



Support  
to Win

# 21 Things to Look Forward to in 2021

## Introduction

2021, the year that promises so much, began with the UK continuing to live and work under full lockdown. We've created this short "Optimist's Guide" to remind our industry what we can all still look forward to.

This collection of 21 things is tangible, achievable and close at hand. But each requires application and a willingness to succeed.

You will find throughout this collection three principal themes, all geared toward taking advantage of post-pandemic opportunities:

1. Sustainable, high-performance sales
2. Technical expertise where it counts
3. Relentless customer-centricity

We hope they inspire you to make 2021 a decisive year for your business!

# Support to Win's 21 Things to Look Forward to in 2021

## DEVELOPING PERSONAL CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Anyone else miss physically 'meeting' people? 2021 promises a safer environment in which to spend quality time with customers at events and meetings. Instil this positive, personal connectivity with customers across your organisation, from salespeople to technical delivery and support. You don't have to be in a customer's presence to give them a personalised service suited to their unique needs.

## PREPARING TO BENEFIT FROM AUTOMATION

Automation is accelerating time to revenue and cutting inefficiencies. For example, in data discovery where drains-up audits of PBX infrastructure take a fraction of the time and with minimal human involvement. 2021 could be the year you harness automation and reap the benefits.

## FLEXING HOW TECHNICAL SKILLS AND RESOURCES ARE DEPLOYED

With remote working the norm, providers can rethink how to deliver professional and support services for comms/telephony. So what if your help desk is virtual, if the new pre-sales hire you need lives 300 miles away, or your 'heavy-lifting' project management team is outsourced. Office based, sat-where-you-can-see-them is so 2019!

## BASKING IN THE GLOW OF GOOD SERVICE CONTINUITY

It took a pandemic, but the virtues of robust, continuous comms services are now well and truly understood. Customers have learnt all too well that catastrophic events do happen, and those who are best prepared are best placed to pivot and prosper.

## UNDERSTANDING THAT USER EXPERIENCE HAS A BIG INFLUENCE ON BUYER BEHAVIOUR

The old adage of 'follow the money' has always been a reliable touchstone for determining who to appeal to when selling comms solutions. If the decision maker is happy, the users must accept what they're given. But in a post-lockdown world that has seen the emergence of consumer-based platforms come to the fore, surely it matters more than ever how users perceive their experience?

## BENEFITTING FROM MORE ACCURATE CUSTOMER DATA

Every customer touchpoint, from initial onboarding to training, billing, support tickets and renewals, is an opportunity to learn more about customers and apply that understanding to sell ancillary services and create additional value. Now, with digital touchpoints growing to a greater extent, suppliers can devise smarter strategies to extract maximum returns.

## BECOMING A TRUE END-TO-END SUPPLIER

Business customers have grown increasingly wary of excessive supplier management and are looking to rationalise where possible. Those offering not just a complete comms solution, but end-to-end IT services (including devices, cybersecurity, IT applications, etc.), risk being too specialised for some customers. Identifying and addressing gaps in capability is critically important, and benefits from access to on-demand third-party white-label professional services.

## CAPITALISING ON SIMPLER PLATFORM SWITCHES

Choosing a platform for your hosted/cloud offering has always brought with it a certain degree of vendor/operator lock-in. Channel players who might otherwise opt for a change in platform strategy have historically had to reckon with the nightmare scenario of an expensive, protracted and risky migration process. However, with the right skills and project management experience, these obstacles are significantly easier to overcome than most realise – a fact borne out by a growing list of case examples.

## MAKING REMOTE INSTALLS THE DEFAULT OPTION

'No access to site' or 'no users in the office' were the hallmarks of lockdown life for comms providers, who have had to find workarounds that enable 'remote' activation of customer accounts including user and admin training. Looking ahead to a return to normal, there's a strong case for preserving these cheaper, faster and more customer-friendly methods.

## NO LONGER SWEEPING CLIMATE CHANGE UNDER THE CARPET

Everyone is concerned about pollution, air quality, extreme weather and rising temperatures. But 2021 looks to be a pivotal year in customers acting on these concerns, selecting suppliers who represent their ethical values and deselecting those without a sufficiently proactive stance. It might sound disproportionate compared to other factors like price and expertise, but there is significant evidence, particularly among DMs under-35, that this is a major buying factor.

## COMBATING CHURN

2021 promises to become very busy later in the year with stiff competition making up for lost time. Comms partners that prioritise more business coming in the front door should be wary of losing sight of existing business disappearing out the back door, and they succumb to the same competitive pressures they seek to exploit. The only way to guard against this is by investing in a highly motivated, high-performance customer support operation with the requisite expertise.

## CROSSING THE MICROSOFT/TELEPHONY RUBICON

Traditional comms players have been on a learning curve with Microsoft Teams, testing the boundaries of where their exhaustive telephony knowledge hits the brick wall of IT infrastructure. It's been exactly the same on the other side of the fence, as IT resellers have grappled with hitherto unknown technologies. Whatever your starting point, in 2021 accessing that missing knowledge will be critical to customer confidence and success.

## DE-RISKING M&A STRATEGIES

Consolidation in the telephony/UC space hinges on rationalising platforms to reduce cost and enlarge revenue. With the right tools and expertise, disparate organisations operating services on multiple platforms can be brought together to create new organisations that achieve the desired economies of scale.

## MAXIMISING EXIT VALUES

From a sell-side perspective, comms business owners seeking maximum asset value for their exits have a variety of opportunities to rapidly and cost-effectively audit their customer estates and prepare actionable migration plans to suit any serious buyer.

## GROWING FAST WITHOUT ADDING DRAG

In the anticipated post-pandemic burst of economic growth, comms providers must be careful not to be saddled with overheads when acquiring customer orders. Every promise must be fulfilled, and that can lead to log-jams in provisioning, onboarding and support that threaten to tarnish reputations and curtail revenue. Outsourcing strategies can remove this drag and enable the business to concentrate fully on consulting and selling.

## EVOLVING CUSTOMER TRAINING TO UPSELL OPPORTUNITIES

Introducing new customers to their comms service should be viewed as an opportunity rather than merely an obligation. What about showcasing additional premium features that customers don't currently pay for? With all the attention on customer acquisition, providers shouldn't lose sight of clever upselling strategies that cost little and deliver attractive returns.

## BUILDING IN-HOUSE TECHNICAL EXPERTISE IN EVOLUTIONARY STEPS

New models for professional and support service delivery have expanded beyond the binary choice between outsourcing on the one hand and insourcing on the other. The third, middle way sees comms providers partnering with a third party to build capability internally while the third-party delivers it externally. After a suitable period, the provider has built-up sufficient critical mass to become fully autonomous and the third party is no longer needed.

## GROWING CHANNEL COMMUNITIES WITHOUT BURDENING PARTNERS

Operators with innovative new comms services will be targeting 2021 as a key time to grow their channel partner bases. One of the ways to increase their attractiveness is by mitigating the inevitable issues that arise when implementing new customers for the first time, or migrating existing customers over to the new service. Expect to see plenty of support being offered to ensure these technical issues don't become obstacles to commercial success.

## STAYING CURRENT TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Sooner or later, taking advantage of the opportunities from new platforms and technologies means migrating existing customers across. 2021 is the year to get this right, but without the right support skills internally, how can you achieve it swiftly and safely?

## MONETISING LEGACY CUSTOMERS COST-EFFECTIVELY

Once you've moved your support focus on to new telephony/UC offerings, you inevitably find that many customers refuse to budge from their 'old' technology. The challenge is optimising revenue from this cohort without having to run parallel support organisations – something that outsourcing can ensure.

## SAFEGUARDING HARD-WON REPUTATIONS

Customer loyalty and revenue growth hinge on giving great customer satisfaction through every stage of their telephony/UC experience. Comms is a business lifeline – we've seen this repeatedly during 2020 – and the providers who deliver comms services have increasingly visible business reputations to uphold. Continually high standards are essential.