



## **Cisco Spark Provides an All-in-One Cloud Unified Communications Solution for Small Businesses**

January 2016

Prepared by:

**Zeus Kerravala**

# Cisco Spark Provides an All-in-One Cloud Unified Communications Solution for Small Businesses

by Zeus Kerravala

January 2016

**ZK Research**  
*A Division of Kerravala Consulting*

.....

## Introduction: Unified Communications Addresses Top Small Business Challenges

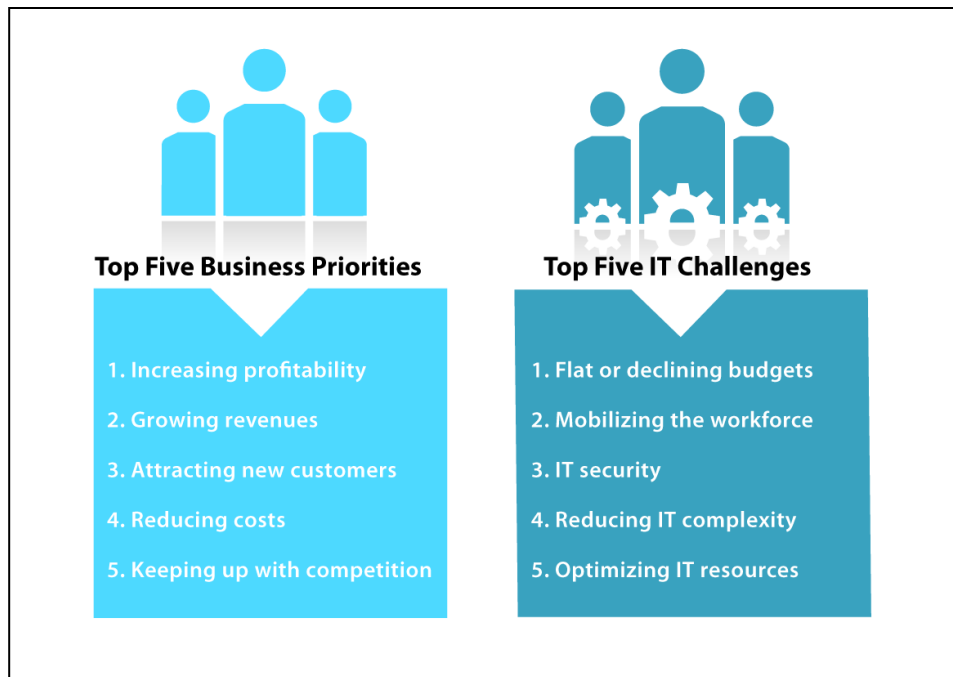
Digitization is having a profound impact on businesses today. As new business models are being created, organizations must find a way to keep up—otherwise, they risk becoming irrelevant and having to struggle to survive. Nowhere is this pain felt more than in the small business environment (defined as companies with 2 to 1,000 employees). In 2015, ZK Research conducted more than 50 one-on-one interviews with small business owners and IT leaders to understand their top business and IT priorities. Exhibit 1 shows a summary of the top five concerns for each category.

The desire to grow a business while reducing costs certainly isn't new, but achieving both of these goals simultaneously has historically been difficult. However, digitization has made accomplishing this a top priority as markets shift much faster than ever before.

zeus@zkresearch.com

Cell: 301-775-7447  
 Office: 978-252-5314

### Exhibit 1: Top Small Company Business and IT Priorities



*Influence and insight through social media*

Source: ZK Research, 2016

There is no panacea to all business and IT challenges, but unified communications (UC) presents a multifaceted value proposition that can address many of the challenges listed in Exhibit 1. UC offers the following benefits to small businesses:

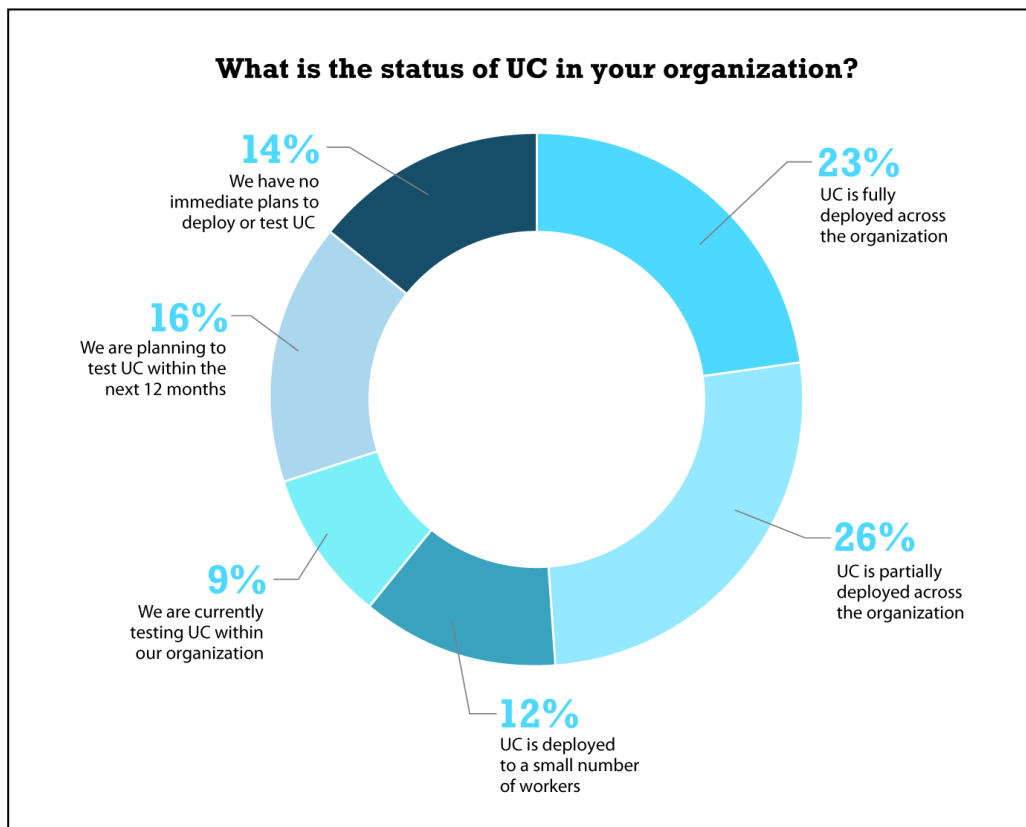
- **Creates a competitive advantage:** Competitive advantage is based on making the best decision quickly while involving the right people. UC enables workers to collaborate with anyone in the extended enterprise in real time, allowing critical decisions to be made faster.
- **Improves worker productivity:** UC enables workers to be productive and get work done regardless of location, network, time of day or device.
- **Saves money:** UC saves money in a number of ways, including significantly reducing the cost of mobility and operational support as well as delivering savings on network costs.

Although UC offers these important benefits, it can be complicated to deploy using premises-based technology, particularly for small businesses with limited IT resources. An excellent alternative for small businesses is to shift to a cloud-based UC solution.

## Section II: Benefits of Unified Communications as a Service

Because UC can address many of the major concerns of small businesses, it should be a top priority of every organizational owner, principal or decision maker. However, despite its strong value proposition, UC deployments have yet to experience accelerated growth within companies. The ZK Research 2015 Unified Communications Purchase Intention Study shows that only 23% of organizations have fully deployed UC (Exhibit 2).

**Exhibit 2: Full UC Deployments Are in the Minority**



Source: ZK Research 2015 Unified Communications Purchase Intention Study

There are many reasons for UC's lack of adoption. The primary issues for small businesses are listed below:

- **Significant up-front investment:** Although the payback occurs relatively quickly, many organizations are hesitant to make a significant capital investment in any technology given the unstable macro environment.
- **Long deployment times:** Deploying a collaboration solution can be a lengthy process due to the amount of infrastructure that needs to be deployed, tested and optimized.
- **Operational and technical skill set:** Managing communications used to be very simple. The systems were self-contained and relatively simple, but they offered no flexibility. Today's systems offer significantly more power and potential, but they require a change in the operational skill set of the IT organization.

As highlighted earlier, UC offers many benefits, and ZK Research believes that small businesses should not wait to deploy it. To address the technical and financial issues with an on-premises solution, small businesses should consider a unified communications as a service (UCaaS) solution. UCaaS can provide all the benefits of a premises-based solution without the associated risk.

Historically, some companies have shied away from cloud services because of a perceived lack of security and control. Today's UCaaS solutions can offer business-grade security and control, and much more. Below are the primary benefits of UCaaS:

- **Lower up-front costs:** UCaaS requires no up-front capital outlay. This means an organization can begin deployment immediately instead of having to first find a large budget to purchase infrastructure.
- **Faster time to market:** With an on-premises solution, businesses can spend months rolling out UC and then several months after that tuning and tweaking the solution to run optimally. Because UCaaS is delivered via the cloud, UC can be made available immediately.
- **Lower or no maintenance costs:** Maintaining a UC system requires constant upgrades and replacement of failed hardware in addition to tackling other administrative issues. UCaaS is maintained by the service provider, which means the administrative burden on IT has been

eliminated or at least reduced to managing a minimal amount of client software.

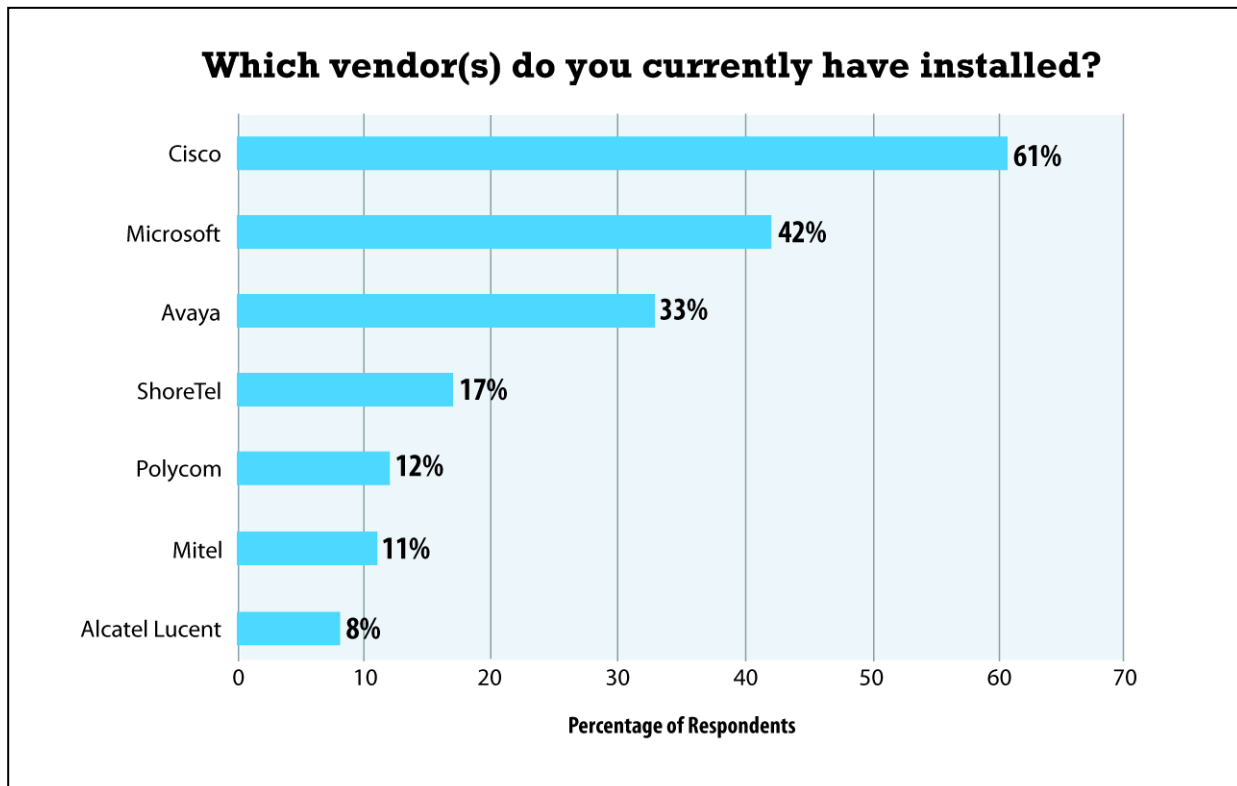
- **Alignment with mobility and "bring your own device":** Delivering any application to a mobile device using premises-based infrastructure can be very challenging. UCaaS services are ubiquitously available to any user on any network without the use of additional client software. Given the strong push toward using mobile devices within small businesses, UCaaS is ideally suited for this new era of IT.
- **Lowens the complexity of UC:** Modern UC solutions require the IT department to manage several servers, the underlying network, wireless infrastructure, desktop software and other technology. Stitching all of these components together can be extremely complicated, particularly for a small business with a limited IT staff. UCaaS moves all the complexity into the cloud so the company can focus on running the business instead of managing technology.

ZK Research believes that UCaaS is ideal for small businesses because it provides all the financial, productivity and user benefits without having to deal with the many challenges of deployment. However, not all UCaaS solutions are created equal. Businesses should compare the solutions based on how easy they are to deploy, the level of security provided and their breadth of features.

### Section III: Introducing Cisco Spark—the Simple, Secure and Complete UCaaS Solution

Cisco is a global leader in UC that offers many market-leading products such as WebEx, Jabber and CallManager. Exhibit 3 shows that when it comes to UC solution providers, Cisco ranks number one.

Cisco recently announced a new cloud-based business collaboration service called Cisco Spark. The product is designed for a cloud-centric, mobile-first world where communications must be an agile resource to enable workers to interact with others from any location, over any device. The Cisco Spark service takes collaboration to the next level by making instant communications, messaging and live meetings possible through a set of integrated collaboration tools and delivering a high-quality experience. Because Spark is built on the Cisco cloud, it can scale as a business grows, is easy to deploy and is optimized for a mobile-first world.

**Exhibit 3: Cisco Is the Market Share Leader in UC**

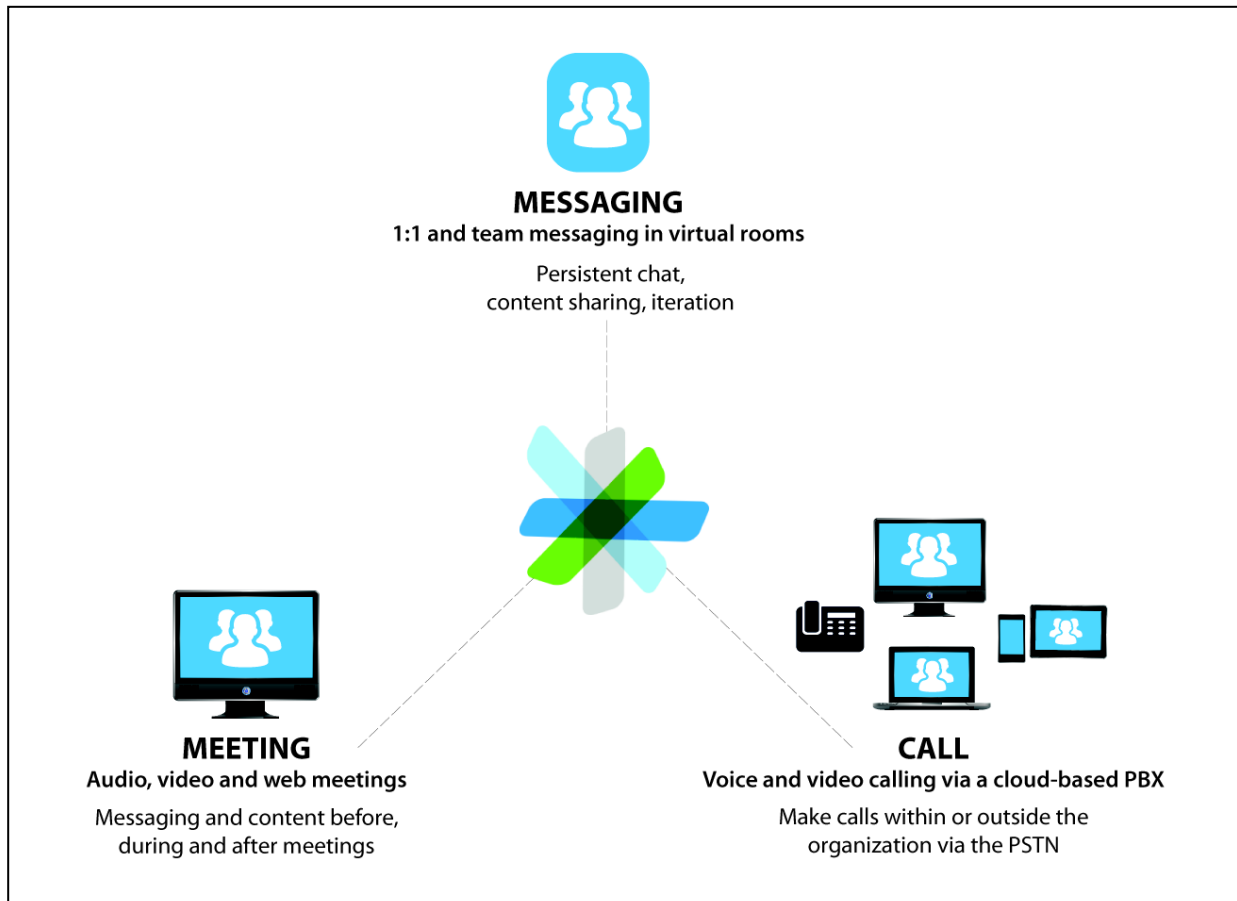
*Source: ZK Research 2015 Unified Communications Purchase Intention Study*

Although Cisco Spark offers one experience, it is built on three core services: messaging, meetings and calls (Exhibit 4). Details of each are listed below:

- **Messaging:** Spark lets workers experience one-on-one and team messaging in virtual rooms with persistent content and context for improved team interactions. Spark also enables workers to prepare, share and collaborate on content, breaking down traditional communication barriers so it's simple for workers to interact with anyone.
- **Meetings:** With Spark, workers can connect with teams, customers or others easily while sharing content before, during and after meetings. Workers can use Spark to schedule or join meetings whether they are in the office, on the road or at home. Each Spark meeting is video centric, enabling the richest possible meeting experience.
- **Calls:** The Spark service lets businesses utilize voice and video communications through mobile and desktop phones as well as room-based systems. It includes a broad set of calling capabilities including VoIP and one-touch

directory dialing as well as the ability to join meetings on any device. Mobile workers will have features that enhance their mobile experience including single-number reach, unified voicemail, video services and the ability to seamlessly transition to different devices during an active call. However, the Cisco Spark service doesn't include PSTN services; customers must purchase PSTN services from a third-party provider. For the complete Spark service, Cisco preferred media provider ecosystem partners can provide PSTN local, long-distance and direct-inward-dial services. Existing Cisco UC customers will use Spark Hybrid Services to connect on-premises call capabilities to Cisco Spark capabilities in the cloud.

The Cisco Spark service has been designed to meet the needs of small businesses. It offers a broad set of communication services for a wide variety of businesses with varying existing communication solutions. Regardless of whether the company has an ad hoc strategy for communications today, has outdated key systems or has already migrated to an IP solution, Cisco Spark improves communications

**Exhibit 4: Cisco Spark Offers a Single Solution for Messaging, Meetings and Calls**

Source: ZK Research, 2016

by offering a single business collaboration service for everyone in the company. Additionally, Spark was designed with the following principles in mind:

**Cisco Spark Is Simple**

Spark was built from the ground up to be an application-centric, mobile-first UCaaS solution. Many competitive products were actually premises-based hardware platforms that were virtualized and then retrofitted for the cloud. This can lead to scale issues as well as long lead times for new features because the hardware platform must be updated before the cloud solution can be upgraded.

Spark is easy to use and simplifies teamwork by bringing together asynchronous and real-time communications into a single experience that can be accessed via a mobile application or web browser. The intuitive interface has been designed for easy setup with low IT overhead. The product can be self-installed and automatically upgrades itself, so

businesses can deploy Spark without the concern of overwhelming the IT department with support calls and training issues.

Also, Cisco Spark enables easy intercompany collaboration. Typically, communicating with people in other organizations using anything other than voice required directory federation, dedicated lines or custom software. Spark is designed to work across any network and on any device so workers can use it to collaborate with other individuals inside or outside their company.

To help simplify the budgeting process, Cisco Spark utilizes a “pay as you grow” pricing model so customers can pay for what they need today and then scale the deployment as required. This obviates the need to go through the complicated process of managing software licenses or predicting how many users need the product at the time of purchase. Additionally, Spark is currently available

through the Cisco channel partners that businesses are already using.

**Cisco Spark Is Secure**

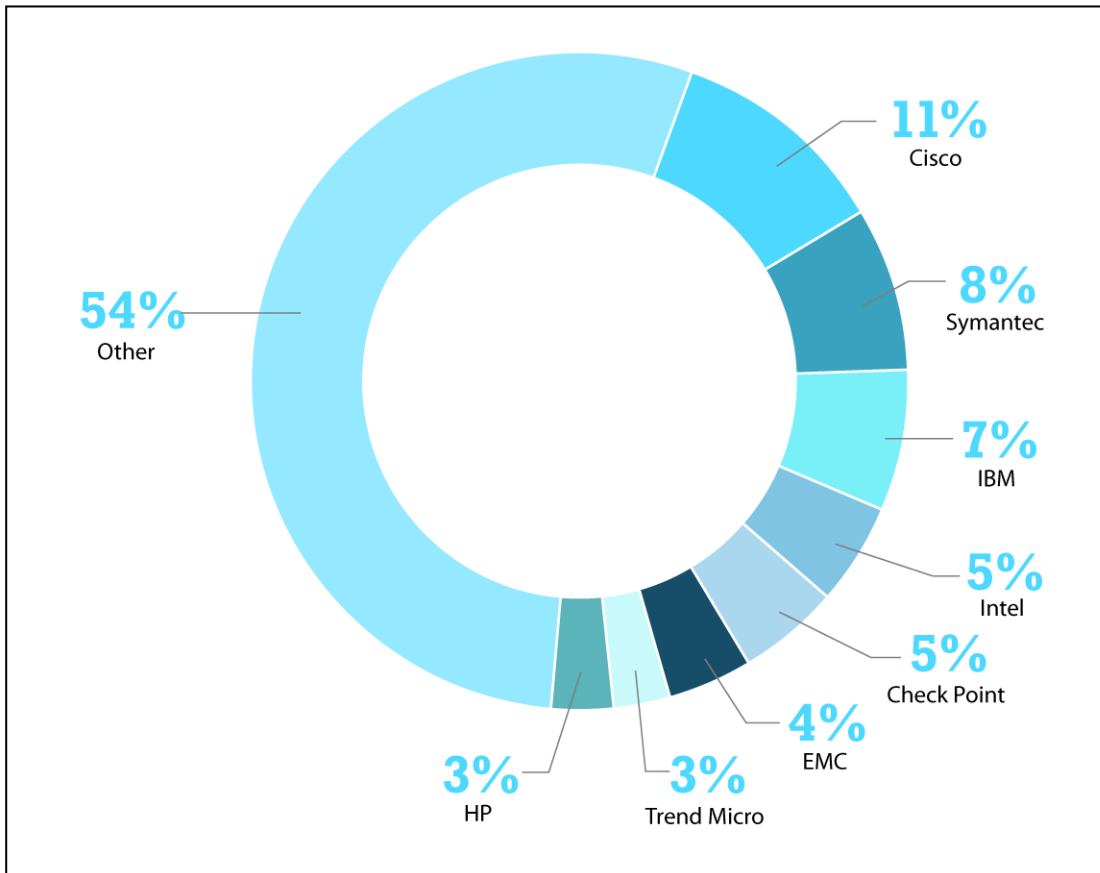
Cisco is the market leader in IT security. Exhibit 5 shows that Cisco is the only IT security provider with more than 10% market share. The company has extensive knowledge in securing the largest, most in-demand environments and has utilized this experience to provide the highest levels of security to Cisco Spark.

Cisco takes protecting the user extremely seriously and has integrated security into the product. One of the biggest barriers to adopting cloud services is the concern about securely storing content in the cloud. Most UCaaS services offer no security or only basic

levels of encryption. Cisco Spark offers end-to-end encryption where the service encrypts messages, files and conversations on a user’s device before sending them to the cloud. The content is sent to the Cisco servers in encrypted form and is processed and stored that way until it is unencrypted on the recipient’s device. Cisco offers an extra level of security by allowing access only to authorized and authenticated recipients.

Also, the product offers user- and IT-level security features to provide additional control. For sensitive information, users can “lock” the conversations and moderate who can see the content and what is shared. IT individuals can enable other features that utilize existing security policies such as single sign-on.

**Exhibit 5: Cisco Is the IT Security Market Leader**



Source: ZK Research, 2016

## Cisco Spark Is Complete

Cisco Spark is a complete UCaaS solution for small businesses. Many UCaaS products are built to be voice or messaging centric, but Cisco Spark has a broad range of collaboration capabilities including the following:

- High-definition audio
- High-definition video
- Conferencing
- File sharing
- One-on-one messaging
- Team messaging
- Mobile application
- Integration with desktop devices
- Interoperability with room devices

When using Spark, mobile users can connect to their calendars to view a comprehensive list of all upcoming calendar entries and can tap to move any of them into a Cisco Spark session, instantly creating an ongoing workspace with other workers. Lastly, because the Spark service is delivered from the Cisco cloud, it is always up to date, ensuring workers have the latest features to maximize productivity.

## Benefits of Cisco Spark

Businesses that choose to use Cisco Spark will realize several benefits that align with the challenges discussed earlier:

- **Improved productivity:** Spark can boost business productivity whether workers are in the office, on the road or at a customer's site. By using Spark, workers can control their desk phone when they are mobile, move seamlessly among devices and access common contacts and call histories from all users' devices.
- **Increased business agility:** Users and teams can respond to tasks faster during any point in the project life cycle. Spark improves the effectiveness of meetings by allowing workers to have more ad hoc discussions and sync-ups between formal meetings. Also, workers can access content and discussion threads during meetings but then review information faster after a meeting, enabling decisions to be made more quickly and to be more informed.

- **Accelerated business growth:** With Spark, IT can evolve from being a cost center to a strategic platform for innovation and growth. Businesses will find that employees will be more engaged with each other and can work smarter by focusing on the task at hand instead of managing multiple modes of communications.

## Section IV: Conclusion and Recommendations

In the digital business era, companies that can find a way to be agile, innovate and move quickly will gain a competitive edge. For small businesses, this puts tremendous pressure on the company to find new ways of growing revenues and increasing profits while lowering costs.

Unified communications is ideally suited to help small companies accomplish this because the technology has a multidimensional value proposition. UC is a unique IT solution that can simultaneously lower costs, streamline business processes, enable greater collaboration and be used to implement new processes. However, the complexity of deploying an on-premises UC solution can be overwhelming for smaller organizations with limited budgets and small IT teams.

UCaaS delivers all the benefits of UC without the associated complexity of deploying and maintaining the technology. UCaaS is aligned with a cloud- and mobile-first world, and it ensures customers are working with the latest features instead of having to wait for IT to schedule time for upgrades. This solution enables users to cost effectively work from anywhere—in the office, on the road or at home. Because of this, UCaaS should be a top initiative for small business leaders.

Many UCaaS solutions with varying degrees of functionality are available to small businesses today. ZK Research makes the following recommendations to help small businesses choose the best UCaaS providers to meet their needs and have a successful deployment:

- **Start the deployment with a small, controlled pilot group.** Start small to understand the productivity benefits and cost-saving implications. The barrier to entry is low, so there's no reason to delay deployment.



- **Consider a UCaaS solution even if you currently have a premises-based solution.** The UCaaS solutions available today are significantly different from the solutions of a few years ago. UCaaS can complement a current on-premises deployment to reach branch offices or remote workers.
- **Choose a UCaaS provider that can deliver a simple, secure and complete solution.** The goal of UC is to make workers more productive at a lower cost than traditional communications. Choose a solution that has a broad set of features, is simple to deploy and for workers to use and offers the highest levels of security to protect your organization. ZK Research believes that Cisco Spark is an excellent example of a UCaaS solution that is simple and secure and delivers a complete feature set.