Delivering a Better User Experience for Mobile Collaboration:

Focus Group Findings on Keys to Success for Service Providers with UCaaS

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IP COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

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Executive Summary

Businesses of all sizes are embracing collaboration platforms to keep employees productive, especially as the workforce becomes more distributed. UCaaS is well-suited to address those needs, and a key success driver for service providers will be the ability to support smart phones, as they have become integral for everyday workflows.

This report is an independent study about the role smart phones play with workers, in which two core themes emerged. First is the intricate relationship between workers and their smart phones, and how service providers need to consider this when developing the value proposition for their business customers. The research revealed several nuances about this relationship that could make all the difference for being productive when mobile.

The second theme pertained to the importance of user experience when using collaboration applications on mobile devices. Based on the evaluation of three mobile UCaaS platforms the research established what constitutes a good user experience. This will help service providers better position mobile UCaaS as part of a collaboration solution for end customers. These findings will be especially beneficial for Metaswitch customers, as its MaX UC platform clearly outperformed two other leading mobile UCaaS offerings.

Overview

This report is based on qualitative research among mobile users to gain insights about their user experience with work-related collaboration applications. More specifically, **a series of four focus groups with a total of 20 participants was conducted** by J Arnold & Associates, during March 4-5, 2020.

These sessions were conducted in Tampa Bay, FL, and participants were carefully selected based on having both familiarity and interest in using collaboration applications on their mobile devices for work.

The research had two sets of objectives, with the key findings presented in the analysis that follows below:

1. Overall usage profile of mobility, including usage of collaboration applications, and the challenges faced working in this mode – this is covered in Part 1
2. Comparative user experience for three mobile UCaaS platforms – with both overall feedback and UX ratings for these platforms across a common set of attributes – Part 2

Part 1 – Mobility Usage Profile

The focus groups began with a discussion about how mobile devices are used and their usage of various applications to get work done. This section summarizes the key findings, which have been grouped into three main themes:

1. How devices are used for work
2. Problems and challenges for working this way
3. Wish list for a better mobile collaboration experience

Theme 1 – How devices are used for work

A variety of aspects were discussed around the role mobility plays in their work, and from this, four main elements emerged that characterize their usage profile.

1. Who provides the phone

The majority of participants use their personal smart phone for business. Combining both sets of needs on one device requires a bit more work, but is preferred to carrying separate devices even if it challenges work-life balance.

"I don't want my kids calling on my business phone while I'm working."

While having physically separate devices eliminates this problem, the onus falls to the user to carry around two phones, and for many that's not a good trade-off. More importantly, it reflects the limited knowledge some mobile users have for ways to manage two user profiles on a single device.

BYOD - bring your own device - is the norm, which is consistent with broader industry trends. People are very attached to their personal devices, and while IT may have concerns around BYOD, they seem to have little choice but to go along with this. That said, the option of using a mobile device just for business doesn't hold much appeal.

"My business gave me a phone, but I don't use it – it's too clunky, and I just can't do anything with it."

"If I use a company phone, I must agree to their conditions, like being able to wipe your data if they feel something is insecure. Better to just pay for your own phone."

These comments reflect valid concerns about companies who won't invest to provide phones that can properly support mobile workers, along with the control the employer can exert over a device that employees are carrying all day.

Conversely, there is also the scenario where the employer isn't willing to provide a phone for business use, so the worker has no choice but to use their personal phone for both. The following quote is from a self-employed contract worker, and while most participants were employees or business owners, this is a major part of the workforce, particularly related to the growing gig economy.

"I'm a 1099 employee, so they don't care. When you work for yourself, you pay for your own tools."

This analysis indicates a wide range of scenarios where workers are using their mobile devices for both work and personal needs. As such, when considering UCaaS, it's important to recognize that managing both needs will be a key part of the user experience. Supporting business applications helps mobile workers be more productive, but it's not the only thing for which these devices are being used.

When considering UCaaS, it's important to recognize that managing both work *and* personal needs will be a key part of the user experience.

2. Where mobile devices are used

Participants were first asked whether work-related usage of mobile phones occurred more in a home office setting, or when working on-the-go or at other locations. On balance, most usage was in on-the-go settings. Primarily, though, mobile phones are used for communication, while more data-intensive work is done on PCs. For example, one participant - who has both of these needs - is in the field most of the time, and regularly works with both devices. She'll use her PC to enter data and work with spreadsheets, and then her mobile device to communicate with customers.

Similarly, when working in a home office, the mobile phone will be used for calls or messaging – even though there may be a landline nearby – and then the PC for working on documents or doing video conferencing. Another reason why they'll use their PC more than their mobile at home is the user experience. Participants often talked about how the PC is better-suited for more intensive forms of work – full-size keyboard, use of a mouse, bigger screen, applications and interfaces are familiar, comfortably seated at a desk, electric-powered, etc.

For most participants, work modes are fluid, and there's a mix of scenarios. Some are mostly in office, while others are hardly ever there, and some are in the field all day long. Home-based working is common as well, with some being fully-based there, and others just some of the time.

Mobile phones are the common denominator for managing these various modes, and it's easy to see why people depend on them so much. However, when it comes to getting work done, mobile devices are a complement to PCs, and there was no indication from participants that mobile phones can address their full set of communication and collaboration needs.

3. Which communications modes are used

Participants were asked to indicate the approximate mix of modalities when using their mobile phones for work – voice, messaging and video. Some clear patterns emerged across the groups. First, voice and messaging clearly dominate, with minimal usage of video. No strong use cases for mobile video came up, and when doing video meetings with teams, they'll use their PC.

Second, the range for voice and messaging was quite mixed. Some are heavy users for one or the other, but most use both modes regularly. Being able to use both modes seems to be a key aspect of the mobile experience, and it's likely that mobility would be used less if it was voice-only. Below are some examples showing the dynamics around having the choice to use either mode, not just to communicate more effectively, but also to manage your day.

"I don't want to talk to people, and they won't or don't want to answer when I do call."

"Messaging is a time-saver – especially when I just need a short answer."

"With text, I can do other things at the same time – that's big."

"With messaging, I have a record of what was said – can resort back to that to refresh my memory, and I don't have to call back a second time to remember what I said."

4. Which applications are used

Participants were finally asked about applications as an open-ended question with no prompts provided. Aside from trying to determine which applications they're using for mobile collaboration, we wanted to see what types of applications came to mind.

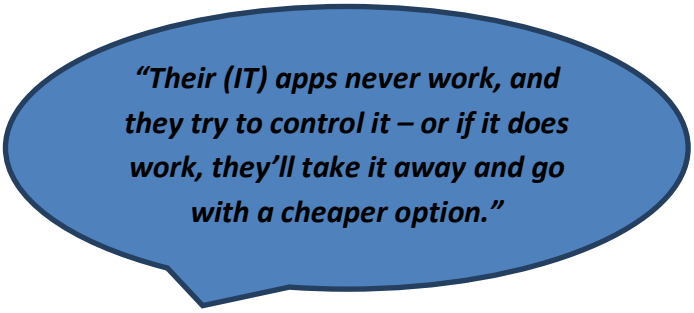
While the mentions were not systematically tallied, Microsoft Teams was the most common, along with related offerings, namely Skype for Business, Outlook and Office. This is noteworthy because Teams (and even SfB) is a collaboration platform, not a point solution.

Conversely, most of the other mentions were for point solutions that only address a particular element that is part of a broader collaboration process. Along the lines of MS Teams, there were some mentions of Cisco Webex and Slack, but overall, **the UCaaS concept for mobility is not well-established among end users**.

Regarding point solutions, the most relevant were Zoom, Google chat, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, GoToMeeting and Dropbox. More specialized applications included Wrike, Docusign, Dotloop, Jira and Confluence.

In terms of getting end users to adopt mobile UCaaS, the use of point solutions reflects some underlying tensions with their employers, especially IT. The discussion around this issue indicated that the path to discovery for these applications came from co-workers or personal experience – and not their employer.

This sentiment is reflected in the following quote, and implies that UCaaS providers need to work more closely with IT so they can deliver a more user-driven collaboration solution that workers will embrace.



Theme 2 - Problems and challenges for working on mobile

Aside from issues already cited, many other challenges were expressed at various points during the sessions. Each reflects specific sentiments and experiences that UCaaS providers need to address in order for mobile workers to adopt their offerings.

Limitations of mobile devices

This is the starting point for mobile collaboration, since the benchmark in their minds is the PC user experience. In addition to what's already been mentioned, other limitations include:

- Battery life, especially for long calls or using video – phones can run hot then as well
- Signal reception – some offices have dead spots, and will vary when on the go or in the home
- Bandwidth availability – dependent on personal mobile plan – especially for sending or uploading large files, so this can slow things down

- Video – gets out of synch easily and screen often freezes – not a user great experience
- Audio quality – varies a lot, so not as consistently good as on desk phone or via PC
- Small screen – hard to read, especially dense content, and that's an issue when working on the go and trying to multitask
- Harder to find and use all the apps compared to the PC experience

Using personal phone number for business

The use of one's personal identity for business is common enough to be an important challenge for the mobile user experience.

"My office line is routed to my mobile, so I have to answer every call. Would be a bonus if I knew which incoming calls are for work, especially for calls coming after hours."

"Some of my workers try to respect my boundaries, but I also get calls from the field on nights or weekends, and those need to be answered."

"Sometimes I need to call foreign countries, and those can be expensive calls – I'm not going to do that."

These challenges are not insolvable, and most mobile UCaaS platforms can address them. A few participants have figured out how to manage dual identities, but clearly most have not, so this capability needs to be more prominently featured.

"I have a separate Google Voice number for personal, so when a call comes in, I can tell whether it's for business."

Robocalls

This may be the most important problem that came from the sessions, not just because it's a global scourge, but also because it was latent. There were no unprompted references to robocalling, but once injected into the conversation, it yielded the most emotional of all responses. This seemed like a problem nobody wanted to talk about, but once it came up, it quickly became apparent how widespread and worrisome robocalling has become.

"Lately, I have (been worried). I still pick it up if I don't recognize the number – could be a customer."

"I get a ton of spam, so am not inclined to pick up calls from unknown numbers."

"Been using a screening app from Verizon, but I still get them."

"A solution for that? Wow – that's a heavy hitter there."

None of this is surprising, but even when trying to block these calls out with a carrier app, robocalls persist, and this only heightens the issue. Aside from the overall nuisance **robocalls** have become, they **are impinging on workflows**, especially around keeping in touch with customers. A lot of time gets wasted answering calls that might be business-related, so clearly, there's a need for more intelligent call screening, and no doubt this would be a strong value driver for mobile UCaaS.

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Trust with the cloud

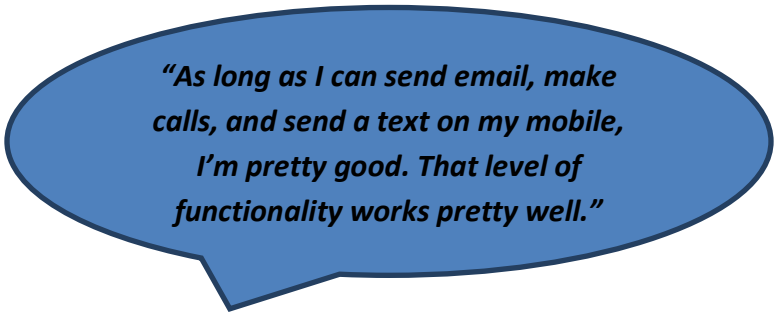
Some trust issues around the cloud were expressed, and as any IT professional would know, these concerns are not confined to mobility. While the use of cloud for enterprise applications has become normalized, it took some time to become trusted as an alternative to premises-based deployments, and in some circles, those reservations still persist.

For mobility, the main concern voiced in the groups was a lack of knowledge of where data is stored. The sense was their comfort level with mobile apps would be higher if they had a way to store data, either on a hard drive or a SIM card. Another area of concern was security of the data when using these apps, namely wanting to know if their mobile data was encrypted.

To whatever extent they actually understand the cloud and network security, there's an opportunity for mobile UCaaS providers and carriers to provide user-friendly messaging around trust. Their trust issues seem more rooted in a lack of basic knowledge than from a distrust about the cloud not being a safe environment, so the task here would be more educational than trying to change perceptions from negative to positive.

Setting expectations for mobile collaboration

The research establishes that mobile devices have a lot of utility for collaboration, but they also have limitations compared to working on a PC in two aspects. First is the idea that end users will only use what's convenient, such as a one-touch experience, or pre-loaded apps that are just there.



This comment suggests that UCaaS providers need to come in at the right level to resonate with end users. Focus on the core communications capabilities, but don't overwhelm end users with too many features or too much complexity.

The second aspect about setting expectations reflects that thinking. Mobile UCaaS is a new concept for most participants, and so far, their experiences haven't been very intuitive. This is a new way of working, and they don't know where to start with using these apps. If they feel there are too many to manage, mobile UCaaS will never take hold.

"I've got so many apps, I can't even think."

"I use different apps for different things. So, an issue may come up on email, and at some point, the conversation moves to Slack, and then you have to refer back to an email two months down the road, and then you can't remember if it was in Slack, or in email – so, you lose that history."

The implication is that mobile UCaaS offerings should have a manageable set of apps that are intuitive, easy to use and seamlessly connected. Otherwise, mobile workers find and use apps in an ad hoc fashion, and will never get to the integrated experience UCaaS provides by design.

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Theme 3 - Wish list for a better mobile collaboration experience

Lastly, participants were asked to identify features and capabilities that would make for a better mobile UX, and these are summarized below.

Integrated client

This wouldn't be the language of end users, but references have already been made for their desire to have a more integrated experience. Clearly, they have issues working with standalone applications, and they don't seem inclined to go out and find mobile apps on their own. The key idea is to have an integrated client ready on the phone, ready for them to use as needed.

"If it's already on the phone, then everyone with use it – not having to download it would be great. Like how Facebook is automatically on your phone when you buy it – regardless of whether you're an iPhone or Android user."

Multiple identities

This is the solution to a common theme across the groups, for which there is a good-but-not-great trade-off for using one phone instead of two when using mobile phones for both work and personal. While nobody wants to be carrying around two devices, most have not solved the problem for multiple identities.

Being able to know when an incoming call is for business would be the main benefit, along with having the ability to use work and personal apps separately. The convenience of mobility is undeniable, but with that comes the concern that they'll have to be always-on for work. Being

able to manage their work-related apps can help mitigate that and set some boundaries for when users are not on company time.

"I only have one phone – wouldn't it be great if when it's 5 o'clock, there's a button that just switches over to personal, so I don't have work apps going then."

Other features/capabilities

These weren't as widely cited, but are still important to consider.

- Native dialer – convenience of one-button calling was appealing – *"simpler is better"*
- Blocking robocalls – *"worried about spoofing to make call look like it's from a real person – is there a way to authenticate this?"*
- Consistent UX for apps across Android and Apple phones
- Text alerts – *"would be nice so I know who's calling, then I can plan what I need to do"*
- Battery conservation feature – *"maybe auto shut-off for apps running in the background when not used – apps can drain the battery quickly, and that's a reason for not using video"*

Part 2 – Mobile UX Ratings

Overview

For this segment of the focus groups, participants were led through a demonstration of five mobile UCaaS applications on devices provided for the sessions. The applications were pre-loaded on Android devices so participants would all have the same experience, and wouldn't have to go through the time-consuming process of downloading them.

A key objective for compiling UX ratings was to compare performance across three offerings – Metaswitch MaX UC and two leading providers with mobile UCaaS platforms. These other providers may be well-known, but in terms of mobile UX, their capabilities are less-well established. For service providers looking to differentiate on this basis, these focus groups provided a neutral forum to show how MaX UC measures up. For expediency, separate devices were used for each offering, and for consistency, all mobile phones were the same make and model - Samsung Galaxy A10e.

For each application, a basic description was provided, and participants were asked to try it on their own. Two technical support people were in the room to assist them as needed, but the intent was for participants to experience the applications with as little support as possible.

Once participants experienced the application for each of the three mobile UCaaS offerings, they were asked to rate each one on a short series of attributes. Following that, they were asked to rank-order the UX for the three offerings for that application in terms being the best, second best and third best.

The five applications and rating attributes are summarized as follows:

Applications	**Rating Attributes**
1. Receiving a call	Ease of use
	Caller ID details clearly displayed
	Call identified as being a business call
2. Making a call	Ease of use
	Caller ID clearly displayed – business
	Ease of finding call history log
3. Merging an incoming call	Ability to view incoming call detail
	Ease of use to merge calls
4. Presence and adding team members to a call	Ability to see contact's presence status
	Ease of use adding team member to call
5. Uplifting to collaborate	Ease of uplifting a call to a meeting
	Ease of use for file sharing
	Ability to send a document/image

The key findings for these ratings are summarized in the following series of charts. Furthermore, one of the applications – uplifting to collaborate – could only be shown across two of the platforms, so the data set there is reduced.

As such, across the three mobile UCaaS platforms, a full data set was compiled from the total base of 20 participants for four applications, and that forms the basis for most of the ratings summaries.

There are two sets of ratings in these charts, calculated on the following basis:

Attributes – these were rated on a 10-point scale, where 1=Poor and 10=Excellent, with the average rating out of 10 being shown in the charts. This metric applies to Charts 1-6.

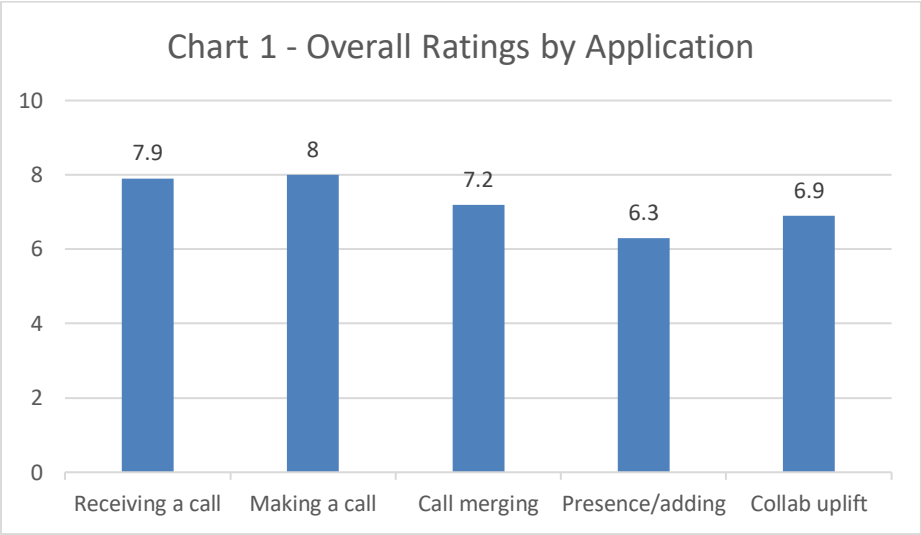
Comparison rankings – using a 1-2-3 rank-ordering for the three mobile UCaaS platforms, the scoring was based on a weighted average. On this basis, a #1 ranking was scored 3, #2 was scored 2, and #3 was scored 1. All ranking instances had a response base of 20, so the highest possible scoring would be 60, and the lowest would be 20. As such, the rank-ordering is based on a scale from 20-60, with the results summarized in Chart 7.

Attribute Ratings

Chart 1 – Overall Ratings by Application

This chart reflects the aggregate rating across all three mobile UCaaS platforms, and all the attributes measured. The intention is to show for the five applications, the overall UX rating for each. As Chart 1 shows, receiving and making calls rated the highest at 7.9 and 8.0 respectively. This isn't surprising given these are basic features that mobile users will be familiar with. That said, as Charts 2 and 3 will show, not all UX's are created equal, and the ratings do vary by provider.

Going the other way, Chart 1 shows that using presence and adding members to a call to be the lowest-rated application. This isn't to say it's the most complex application tested during the sessions, but a closer look in Chart 5 shows that this overall UX rating of 6.3 was driven by very low scores for two of the three UCaaS platforms tested.



Charts 2-6 – UX Ratings by Application

The following series of charts breaks out the UX ratings for each of the five applications tested:

- Receiving a call
- Making a call
- Merging an incoming calla
- Presence and adding a team member to a call
- Uplifting to collaborate

The pattern for UX ratings is very consistent across these charts, where Platform 1 - **Metaswitch MaX UC - rates higher than Platforms 2 and 3 in every instance, often by a wide margin**. As such, the overall data set shows that these participants found the UX for Platform 1 to be the best of the three tested.

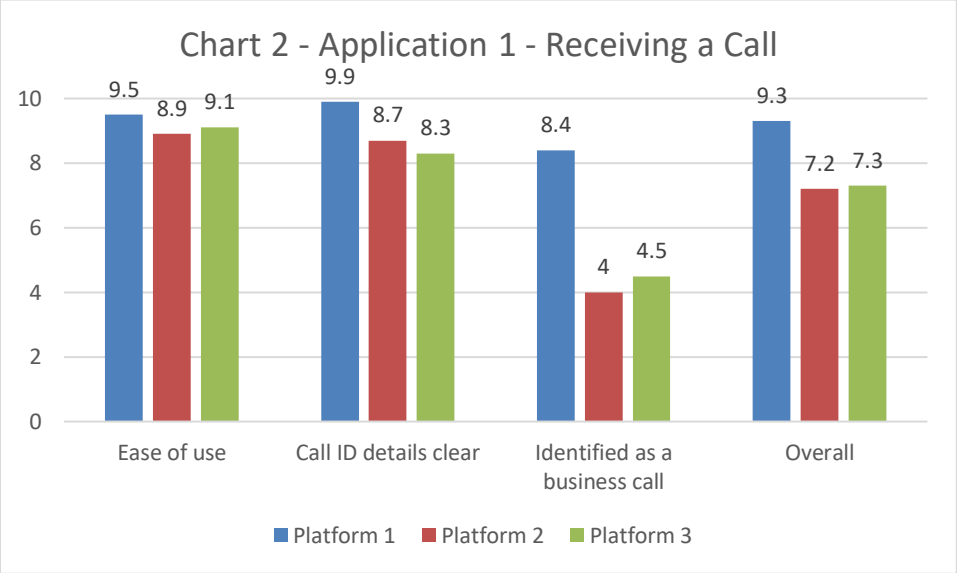


Chart 2 - Application 1 - Receiving a Call
10
8
6
4
2
0
9.5
8.9
9.1
9.9
8.7
8.3
8.4
4
4.5
9.3
7.2
7.3
Ease of use
Call ID details clear
Identified as a business call
Overall
Platform 1
Platform 2
Platform 3

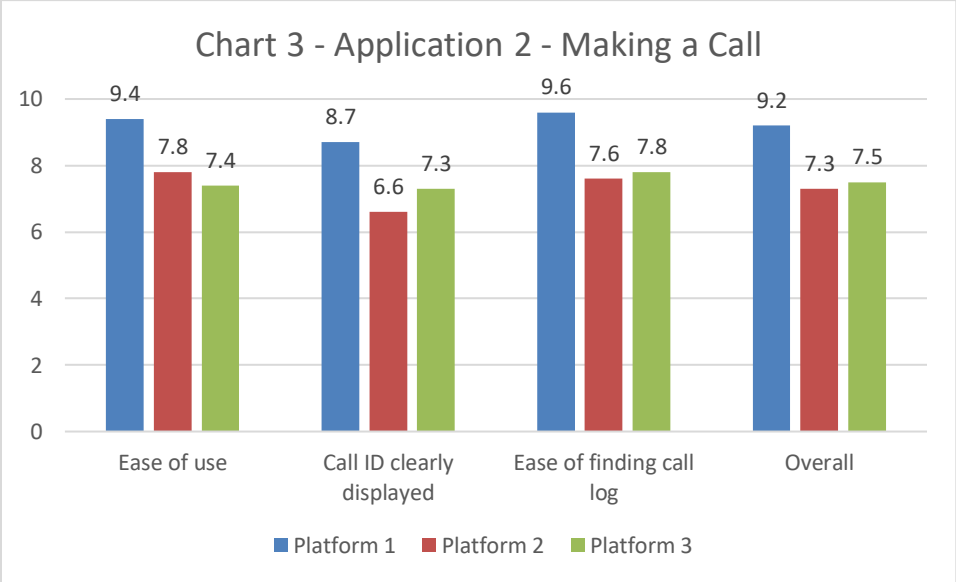


Chart 3 - Application 2 - Making a Call
10
8
6
4
2
0
9.4
7.8
7.4
8.7
6.6
7.3
9.6
7.6
7.8
9.2
7.3
7.5
Ease of use
Call ID clearly displayed
Ease of finding call log
Overall
Platform 1
Platform 2
Platform 3

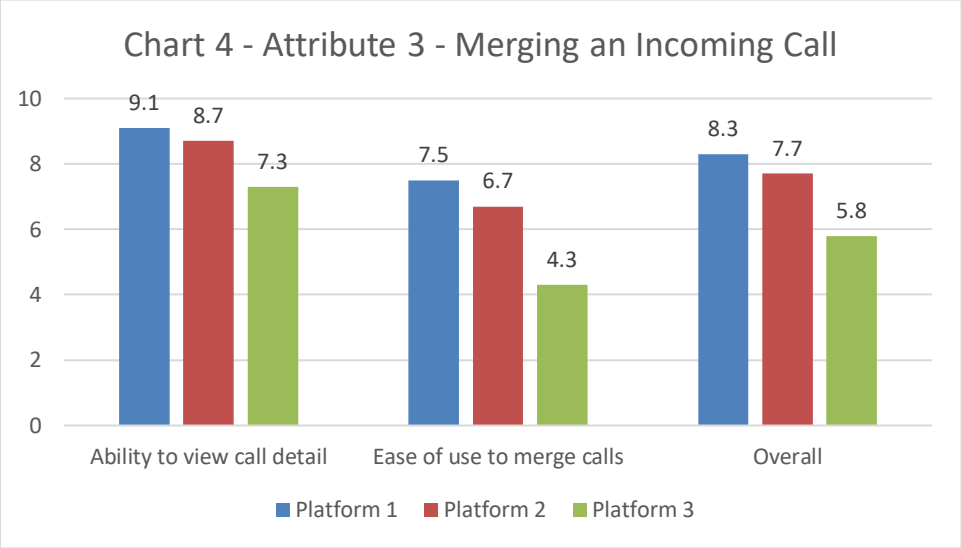


Chart 4 - Attribute 3 - Merging an Incoming Call
10
8
6
4
2
0
9.1
8.7
7.3
7.5
6.7
4.3
8.3
7.7
5.8
Ability to view call detail
Ease of use to merge calls
Overall
Platform 1
Platform 2
Platform 3

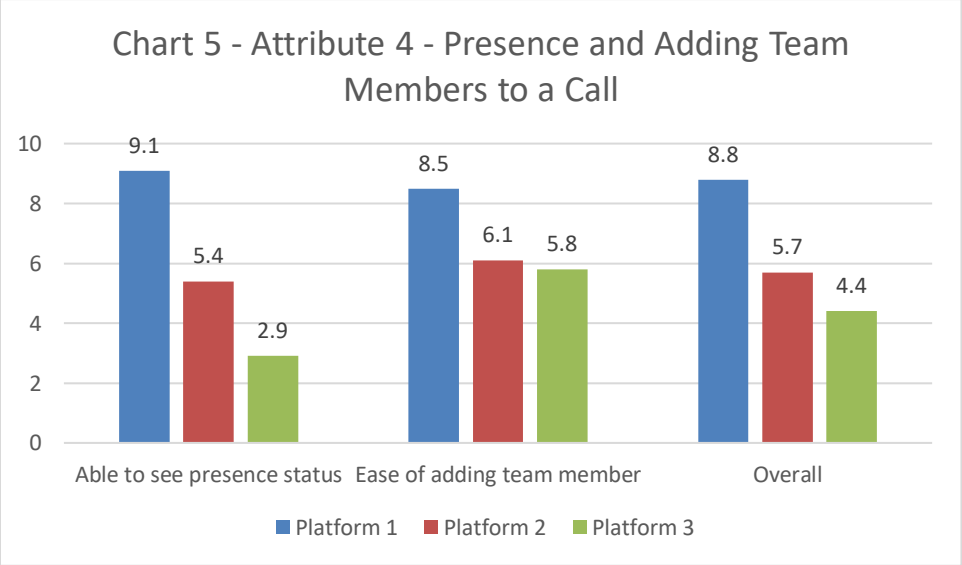


Chart 5 - Attribute 4 - Presence and Adding Team Members to a Call
10
8
6
4
2
0
9.1
5.4
2.9
8.5
6.1
5.8
8.8
5.7
4.4
Able to see presence status
Ease of adding team member
Overall
Platform 1
Platform 2
Platform 3

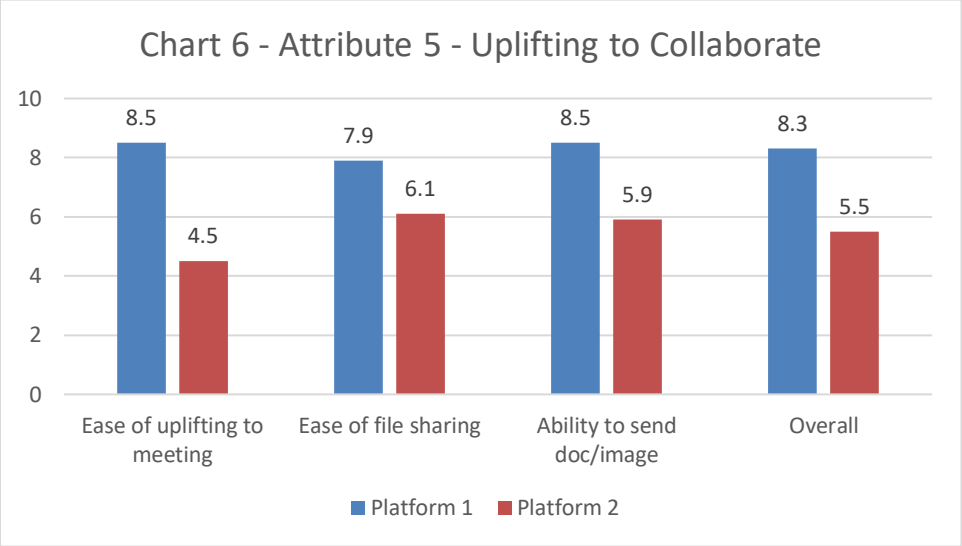
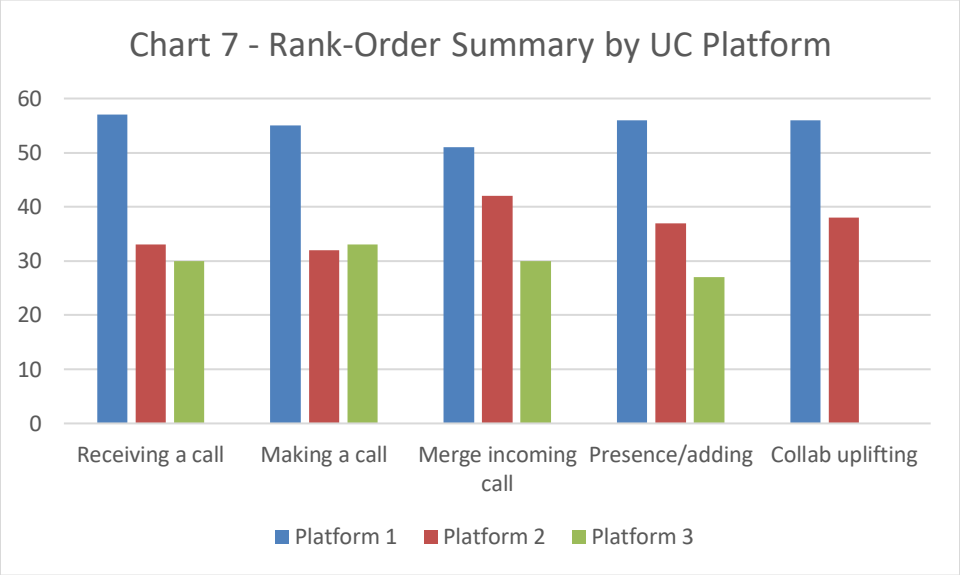


Chart 7 – Rank-Order Results for Mobile UX

Finally, Chart 7 summarizes the comparative scoring among the three mobile UCaaS offerings rather than the applications. For this set of metrics, participants rank-ordered the three platforms for each application. As explained earlier, the highest possible ranking score is 60, which reflects complete preference across the board. This would be the case if all 20 participants across the four groups ranked a particular platform as being number 1. Conversely, a ranking score of 20 would be show the lowest possible degree of preference.

As Chart 7 below shows, Platform 1 was the clear leader across all five applications. This overall profile mirrors the comparative ratings results in Charts 2-6, providing further support for MaX UC providing the best overall mobile UX. Small sample size notwithstanding, the use of two completely different types of metrics was by design. Whereas Charts 2-6 reflect comparative data, Chart 7 is based on absolute data, and both when yield similar results, the conclusions are more substantive than if only using one of these data sets.

Platform 1 was the clear leader across all five applications. This overall profile mirrors the comparative ratings results in Charts 2-6, providing further support for MaX UC providing the best overall mobile UX.



Mobile UX Discussion

Following the UX demos and ratings, there was a group discussion about their overall impressions. There was a broad range of commentary, and from that, one main theme emerged. **The UX ratings across the three platforms consistently showed preference for MaX UC**, and the comments below provide some insights as to why. Following that are comments for a secondary theme regarding the overall mobile UCaaS UX.

MaX UC strengths - features

- Call indicator – *"I loved the blue indicator that came up saying it was a business call"*
- Pop-up menu – *"I like how it shows the features for you to click on – don't have to go to a separate app to join a meeting"*
- Menu navigation – *"Having a menu that expanded – that was pretty cool"*
- One-touch feature – *"It's all there – I don't like multi-steps – with this, easier to merge people into your call with one step"*
- Native integration of apps – *"I don't have to open another app to do something, like share a file or switch to video or add a user in''*
- Making groups – the ability to choose favorite contacts and put them into groups
- Viewing team members – *"I really loved the visual part of this feature with a drop-down box showing your team members on the side"*
- Touch screen interface – *"Very convenient – makes things easier to do on the go"*

MaX UC strengths - overall

"Overall, #1 was the most consistently user-friendly. It was easy to make a business call, or switch from voice to video without exiting the app or sending an invite."

"1 had the friendliest UI."

"The first app was better integrated than the others."

Overall Mobile UCaaS UX

- Whether these apps would lead to more collaboration on mobile – *"Absolutely. Cell phones have taken us away from our PCs. Not sure I'm happy about that, but it's not going away."*
- Outcome if mobile UX was not good and didn't resonate with end users – *"People would just go back to their old ways of doing things – some people aren't keen to adapt to change."*
- On providing an intuitive UX – *"Conference calls are easier this way. We're not very techy, but we got it."*
- On having an integrated platform – *"Great to have a history of file sharing in a centralized place so you can have a trail for your activity."*

Conclusion

The mobile usage profile in Part 1 established the importance of mobility in two ways. First is the fact that **work is increasingly being done in mobile settings** – both outside and inside the office. Even when working in an office setting, employees are no longer desk-bound, and will routinely use their mobile device to get work done. Smart phones become even more central outside the office, especially when it's the only communications device available, such as when working on-the-go.

Secondly, mobility pertains to the device being used, and the research clearly showed how dependent workers are on their smart phones. Their relationship with these devices is complex, and service providers need to understand this to effectively to support collaboration when working in mobile settings. The research identified a wide range of challenges with the current mobile user experience – UX - and these represent real impediments to worker productivity.

Part 2 served to address this by having participants evaluate the mobile UX for three UCaaS platforms. **UCaaS can be a great offering for service providers, but if the mobile UX is poor, businesses will not get wide enough adoption to generate a good ROI. The research results showed that MaX UC outperformed two leading UCaaS platforms**, and given the importance of UX for mobile collaboration, our view is that this should be a primary consideration when evaluating UCaaS partners.

A Note About Market Research

When reviewing the analysis in this report, the qualitative nature of focus group research must be emphasized. Across the four sessions there were 20 participants, and the analysis reflects the overall sentiment for the topics explored. This is largely based on the report author's collective view across the four sessions, all of which were moderated by the author. To maintain objectivity - and provide additional color - the narrative has been complemented by verbatim quotes from participants (but anonymously, for privacy protection).

The same caveat about qualitative research also applies to the UX ratings. On a comparative basis, the MaX UC platform UX was clearly preferred to the other two, but the data should not be viewed as comprehensive or statistically significant. While these findings are directional in nature, they do provide a reasonable sense of the strengths and weaknesses of mobile UX across the three UCaaS platforms evaluated.