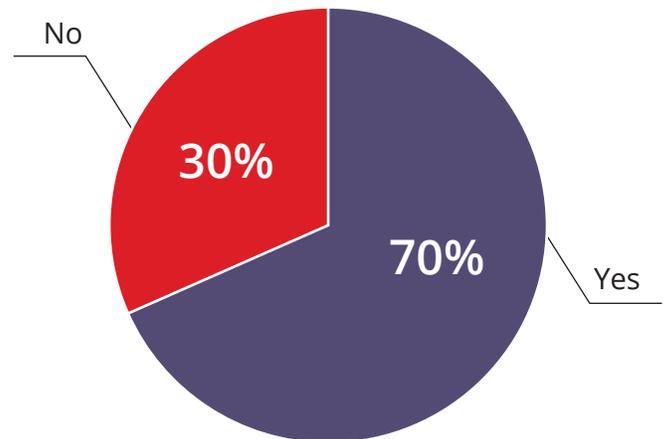

Figure 5. Are your company's communications systems required to support certifications such as FISMA, HIPAA or PCI?

These systems might also lack enterprise-level, centralized analytics for all branches and extensions in support of company business decisions.

Close to 85 percent of respondents consider enterprise-level analytics to be important, but nearly half lack this feature today (see Figure 6).
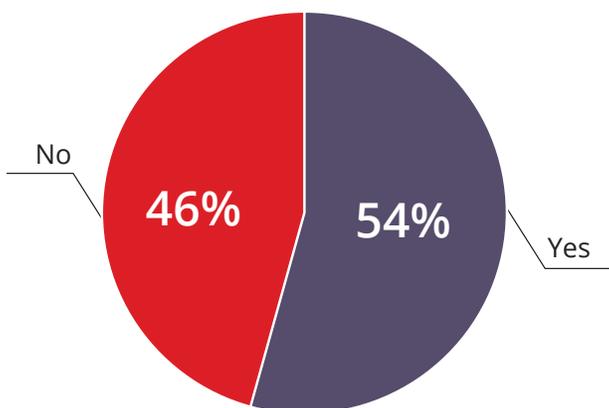

Figure 6. Does your current legacy communications system provide enterprise-level analytics for all extensions?

There is one solution that does it all, offering cloud-based, enterprise-class software solutions for small and medium businesses in addition to mid-market and distributed enterprises worldwide.

8x8 communications and collaboration technology opens the door to delivering both business simplicity and agility, letting your organization be productive from day one and always ready for growth. 8x8 solutions are designed with cost-optimization in mind, so you'll realize rapid return on investment through improved efficiencies, both with your employees and also with the maintenance and management of your communications system.

Additionally, 8x8 drives better collaboration, making it possible for communications to take place between employees and with customers using any device, anywhere—even switching between devices with no disruption to the experience.

As the most trusted cloud communications and collaboration solutions provider, 8x8 is the leading choice for small and medium businesses that want a smarter way to communicate.

Ready for the Next Step?

Contact a Solutions Expert to learn even more about how NetCare Connect can help increase productivity and lower costs at your business.

Call 1.888.750.5465, option 3, email connect@linkcorp.com or visit www.linkcorp.com

8x8

8x8, Inc. (NYSE:EGHT) is a leading provider of cloud phone, meeting, collaboration and contact center solutions with over a million business users worldwide. 8x8 helps enterprises engage at the speed of employee and customer expectations by putting the collective intelligence of the organization in the hands of every employee. For additional information, visit 8x8.com, or follow 8x8 on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook.