The Support Column: You'll struggle to ace UC with Teams if you can't get telephony over the net

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I miss Wimbledon, though I'm no tennis player. It's like implementing and supporting comms solutions, rather than selling them: you get prime courtside seats at an elite tournament where global champions and local heroes go head-to-head.

From this privileged vantage point at Support to Win, it's been fascinating to see new opportunities unfold around UC, and MS Teams in particular.

It's far too early to award Teams any grand slams, but what with demand increasingly being drawn to it – arguably because the dominance of Microsoft as the desktop environment of choice makes it logical for enterprise customers to go that route – it has to be a top contender.

And while other UC solutions have their virtues, none possess this kind of foothold in the market.

Deploying Teams isn't all strawberries and cream though, as anyone involved in a large-scale deployment will tell you.

Speaking from considerable direct experience of Teams projects, the major sticking point is often telephony. Understandably, this is a source of pride among comms partners who benefit – unlike their IT-centric brethren who they increasingly compete against in Teams RFPs – from home field advantage. After all, it's comms partners who are uniquely grounded in how phone systems work, and can easily identify which PBX functions are critical to organisations and which cannot be satisfied via the native Teams PBX functionality.

But like the grass-court expert who takes their talents onto clay, comms-centric partners are equally at risk of weakness; typically being far less proficient on executing IT integrations, and lacking experience in managing wider technology dependencies related to enterprise software investments and digital transformation strategy.

The last 3 months have been a massive proof-of concept for UC in British businesses; a product trial of epic proportions. As the economy bounces back from lockdown, we are seeing the natural consequences of a successful UC POC: a surge in UC demand – especially for Teams.

Partners who want to focus on revenue rather than the thorny issues of implementation and support are flocking to Support to Win to deliver these projects in full, or augment existing professional services capability.

Let me leave you with 5 quick tips to help you with any Teams projects you're working on:

1. Be certain of dividing lines between Teams PBX and any separate PBX. Do this first and cover off necessary maintenance and BCDR plans while you're at it.
2. Understand all technology refresh interdependencies and the wider context for the project. What might slow down/speed up progress?
3. Get full visibility of the current state via a thorough audit. Use this opportunity to cleanse data and challenge what does/doesn't need to be carried across.
4. Be ready to absorb change. Large Teams implementations are invariably rolled out in stages. Ensure plans can accommodate change where necessary.
5. Settle who owns which systems integrations. Don't assume anything about third-party relationships or interoperability. Look out for related infrastructure upgrade requirements that may add cost and delay.