



# **MANAGING MICROSOFT TEAMS IN MULTI-VENDOR ENVIRONMENTS**



The world of work has changed drastically in recent years. Since the pandemic hit, companies have been forced to rethink everything, from how they define communication and collaboration, to how they measure and increase productivity.

In this agile landscape, platforms like Microsoft Teams have emerged as new digital “work hubs”, promising an environment where business leaders can synchronize their teams, and support the flow of information. However, even a comprehensive solution like Microsoft Teams rarely provides everything business leaders need for the modern workforce out of the box.

To create a truly complete environment for unified communications, most organizations are required to mix and match solutions and technologies from a host of cloud communication vendors. Without proper planning and strategy, this can lead to a patchwork of portals, command line scripts, and tools, leading to silos and confusion in the ecosystem.

Rob Scott, from UC Today News, spoke with AudioCodes leaders, Erin Romeo, and Jay Wyatt, to collect their insights into how companies can effectively manage the complexity of a “multiverse” or multi-vendor environment for Microsoft Teams.

Here, we’ll look at the realities of a multi-vendor environment, the challenges to overcome, and the strategies and solutions companies can use to create a fully unified digital experience.

## **Maintaining Seamless Voice Connectivity in a Multiverse**

The term “multiverse” might seem unusual when linked to concepts like Microsoft Teams. However, on a basic level, it refers to a realm consisting of multiple different environments, lacking a single order, or ruling. This is a fitting description for the complex and diverse environments many Microsoft Teams admins are faced with today.







In the Microsoft Teams world, most companies aren't just dealing with Microsoft as a standalone vendor. Around 80 to 90% of enterprise customers are using Direct Routing for voice, and many others are exploring options like Operator Connect.

There are other vendors to consider too, such as PowerShell partners, cloud innovators, recording and analytics companies, and more. Failing to make the right connections between these landscapes can cause a host of problems, with everything from UC performance, to productivity.

One of the major problems companies face, is with maintaining a seamless voice experience in the transition to Microsoft Teams.



This is a very real issue for many organizations, particularly large enterprises. They can't just implement a new system and turn the old one off. In most cases, there needs to be a gradual transition, and an element of co-existence before seamless voice connectivity is possible.



According to AudioCodes, one of the biggest issues companies face is failing to fully understand, audit and assess their voice ecosystem before transitioning to Teams.



Like the IT landscape, telephony has grown organically over the years. Not every business leader is fully aware of the number of lines they have, which analog adapters they're using, and which solutions need to be transitioned into the cloud. Ensuring a seamless transition means:

- **Fully assessing the communications environment:**


Business leaders need to take the time to run through every system and carry out discovery workshops to determine what their voice environment looks like, and how it needs to evolve when moving into Teams.

- **Getting the right team members involved:** Numerous employees can play a role in assessing and planning for a successful migration. It's not just the IT team, but the security team, and even the networking team that should be involved. Companies need to ensure their network is suitable for an IP connection, and their environment is secured.


- **Assessing the cloud ecosystem:** Companies also need to look beyond simple phones and telephone lines, to address all of the connected cloud solutions involved in their landscape. Business leaders may need to implement conversational AI tools, contact center functionality, and other solutions from different vendors.

## Effectively Transitioning to Teams and the Age of Hybrid Work

For many companies, transitioning to Microsoft Teams for Unified Communications isn't just about moving away from traditional legacy tools. Teams has become a critical component in the shift to hybrid work models for countless organizations.



"Microsoft Teams has constantly been developed with a focus on empowering hybrid working. It's designed to support employees with communication and collaboration wherever they are. However, the shift to hybrid work still creates another set of challenges for IT teams and admins."



The first challenge is often in defining what “hybrid” work will mean in any business environment. There are multiple different approaches to consider, from a remote-work first model, to an office-first model, or even a “flexible” approach.

According to AudioCodes, the path to success starts with:

- **Defining employee personas:** Today’s workplace is made up of a multitude of different employees from distinct generations and backgrounds. Different team members will need different tools and resources to thrive in the age of hybrid work.

Identifying each employee persona in the business ensures companies can properly equip their workers with the right tools, based on the “where, how, and what” of their work experience.

- **Rethinking business environments:** Hybrid work naturally converts the office into a more flexible environment, with fewer restrictions placed on office presence. However, each hybrid work model still has its own environments to consider.

Businesses need to think about how they’ll empower collaboration with small meeting rooms or huddle rooms, whether they’ll offer hot-desking solutions, and how their environments will be optimized.

- **Setting goals for hybrid work:** Establishing goals for hybrid work success is about more than just ensuring teams can communicate, see, and hear each other. Businesses need to establish how they can improve inclusivity and company culture by retaining the human element among teams.

They need to think about how they can enhance productivity with contextual tools, AI, and collaborative resources.



## The Impact of Hybrid Work on User Transition

Hybrid work has taken the world by storm, with 74% of companies considering a hybrid work model. While many organizations began their transition to Microsoft Teams during the pandemic, there are still plenty that are still in the process of migrating.

For companies with existing hybrid employees, the transition to a new form of cloud-based communication strategy can be even more complex. Not only do companies need to adapt to a new range of “employee personas” in this environment, but they also need to consider how new working strategies will affect how their teams work, communicate, and collaborate.

This means rethinking:

- **Office environments and access to supplies:** With all the data they need available at the touch of a button, agents can resolve issues faster, somersault over problems, and minimize issues. AI tools can even help route customers to the right agent for their needs, provide professionals with behind-the-scenes insights into customer profiles, and offer next-best action guidance
- **Changing communication trends:** Power Virtual Agents, generative AI enabled chatbots and virtual assistants pave the way for a new era of self-service. With these tools, companies can deliver 24/7 support to their customers, without compromising on a personalized, intuitive experience. This means agents have more time to focus on the tasks that require their human input, empathy, and creativity.
- **Evolving workplace perceptions:** The hybrid environment also requires business leaders to rethink how they look at and measure concepts like productivity. While productivity has remained high in the hybrid work environment, simply tracking the number of meetings teams have, isn't enough to provide a clear insight into employee experience and engagement. Business leaders need new ways to monitor customer and employee experiences alike.


## Monitoring and Improving Customer and Employee Experiences

In a world where supervisors can't always hang over the shoulders of their employees to track engagement, or listen into customer conversations, finding new ways to monitor experiences is crucial. Teams does offer some tools out of the box for this purpose.


The Teams admin center can provide insights into connectivity, meeting times, and other valuable data. Business leaders can also build on these insights with integrations to Power Automate and Power BI. However, while these tools may be effective for smaller organizations, they can be limited.

Gaining full insights into the quality of your communication strategies in a multi-vendor environment, and the engagement of your team members may require a more creative approach. Companies like AudioCodes can extend data insights to customers, providing behind-the-scenes views of SIP carrier solutions, direct routing technologies and more.

This essentially ensures business leaders can determine whether it's the carrier handoff that causes a problem with Jitter or Latency, or whether there's a problem with a headset or device.



The One Voice Operation Center gives companies access to a comprehensive environmental monitoring and reporting tool. It's an end-to-end reporting solution, designed for a multi-vendor environment, with included user and device management. Essentially, this builds on what you can get from the Teams admin center, without the need to deal with complex PowerShell scripts.




## The Role of Flexible Buying Models

Switching to a model of hybrid work, and multi-vendor communication connectivity with Microsoft Teams requires a complete polarity shift in the way companies manage and operate their solutions. It's not just multiple software companies taking part in the Teams "multiverse" environment, but various hardware vendors too.




Companies today need to maintain an agile approach to hardware investment, ensuring they can access the various resources they need, from full meeting room kits to cameras and microphones, for every “employee persona” in their ecosystem.

Fortunately, vendors like AudioCodes are introducing new ways for companies to shift from the standard “Capital Expenditure” model to an “Operational Expenditure” alternative.




“Historically, companies bought a piece of hardware, put it on-premises, and were forced to rip and replace that technology whenever their business evolved. Now, flexible buying models, which allow companies to access hardware on a subscription basis, are becoming more popular.”




With these models, companies can access the hardware they need with a monthly recurring cost. This not only ensures organizations can upgrade and adjust their hardware strategy quickly, it also allows for exceptional confidence and peace of mind.

The recurring model means companies access both the hardware, and the consistent support and technical guidance of a trustworthy vendor.



“It’s really about investment protection. Companies can choose if they want to upgrade or downgrade their devices, based on their budget and persona requirements. At AudioCodes, we can offer everything on a managed service model, so organizations can access the flexibility they need in a hybrid working world.”





## Key Performance Indicators: Measuring Success

As mentioned above, being able to effectively measure the success of a multi-vendor environment in terms of productivity, engagement, and overall performance is crucial. In today's complex world of work, it's not enough to simply track the number of meetings a team has.

According to AudioCodes, "The ultimate measure of success is, primarily, the number of users that embrace and use the new platform, without issues. If your users aren't adopting the ecosystem, because of user experience issues, then you're not going to get results."

Alongside adoption and consumption, companies should also think about the key metrics that really make a difference to their business operations. Monitoring lag, jitter and latency is great, but it's also important to think about the impact the technology is having on business and team performance.

Companies should be asking themselves:

- How much are we actually accomplishing as a business with this new solution? What action points and business intelligence insights are we taking advantage of?
- How effectively are we reducing complexities and bottlenecks in work processes? How well are teams collaborating and innovating?
- How engaged are employees in the ecosystem? How happy do team members feel using the new tools, and how does that correlate with customer experience?

With innovative AI solutions like Copilot and ChatGPT making their way into environments like Teams, there will be endless new metrics and KPIs to monitor in the future multi-vendor environment. Companies will be able to see for themselves whether their Teams strategy is actually driving increased productivity and innovation on a significant scale.

## Integrating Microsoft Teams with Multi-Vendor Environments

Ultimately, Microsoft Teams naturally lends itself to a multiverse, or multi-vendor environment model. The flexible platform allows companies to integrate a host of different cloud and software tools into the same convenient space for productivity.

However, business leaders need to think strategically if they want to ensure their “multiverse” is working effectively. According to AudioCodes, this means:

- **Fully understanding your needs:** Examining the functionality you really need from a communication stack, and setting clear goals for success is crucial to ensuring you’re getting the most value out of your multi-vendor ecosystem.
- **Accessing the right support:** Consultants and experts in the communication landscape, like AudioCodes, can work with business leaders to determine exactly how they need to implement hybrid work solutions and cloud technologies to empower every employee persona, and reach essential business goals.
- **Monitoring the right results:** Ensuring comprehensive visibility across the multi-vendor stack, and collecting insights from the right metrics will ensure business leaders can constantly build on and enhance their communication strategy over time.

Companies interested in building their own ideal multi-vendor environment can access the support of AudioCodes to start planning their migration. The Microsoft partners can walk you through the experience of integrating your environments, and exploring the “art of the possible”, to ensure your new communication stack doesn’t just check boxes, it paves the way for a brighter future.