Top 5 Communications Pain Points for SMBs

Being competitive means more than just offering a product or service that is in high demand. It takes a comprehensive understanding of the business and the sunk costs plaguing profitability. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) need to be aware of the areas where productivity and efficiency are lost and seek opportunities to overcome them through innovation and upgrades. In fact, many sunk costs can be traced back to outdated business communications systems, making SMBs prime candidates for communications upgrades, like IP technology.

In a recent study by SIS International Research, sponsored by Siemens Enterprise Communications, over 500 respondents in eight countries, across eight different industries were questioned regarding the most detrimental communications pain points (i.e., productivity challenges) for SMBs. The results showed that approximately 70% of the SMB respondents struggle due to the top communications pain points identified and spend a significant amount of time per week managing these issues. Based on the five communications pain points, as defined in the referenced study, this article interprets how these points can have severe implications for SMBs in terms of lost productivity or increased overhead expenses and have led many to the conclusion that a communications upgrade is essential.

The Top Five Pain Points

Waiting for Information. When an SMB reaches a decision making point, it is essential they are able to access all necessary information and team members to assist in making that decision. However, at this point in the process, it is quite common for SMBs to suffer delays because an inadequate business communications system is causing information to be inaccessible. These delays take an average of 3.5 hrs per week.

Unwanted Communications. Whether it is forwarded joke email messages, spam emails, unsolicited sales calls, or low-priority calls and voice mails, unwanted communication frequently weighs on the productivity of SMBs. This challenge causes SMBs an average of two or more hours of lost time per week, creating an unnecessary decrease in productivity.

Inefficient Coordination. Attempting to coordinate communications between team members can be difficult, as each team member uses different communications tools (i.e., landline, cell phone, email), which can lead to lost invites, delayed responses, and missed meetings or deadlines. This pain point reportedly causes an average delay of 3.7 hours per week, weighing on the progress of projects and goal attainment.

Barriers to Collaboration. An inability to establish collaboration sessions and meetings with colleagues is another top pain point for SMBs. With constantly changing schedules and traveling employees, finding a common location and time to fit the needs of all team members can be near impossible. This struggle to leverage technology that facilitates teamwork causes SMBs an average of 3.3 unproductive hours per week.

Customer Complaints. On average, SMB employees spend 3.3 hours per week dealing with complaints from customers about their inability to reach the SMB employees in a timely fashion. The high cost of an unsatisfied customer extends beyond the loss of productivity.

These communications pain points account for an average of 17.5 hours per week, per knowledge worker (employees who primarily utilize information/knowledge to accomplish work tasks and are in roles such as management, information technology, customer service, or sales and marketing). That is over 40% of the work week spent managing communications inefficiencies. Based on the average hours spent per week, the cumulative cost of the productivity losses resulting from these communications pain points was estimated to be $26,041 per knowledge worker per year.

What our customers are saying...

"Using TDS' *managedIP* system has allowed us to run our business without interruption. I now spend the majority of my time working with our current clients and engaging potential clients instead of firefighting outages and problem-solving why the phones and internet don't work."

Wayne Harris, President/Partner
Glowac, Harris, Madison, Inc

Respondents also stated that in addition to the time spent by knowledge workers, an average of 20% of employees (all employees of an organization regardless of their role or use of communications technology) within their companies experience these communications pain points. This cost, which could amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, makes addressing communications pain points crucial for SMBs. According to the study, 41% of those surveyed stated that having a system to reduce the time spent addressing pain points is an extremely high priority for their business. Considering the dollar amount associated with these pains, it is no wonder why the importance level is so high.

These challenges illustrate the spectrum of communications pains facing SMBs. They are proof that being competitive involves more than simply selling a product or service. SMBs need to enlist the most efficient and value-added technologies to enhance their business. Just because a communications system isn't "broken", doesn't mean that it is working. This survey clearly shows that although a phone system may be functioning as it should, SMBs are still losing productivity and, in turn, money due to the phone system's limitations. Now is the time to look into leveraging resources with business communications technologies to gain increased productivity and create an integrated system for communication with employees, vendors, prospects, and clients.

To learn more about how communications upgrades can help increase productivity and minimize communications pains, visit www.tdsbusiness.com/ROI or call your TDS Account Executive.

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- Save time by sending all calls placed to your office phone to multiple phones at the same time with the simultaneous ring feature.
- Don't plan your day around phone calls. Instead, set your calls to route a certain way during a specific time of day. Calls will automatically go to voice mail during your weekly staff meeting and resume status when the meeting ends.
- Set up your remote office on the spot. Use your home phone, cell phone, or even a hotel phone as your business phone. You can make calls and have them billed directly to your business or set incoming calls to ring the remote phone.
- Protect your business from harmful threats and viruses with PC and Network Defenders.
- Maximize your bandwidth utilization and performance with online bandwidth monitoring.

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