



# Skype for Business Online is retiring

## Here's what you need to know

July 2021



Overview .....	2
How long does each platform have left? .....	2
What are the benefits of migrating to Teams? .....	2
New and enhanced features .....	3
What is your risk, and what should you do? .....	4
Summary .....	10
Next steps .....	10



## Overview

Microsoft's previous unified communications platform, Skype for Business, is currently available in two versions:

- Skype for Business Online (SfBO), a hosted service provided as part of Office 365
- Skype for Business Server (SfBS), a self-hosted platform generally installed by companies on-premises

Both the hosted and on-premises versions of Skype for Business are rapidly approaching end-of-life, and business should begin planning their migration to Microsoft Teams.

In this guide we will outline some recommended steps depending on the topology of your Skype for Business environment, and the level of risk you are under.

## How long does each platform have left?

SfBO's retirement is rapidly approaching, with a scheduled shutdown date of July 31, 2021. In their [Skype for Business Online Retires paper](#), Microsoft have detailed the impact this will have on organisations who are still using Skype for Business. When this date passes, users may not be assigned a SfBO license, and must use Teams-Only mode.

As for SfBS, it will leave mainstream support in January 2024, and extended support in October of 2025. Once out of mainstream support it will cease to receive updates beyond security critical updates, and when out of extended support customers may continue to operate an on-premises SfBS at their own risk.

When SfBO is shut down, there are several components which will still be required by customers using SfBS on-premises. For example, if those customers are using voicemail, they need a hybrid mode connection in order to consume this feature. Even for those customers who have on-premises Exchange for voicemail, Microsoft will still want to keep a path open for them to be able to migrate their users, contact lists and meetings to Teams eventually. For this, the hybrid components must remain.

## What are the benefits of migrating to Teams?

Microsoft recommends that no matter which version of Skype for Business you're using, you should migrate your users to Microsoft Teams.

The good news is that Teams is not just a straight replacement for Skype for Business. Arguably it's not even a direct upgrade, as it's been written from the ground up for a modern experience, instead of building upon legacy code which stretches back to 2007 (or 2000 if you count the Exchange Meetings Plugin).

While features such as instant messaging, presence and meetings are fairly similar to what they were like in Skype, in Teams they are enhanced and expanded.



## New and enhanced features

**Leveraging Microsoft's global network.** When hosting your own Skype for Business environment, remote meeting participants' audio and video streams were routed over the internet to get to your environment's edge servers, leading to unpredictable quality issues. With Teams, audio/video streams need only get to Microsoft's front door – which is usually via a peering link at user's ISP – and from there they are routed across Microsoft's managed backbone to provide a guaranteed level of service.

**Vastly improved meetings experience.** Skype's meeting experience is quite dated compared to Teams. To join a meeting, guests would need to download a client, which caused confusion and friction, and video content was limited to four small squares.

Teams launched with 4 videos (2x2), but this has now been expanded to 9 (3x3) by default, and 49 (7x7) for large meetings. Teams will also get dynamic layouts shortly, allowing more active speakers to take up more of the stage. You can also switch to Together Mode for a more fun experience.

**Document co-authoring built in.** Skype for Business did not include any sort of collaboration beyond simply sending a file to a colleague. Teams brings forward Sharepoint's document collaboration and fits it seamlessly into the Chat and Teams sections, allowing users to upload and work on documents together in real time.

**Added chat experience.** Along with simple emoticons, Teams brings a range of fun GIFs and stickers for users to add some visual flair to their chats.

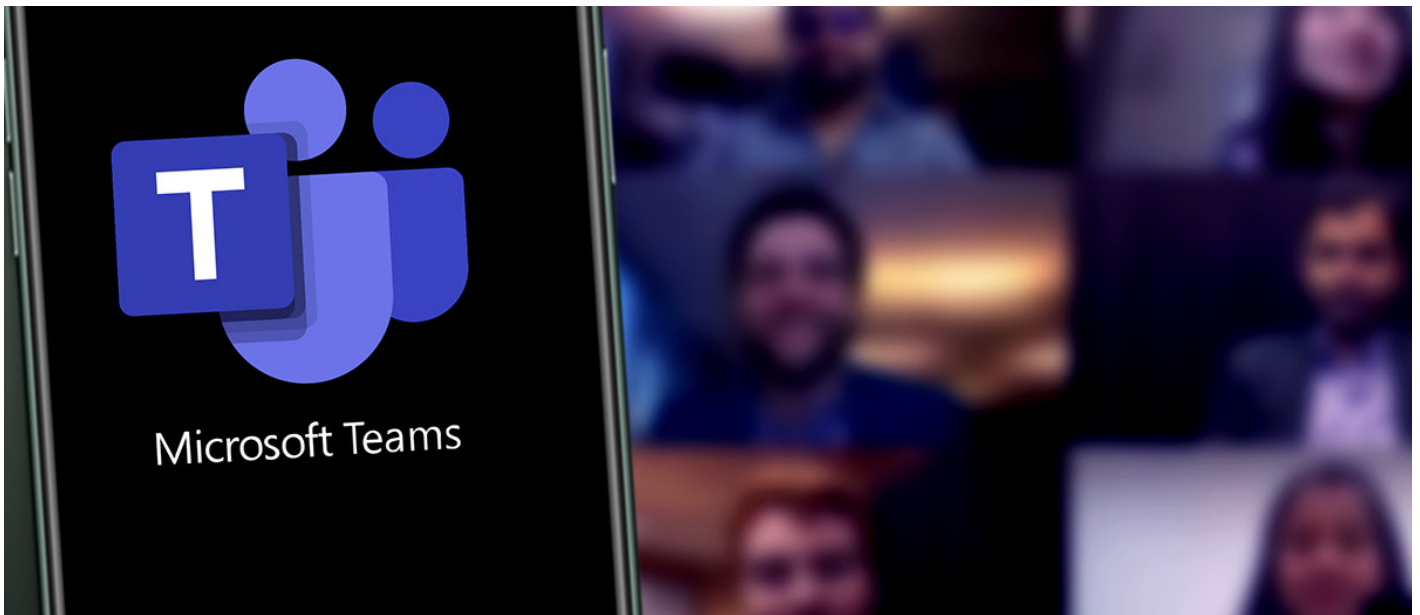
Some administrators seek to turn these off via policy, but these features are often key to engaging users – especially younger ones – in participating in team discussions.

**Great mobile experience.** The Skype mobile platform was a bit clunky, with most users giving up on accessing their chats and calls remotely. In contrast, Microsoft's philosophy for Teams was that 'if it doesn't work on mobile, it doesn't work' and that shows. Teams mobile essentially has feature parity with the desktop platform, so mobile-first users will find it comfortable to use. For instance, when you are on a call and walk out of wifi range – where Skype would have dropped the call and forced you to re-dial – Teams plays a hold ringtone and reconnects you over 4G.

**Fully featured web client.** Skype basically had no web option. Either you were using the desktop app or nothing at all. Teams on the other hand, is all but native in a supported browser – the only thing you will really miss is multiple videos. Everything else from the desktop app is there, meaning your users can get to their work and chats even if they do not want to install the client.

**Apps, bots, and integrations.** Where things really take a massive leap forward is the ability to add apps from the Teams App Store, and the scale of choice here is extensive. These apps can bring information into chats from external sources – for example, a Salesforce app which lets you search for contacts or opportunities. They can also trigger external activities, such as the new approvals app, which lets you tag a file for approval by your manager.

**A pure cloud-based solution.** Many Skype for Business customers are still using SfBS, either on-premises or partner hosted.



By moving to Teams, your business gains access to a more modern cloud-based solution for their communications and collaboration, which can help to save costs within your organisation such as:

- Hosting or rack space if using a shared environment
- Air conditioning and power if you're self-hosting
- Network connectivity
- Server licensing
- SQL licensing, which can be quite costly if you're using Always-On databases
- Staff time to perform patching and upgrades most likely outside of business hours
- An F5 or Kemp reverse proxy, and associated licensing/maintenance
- Hardware maintenance and licensing costs for session border controllers if you're using Enterprise Voice
- A duplication of some or all of these costs if you have a disaster recovery site deployed

**You're probably already licensed.** Teams licensing is included with every Office 365 or Microsoft 365 license with the exception of F5, and the whole solution is provided as a SaaS solution. The only additional licenses you'll require are the Audio Conferencing SKU if you intend to offer dial-in numbers on your meetings, and the Phone System SKU if you intend to use Enterprise voice.

### What is your risk when SfBO shuts down, and what should you do?

At the end of July 2021, the closure of the SfBO environment may impact your business.

First, let's define what the risk types are which we'll be using in this document:

#### Low risk

There will be little to no impact to your current day-to-day operations.



#### Medium risk

There will be moderate impact to how your services are delivered, which will result in a change of experience for your users.



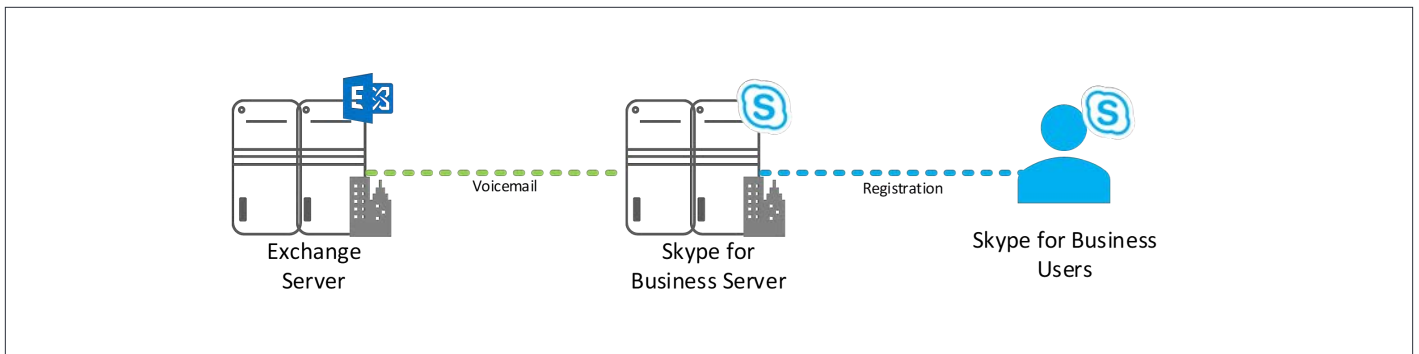
#### High risk

There will be significant impact to your users, and business critical functionality – specifically calling – will cease functioning.





### Topology 1: On-premises only



In this topology, none of your users or workloads have been migrated to Microsoft's cloud. You will be using SfBS (or perhaps even Lync in some offices), as well as Exchange 2015 or below, and perhaps SharePoint. Both Skype and Exchange are running standalone, with no hybrid connections to Office 365. **Your risk is low ... for now.**

This changes if – more likely, when – you intend to upgrade to Exchange 2019. As noted earlier, Exchange Unified Messaging was retired as a feature following Exchange 2016, so pushing to 2019 would require enabling hybrid mode for both Exchange and Skype for Business, and then enabling your users for Azure Voicemail.

It also changes in 2025 when SfBS 2019 reaches end of support. No further versions of SfBS will be offered by Microsoft.

**LOW RISK (FOR NOW)**

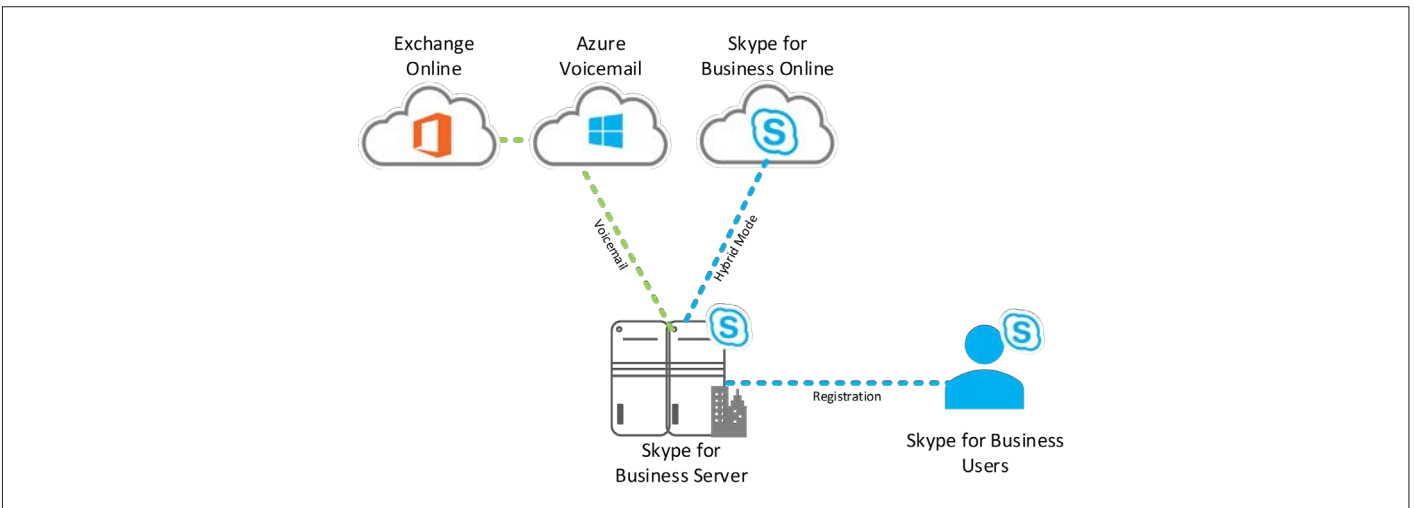


#### Recommended course of action:

While your risk is low, we recommend that you begin planning for your migration to teams. Beginning this journey now will significantly improve the eventual outcomes of your migration to Teams. It is also worthwhile investigating migration to Teams for the list of benefits defined earlier.



### Topology 2: On-premises with hybrid mode and Exchange Online



If you are still running SfBS, but the rest of your workloads have migrated to Exchange Online and SharePoint Online, **your risk is low.**

There should be no changes to the way SfBS interoperates with Exchange Online via a hybrid connection, which means there should be no disruption to your voicemail, and all other Skype functionality will continue as normal.

When you do decide to move your users to the cloud rather than an on-premises server, your users must be migrated to Teams directly. There will be no option to migrate users to SfBO past the shutdown date.

LOW RISK

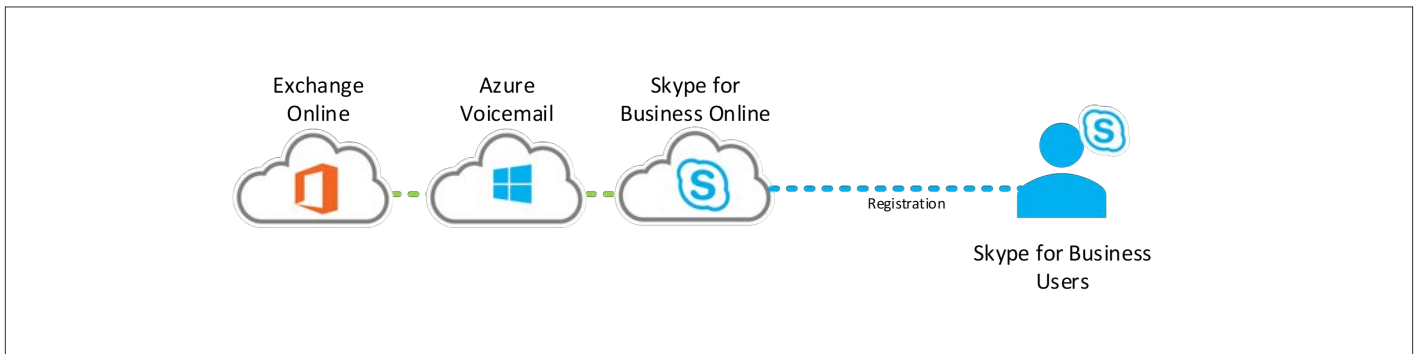


#### Recommended course of action:

While the shutdown of SfBO will not directly impact your users, it's still worth noting that 2025 is the scheduled date for the end of mainstream support for SfBS 2019. We recommend that you begin planning for a migration to Teams, or the adoption of its collaboration components as part of a hybrid deployment of Skype and Teams.



### Topology 3: Online-only with no voice, or online-only with Calling Plans



If your users are only using SfBO, and are either not using voice, or using voice via Microsoft Calling Plans, **your risk is medium.**

In this topology there will not be any fundamental changes to how your service is delivered, though you will still be required to migrate your users to Teams. The only thing to consider is whether you have non-voice users outside of Microsoft's Calling Plan availability regions.

If in future you intend for these users to migrate to Teams Calling, you will need to investigate the local deployment of Session Border Controllers, or the migration of your numbers in those regions to a Cloud Teams Calling provider such as LoopUp.

If you have 3PIP phones deployed for your voice users, these devices will still function via the 3PIP gateway for Teams, though specific firmware versions may be required.

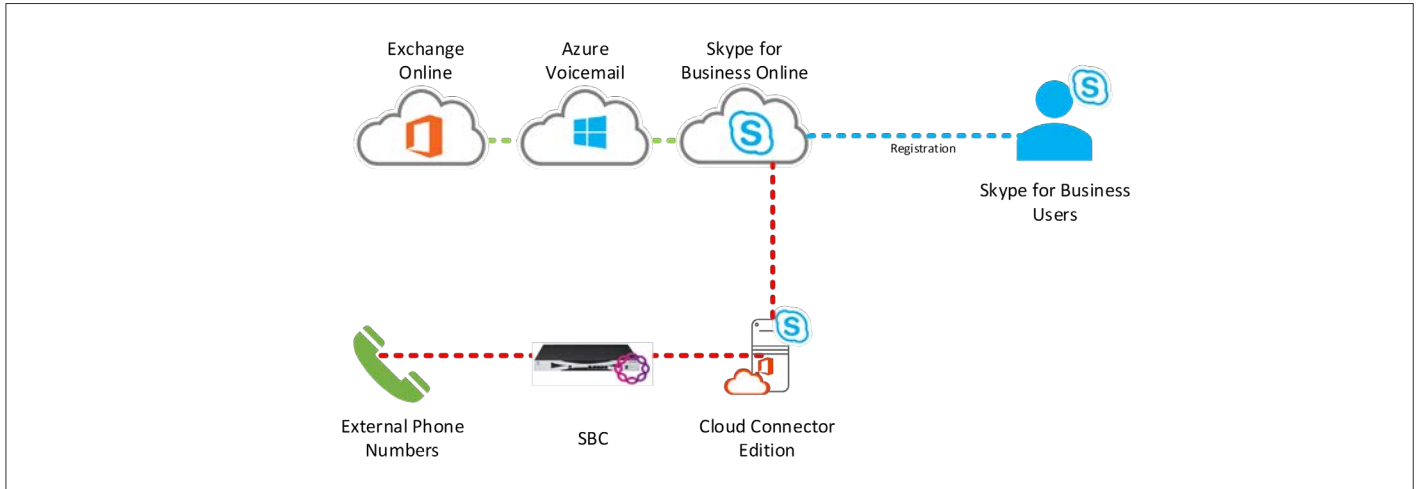


#### Recommended course of action

You should begin planning for the change from Skype for Business to Teams immediately. This should include verifying that your end-user devices are capable of running Teams, and that your Office 365 licensing includes all relevant SKUs. Check with your hardware vendor to ensure Skype for Business phones are up to date and will be able to be used with Microsoft Teams' 3PIP gateway.



#### Topology 4: Online with Cloud Connector Edition



If your environment includes Skype for Business Cloud Connector Edition, an On-Premises appliance for routing local trunks into the Skype for Business Cloud, **your risk is high**.

The Cloud Connector Edition of Skype for Business was designed as a cut-down appliance for organisations who wanted to use SfBO but retain their on-premises trunks. This may have been due to Calling Plans not being available in their region, or the requirement to retain integration with an on-premises PBX.

Teams and SfBO use a completely different mechanism for delivering calls to users from On-Premises, and the two are not interchangeable.

For sites where a Cloud Connector Edition exists, users must be migrated to Teams, trunks must be migrated to the Direct Routing model, and the Cloud Connector Edition must be decommissioned. Upgrades and licenses may be required for your Session Border Controller as well.

If you have 3PIP phones deployed for your voice users, these devices will still function via the 3PIP gateway for Teams, though specific firmware versions may be required.

**HIGH RISK**



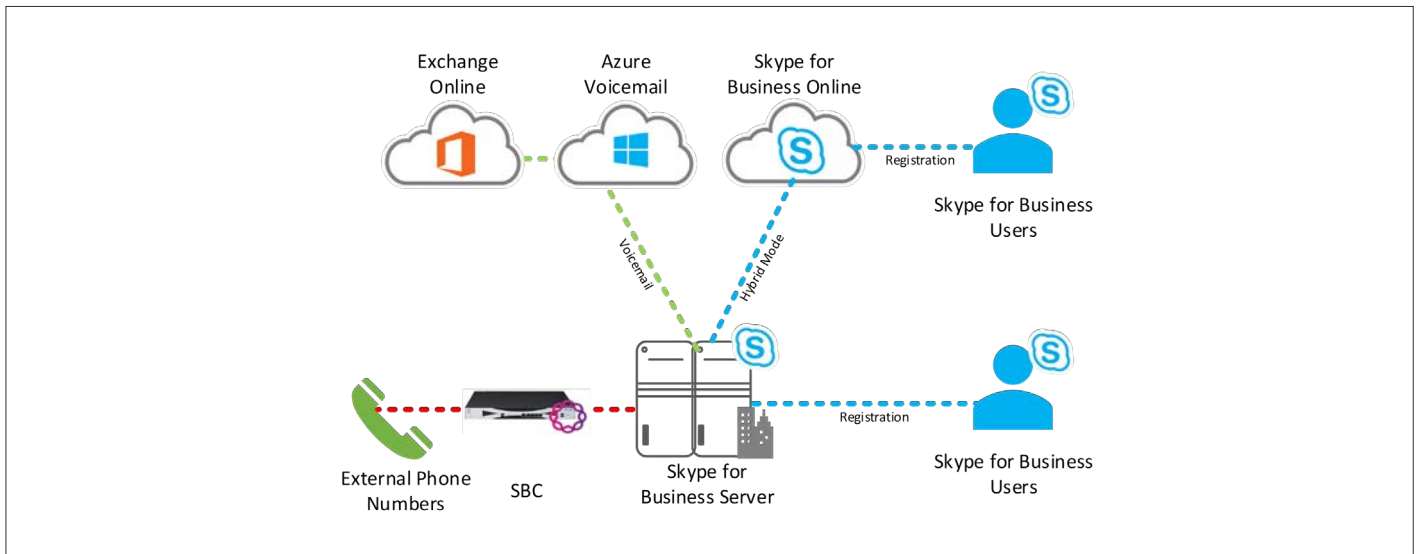
#### Recommended course of action

You should begin planning for the change from Skype for Business to Teams immediately. This should include verifying that your end-user devices are capable of running Teams, and that your Office 365 licensing includes all relevant SKUs.

Cloud Connector Edition servers must be planned for decommission, and Session Border Controllers must be [reconfigured for Direct Routing](#), or your numbers should be ported to a Direct Routing provider such as LoopUp.

Check with your hardware vendor to ensure Skype for Business phones are up to date and will be able to be used with Microsoft Teams' 3PIP gateway.

### Topology 5: Online with Cloud Connector Edition



If your environment includes a SfBS environment which is providing Enterprise voice for both on-premises and online users (Hybrid Voice), **your risk is high – for your online voice users.**

Once SfBO is retired, users must be migrated to Teams, which does not support Hybrid Voice. In this topology, Direct Routing must be deployed to provide calling functionality to online-only users, although on-premises users may still use SfBS in standalone mode.

Further, when migrating users from on-premises to online in future, they must be migrated to Teams with Direct Routing, which will require additional administration to configure your SBC(s) each time a migration is made.

**HIGH RISK**



#### Recommended course of action

You should begin planning for the change from Skype for Business to Teams for your online users immediately. This should include verifying that your end-user devices are capable of running Teams, and that your Office 365 licensing includes all relevant SKUs. Session Border Controllers must be **reconfigured for Direct Routing**, or your numbers should be ported to a Direct Routing provider such as LoopUp.

Alternatively, your online users should be rehomed back to your on-premises pools.



## Summary

Teams is taking over as Microsoft's chat, collaboration and calling application. This is more than an upgrade. Microsoft are adamant this is the new chapter in business communication. These new features, combined with the rapid pace of development make Teams hard to ignore.

As stated before, the 2025 end of mainstream support for SfBS 2019 should also be taken into account as part of your overall strategy.

## Next steps

With the SfBO end of life deadline fast approaching, if your environment looks like one of the risky ones as outlined above, it's time to get your migration underway – if you haven't already.

If your environment looks like one of the low-risk ones, it is highly recommended that you begin your journey to Teams anyway.

If you're looking to migrate to Teams Calling, speaking with a Microsoft Teams Calling provider such as LoopUp could be worthwhile. There's undeniable business advantage to replacing legacy on-premises phone systems with a single, unified cloud solution, but factors such as how many sites and users you have, and the unique complexities of your organisation will impact your migration journey.

We can help streamline this journey. We have the infrastructure and regulatory approval to deliver cloud telephony in more countries than any other single provider. Having already worked with 5,000 businesses, we have the expertise to create a solution that is tailored to drive productivity for your organisation.

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## Here to help

If you're interested in finding out more about your Microsoft Teams Calling options, [we'd love to speak to you.](#)

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## About LoopUp

LoopUp provides a global solution for secure, reliable cloud communications using cloud voice with Microsoft Teams and Direct Routing.

We include an integrated best-in-class remote meeting solution for premium remote meetings.

Our fully managed voice network was built for the high demands of professional services. It uses 15 carefully chosen Tier 1 carriers, and features auto-failover, PESQ scoring on all routings and real time carrier redundancy. We choose the optimal carrier to connect each call. This improves audio quality and resilience, and reduces costs.

We are Microsoft Certified Gold Partners and have been a Microsoft voice partner since 2010.

Our expertise is in the modern workplace, including security and compliance. We provide consultancy services and support from our modern workplace advisory consultants.

We offer bespoke solutions for contact centre and call recording.

We combine all this with consultancy for Microsoft-based Unified Communications, Collaboration, and Telephony using Teams. Our services include network analysis and performance, transition design and management, enablement, training, adoption and support.

We are the trusted partner to more than 5,000 enterprises, including 20 of the world's top law firms.

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