“Our vision is to become the new global standard for telecommunications by offering ultra-reliable, enterprise-grade communication technology solutions.”

The Research Team

While everyone at Blueface had their own part to play in assembling this insight report, the research team was primarily made up of members of Blueface’s Marketing Team.
Welcome to the 2018 Business Communications Technology (BCT) Insight Report. With insights from every size of business, this report outlines the current state of BCT and the direction the industry is taking to achieve its transformational goals.
I would like to begin by thanking the businesses who participated in the 2018 BCT Insight Report research phase — the Blueface Research Team were delighted with the strong response.

In the context of this report, business communication technology refers to any tool that helps a business collaborate and the intelligent applications of these tools.

BCT 2018 explores current and forthcoming industry trends and takes a deeper dive into the impact of communication technology by organisation size (Startup, SME, and Large Enterprises).

Certain results are cross-referenced with our findings from the Blueface 2014 ICT Report to identify concurrent trends.

Finally, the Blueface Team use the data provided to make informed predictions about the future of communication technology.

The report begins with a high-level summary of BCT 2018 findings and predictions, followed by the main body of research beginning with broadband infrastructure.

Alan Foy
BLUEFACE & STAR2STAR GROUP CEO
The 2018 BCT Report is full of insight that we believe is both reflective of our current business landscape as well as a guidepost for future innovations. In this section, we’ll examine some of the key takeaways from the report.

**Survey Sample**
To ensure the 2018 BCT Report is representative of all types of business sizes, the sample comprises of 50% Startup, 43% SME, 7% Enterprise businesses across every industry.

57% have more than one location.

**Internet Delivery**
Fibre is now the primary delivery method of broadband 39%.

**Business Broadband**
The low-end of business broadband has gotten faster, with 25% reporting speeds between 50 – 999Mbps. This represents a huge ICT infrastructural leap forward from 2014’s when 10Mbps-or-less was the majority at 29.1%.

**Devices**
Integration has been key to business success over the last few years and this is shown in our research. 50.2% of businesses utilise a combination of fixed and mobile devices every day. 7.2% have no preference of device or use an alternative communication source.

**Communications Technology Solutions**
35% of those surveyed now have a business VoIP line. A large number of these businesses (34.5%) have added a future-proof fully hosted option. 54.5% of businesses have a mix of hybrid and legacy on premise solutions. 11% are unsure.

**Fixed Call Volume**
Fixed-line calls are expected to increase, as 52% believe call volume to their landline will go up, while 33% expect their volume to remain static. A limited 15% expect their call volume to decrease in 2018.

**Line Rental**
The slight majority (42%) are still paying fixed-line rental, while 40% have moved forward. Interestingly, 18% are unsure if they are still paying line rental and 90% of these line-agnostic people do not understand their bill.

**Conference Calling**
Conferencing is split as 34% can host a conference with their main telecoms while 34% do not have this facility and must solicit a third party. Without a consolidation of services, companies can accrue more contracts than they expected.

**Fax Services**
45% are still faxing, 29% are Virtually Faxing and the remaining 16% prefer Physical Fax. While 85% of businesses don’t use the service, it’s clear that innovations have maintained the trusted document sender’s popularity.
PHISHING OR HACKING
38% of businesses have had to endure malicious hacking attempts in the past year. The cost of phishing or hacking is so high, even companies who have yet to suffer it should remain vigilant.

JOB SECURITY (AI)
As AI evolves, certain tasks and roles are falling foul of automation. Automation is beneficial to a business insofar as time-consuming tasks are standardised but it has left 25% fearing for their future job security.

BILLING COMPREHENSION
82% of customers have a solid understanding of their itemised bill. Billing comprehension gets murkier when we add in multiple locations as 50% of businesses with 6 or more do not understand their bill.

MOBILE OR LANDLINE?
In contrast to our 2014 ICT Report – where mobile was the dominant point of voice contact – consumers prefer calling landlines (52%) now more than ever. 34% have no preference while 14% much prefer dialling a mobile phone.

MOBILE USAGE
Voice calls remain the primary business mobile phone function at 60%. Data usage – including VoIP services – comes in second at 34% and traditional SMS takes third with 7% and only 1.5% are using an equal share of features.

BYOD POLICY
Integrations have allowed businesses to quickly implement Bring Your Own Device policies, which is why over 69% of those surveyed allow BYOD. 31% forbid BYOD for reasons ranging from data-protection to device standardisation.

VOICEMAIL
79% of respondents still use voicemail for their daily business processes, which is in the tradition of users’ mailboxes across devices and less disruptive access to messages has consistently added value to the stalwart feature.

CALL RECORDING & QUALITY
82% believe that call recording makes little difference to the overall quality of the call while 48% disagree. Since recording is for both compliance and customer experience, the value of it to consumers is split.

PROFESSIONAL TIME DRAIN
There’s no bigger drain on a professional’s productivity than meetings (81%) if we include virtual and physical meetings. Face to face (81%) is far more disruptive than any other activity during the workday.

SAME PROVIDER, MULTIPLE SITES
The global nature of business has opened up opportunities. New locations, new target markets and access to a global talent network. 67% choose to use the same provider for each location.

PROVIDER LOYALTY (SWITCHING NEXT YEAR?)
52% of businesses are switching to new providers next year. The advancement of telco technology has left 38% justifiably unsure of where to go next and a small sample are committed to choosing a new provider.

REMOTE WORKING
Businesses are now in favour of remote working as 78% of survey respondents reported a remote working strategy was in place. 9% are unsure of their company’s stance while the remaining 17% have chosen to retain a static workplace.

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BCT Predictions Summary

Blueface made predictions based on data captured during the 2014 ICT Insight Report, projecting the future of the telecommunications landscape by 2025.

Much has changed in the intervening three years. To begin, there is more clarity surrounding the global IP-Migration, VoIP is becoming an essential business tool and internet speeds have rapidly improved. Below is short breakdown of our adjusted predictions and for a full analysis of our predictions, turn to page 70.

Predictions 2025

BCT Predictions Summary

BCT PREDICTIONS SUMMARY

19 Predictions 2025
ASR & UC: THE NEXT GENERATION COMMUNICATION PLATFORM

Through integration with modern phone systems, Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology will become a primary access point. AI, ASR and Unified Communications will combine to create a fluid, integrated communications platform for the next generation business.

MERGERS, ACQUISITIONS AND CONSOLIDATION

Consumers – both business and residential – are increasingly expecting a full suite of telecommunication and multimedia features from their provider. Expect the already blistering rate of M&A to grow exponentially by 2025. Smaller telecoms services will continue to grow by white labelling their property.

THE AGE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

To maximise the power of technology like the IoT and minimise societal / workplace inequity brought on by innovations like this, government, and academic institutions will look to the private sector for guidance. This will come in the form of industry advisory councils or technology frameworks.

IP-MIGRATION / END OF LINE RENTAL

Many of the major telecommunications providers – including BT (UK) and Orange (Global Primary) have announced their PSTN / POTS shut down date. This will mark the beginning of the end of line rental as we know it. It also marks the beginning of a hyper-growth period for VoIP services, as the UC market is estimated to hit $93bn by 2020 alone, per Global Market Insights.

Predictions 2025

REMOTE WORKING WILL CHALLENGE FIXED OFFICES

According to BCT 2018 trends, 78% of businesses have implemented remote policies and the Business team believes remote strategies will rival fixed-location working as the default method of work. As our tools for work modernise and virtualise, so too will our methodologies.

VOIP TO BECOME PRIMARY CALL-CARRYING METHOD FOR MOBILE

With the en-masse rollout of 5G data services by 2020, VoIP will become the primary medium for mobile voice services. Where once reliability and call quality were a concern, infrastructure improvements have quelled these fears. Cellular networks will remain for years to come, primarily for mobile data provision.

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A follow-up to the Blueface 2014 ICT Report, the 2018 Business Communications Technology Report reexamines the ever-evolving workplace and the technology used to retain an advantage. Research for this report was conducted through Q3 & Q4 2017.
SURVEYED LOCATIONS
As Blueface HQ is located in Dublin, Ireland, 85% of survey respondents for the 2018 BCT Report were Irish businesses with the remaining 15% scattered around the globe.

The United Kingdom (9%) and the United States of America (2.5%) had the second and third highest representation respectively.

The remaining businesses operate in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Australia, India, and United Arab Emirates (<1% each).

While there were slight location-based variables, the global outlook on business communications technology has been overwhelmingly positive. Survey participants were sourced via social media (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn), mailing lists, incubators and Blueface’s client-base.

PERSONNEL
To ensure that only the highest quality data was captured, the research team contacted only key decision makers.

Primary respondents were business owners, office managers, IT managers, CEOs, COOs and CTOs.

COMPANY SIZE
The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) highlighted Ireland’s outstanding business growth as 30,000+ started up in 2016. As a result, Startups (1–5 employees) had the highest representation in the 2017 BCT Survey at 50%.

Ireland’s staple industry group, SMEs — classed as any organisation with 6 - 200 employees — are featured prominently at 43%.

The remaining 7% are 200+ employee enterprises, that work with increasingly complex communications infrastructure.

MULTI-SITE LOCATION(S)
57% of survey respondents operate from more than one location.

Most respondents reported having an internet presence for global operations but 25% of those surveyed report having international brick & mortar locations.

Cost-effective, collaboration and communication tools are now essential to optimise international locations and empower remote talent and backing strategies.
Global connectivity infrastructure development has enabled commercial access to high-speed, ultra-reliable broadband. As 32% of businesses choose Fibre (16%, 2014), only 13% of businesses find DSL (38%, 2014) adequate in the age of digital transformation.
2016 redefined the term “high-speed” in relation to widely-available business broadband. ICT infrastructure has improved across the board, albeit slowly.

33% of Irish businesses were operating with a slow 10MB-or-less connection in 2014, that figure has dropped to less than 15% in 2018.

More than 43% of businesses now operate with 50MBps speeds, 16% of these run at 100MBps — 1Gbps, and 2.5% have ultrafast 10Gbps+ connections.

24% of these reported working with a 50MBps — 90MBps connection; which can be accounted for by the growth in small and medium business.

Ultra-fast broadband is still rolling out, as a result, 16% of — primarily Satellites and DSL — customers are limited to a less-than-20MBps connection.

SMEs and Startups have access to enterprise-grade internet connections and with that, the infrastructure for an enterprise-grade suite of digital technologies.

Business speeds connection 2018

- 50MBps speeds: 43%
- 50MBps - 500MBps speeds: 24%
- 10MBps or > speeds: 15%

Ultra-Fast Broadband (32%) has replaced DSL (13.33%) as the main business broadband delivery method.

To put into perspective, 16.7% had access to fibre-powered broadband in 2014 and DSL (30.2%), 2014 was the most common.

Telecoms and ISPs are under increasing pressure to offer better infrastructure in a world increasingly reliant on cloud-based services.

DSL simply wouldn’t be able to handle the rapidly increasing traffic and would cause significant SLA disputes.

The even split between Wireless & Wired connections (18.7%) represents a bigger share for Wired connections (5% increase from 2014).

While businesses are connecting more devices wirelessly, they are now astutely aware of the reliability, security and high-speed benefits of a hardwired connection.

This is especially relevant for a business that uses international VoIP-calling.

Finally, Mobile (3.33%) and Satellite (4.2%) remain as secondary or failover options with 21% unsure of their internet delivery methods.
Mobile has been the surging business trend for the last decade but 85% of businesses still have a business landline. Once overshadowed by mobile, consumer familiarity, call reliability and integration with other devices is why the landline remains an essential business tool.
Only 11% of businesses exclusively operate with mobile, significantly less than exclusively landline at 32%.

Affordability, reliability, call quality, and features have reinvented the desk phone for a digital generation. 74% of businesses are likely to keep using their landline phones in the future, due to mobility innovations like soft clients.

A small number of businesses (7.2%) have no preference or use an alternative communication method. Affordability, reliability, call quality, and data-compliance features have reinvented the desk phone for a digital generation.

Device (tablets mobile & desk phones) numbers have exploded in recent years, as 55% of business users use between 3 – 4 per day, illustrating the need for device unification.

Two device employees (32%) usually utilised their mobile device and laptop at work, further punctuating the convergence of devices.

While 85% of businesses have a landline service, 50.5% of business prefer a combination of Mobile & Landline.

Businesses want to infer familiarity and permanency while delivering clear and reliable call quality but also need business mobility and workplace flexibility.

74% of businesses are likely to continue using desk phones in the next year, using some continuity to IP-powered desk telephony.

The commercial value of the desk phone has increased with innovations like VoIP calling, unified communications integrations, and virtual numbering.

A small sample (18%) intend to decrease their use or cease using desk-based hardware altogether in favour of a business solely operating from mobile devices.

Cloud-based fixed-line services with UC can collect detailed analytics, sync with mobile phones (via Softphone) and can dial out with a local presence (via Geo-Numbering) from HQ.

Soon, desk phones could be defined as UC-enabled desktop computers, integrated with communications infrastructure.
Fixed-Line Call Volume

The quickly growing array of communication technologies has raised relevant questions over voice calls in a message-app driven world (Whatsapp, Viber, Slack, iMessage).

The growth of these applications is owed much to their toll-free service, particularly for international business.

Like SMS and MMS messaging, standard line-based phone functions are limited and cost-ineffective. Users need an array of features for less.

As 61% are switching to VoIP phone systems when their current contract expires, 54% expect to receive more calls than ever from their landline.

Like messaging, there are now more cost-effective ways to utilise voice communication technology with an array of integrations. Voice still has a growing role to play, it has just evolved.

Cheaper local and international calls and a host of device and software integrations that allow businesses to stay connected with their phone system.

34% expect usage to remain static while the 12% expect a decrease in fixed-line voice, presumably transitioning into a mobile model.

The outlook for fixed-line voice services appears to be stable at worst. As the way we use voice tech changes, it appears the landline still has a significant role to play.

Line Rental

Line rental has historically been a thorny telecoms issue. With few viable options to wire-based telephony, consumers have had no other choice but to pay.

Now, as legacy subscription fees edge towards discontinuity — most businesses (42%) are still paying monthly line rental charges, 40% are certain they have done away with the much-maligned fee.

The decrease from 2014’s 60% further illustrates the dynamic shift to IP telephony but clearly, some are still entrenched in traditional telecoms.

Services such as security systems and old card machines were dependent on analogue telephony, but modern iterations of these devices connect directly to VoIP and mobile data or WiFi.

17% are unsure if they pay or not and as a point-of-concern, 50% of those do not understand their itemised bill which could be costly in the long-term.

With a three-year 18% slump and diminishing reliance on analogue lines for point-of-sale and security services — Blueface predicts the No Line Rental trend accelerating.
VoIP is edging closer to becoming the standard for businesses, exemplified by the 35% of businesses that now have a business VoIP Line.

Not all businesses are ready to commit to an all-IP solution, as 35% of those with a VoIP line also continue to pay fixed-line rental.

Due to VoIP teething difficulties, some companies retain lines to facilitate a backup or ancillary service. Some 44% have taken a more tentative route, as they have yet to introduce any kind of VoIP business solution, while 21% are unsure. From an industry perspective, there’s a lot of empty seats.

The future is blurry for those without a VoIP line, as the majority (52%) are unsure, 25% are switching to VoIP and 15% are resolved to stay with line-based telephony.

With more and more businesses opting to have a VoIP as their primary solution, it will be increasingly difficult to justify operating without one.

As we enter the twilight of line-based telephony (see Predictions: PSTN Shut Down), proactive businesses are getting ahead of the curve.

Reliability is the cornerstone of Blueface’s service and this sentiment is shared by businesses as 69.5% rank reliability first when they’re choosing a provider.

While reliability is the number one on the list, price has a key role in the decision making process as 19% believe it’s the most important offering.

Striking a balance between reliability and price is no easy task for businesses but appears to be the fast-track to the perfect telephony provider.

Features rank third for – mostly Startup – businesses at 5%. Modern phone systems with feature-rich solutions are an expectation from the discerning business customer.

Possible integrations with other software can unlock a host of new features depending on the fit.

Scalability (2.5%) and flexibility (4%) – while vitally important to businesses is not the most pressing concern. There is higher concern with quality and the bottom line.

For long-term costs, investing in a system without easy scaling or flexibility can cause long term issues and will impact the overall price.
Voicemail

According to Blueface research, rumours of the death of voicemail have been greatly exaggerated as 75% of those surveyed still use the service regularly. Traditional one-per-device voicemail boxes were inefficient and tedious to access, Unified Voicemail adds more features and eliminates tedium.

Users can now check and save voicemails in real-time from a Unified Communications dashboard and email inbox. In 2014, we asked respondents how useful they would find Unified Voicemail (Mobile & Landline), 61% agree on its usefulness while a further 11% were currently using it.

This less disruptive approach to voicemail gives the user ease of access and endear some to the classic voice service. That isn’t enough to convince the 18% of businesses who have decided that voicemail is too great a work disruptor and would rather employees use other methods.

Many telecommunications companies will feature voicemail as standard, which could account for the 7% who were unaware of any voicemail service. Voicemail is another example of traditional service that has been augmented by technologies such as email and improved infrastructure like fibre-broadband.

Primary Provider or Third Party?

Remote sites and telecommuting has given rise to the conference call but often businesses do not have the line allocation, software or hardware to accommodate for the conference bridge traffic. This has left just over a third (34%) of companies surveyed with no choice but to outsource their conferencing to a third party.

An equivocal 34% of businesses have conferencing rolled into their primary telecoms provider contract. VoIP conferencing works over the internet, paired with conference-specific hardware that makes remote meetings a significantly smoother experience, so it’s little surprise there’s been a shift.

As mentioned earlier, many are unfamiliar with conference best practices but many more (32%) are unaware of who hosts their conference calls.

As video-conferencing becomes the optimised way of meeting remotely, we expect more to switch providers or enter into more third-party contracts.

Conference Calls
With so many methods of communication, it can be difficult to believe that 45% of companies still utilise fax services. 16% still pay a high premium for a traditional Physical Fax service; fax line, toner, paper, and machine-maintenance, while 29% have evolved the way they send documents with Virtual Fax. Virtual fax combines the ease-of-email with the hardcopy, business-friendly image of a physical fax with more features at a lower price point. Legacy processes, reliability fears, or industry-specific legislation are key reasons why fax has continued in spite of new technologies, giving it just enough time to evolve.

Fax Services

Virtual fax combines the ease-of-email with the hardcopy, business-friendly image of a physical fax with more features at a lower price point. Legacy processes, reliability fears, or industry-specific legislation are key reasons why fax has continued in spite of new technologies, giving it just enough time to evolve.

Example
The Canadian Health Board are required-by-law to fax and can process up to 20,000 physical documents per week.

Remote Work

The way businesses operate has fundamentally changed. Fixed had traditionally been the primary method of working but that tradition is being challenged. 78% of businesses have set in place a remote working policy, which is a revelatory figure if we consider long-standing beliefs about employees and work.

More employers are open to these policies for a number of reasons ranging from globalisation to employee accessibility. Some businesses could not exist without the technology – like cloud-telephony – that enables seamless telecommuting.

17% of businesses are resistant to remote working, this may be due to culture or the particular company or industry is simply unsuited to these strategies. As an increasing number of businesses loosen their policies on remote working and flexible hours, 5% of respondents are unsure about their company’s stance.

For more on the future of remote working, read the BCT 2025 Predictions.
In the advanced stages of the IP-Migration, even larger organisations with older On-Premises equipment are upgrading. While they generally adopt a Hybrid Solution before cloud committal, all signs indicate a shift towards cloud-based, fully-managed communications.
In 2014, Blueface tentatively referred to Hosted PBX as a relatively new solution. Four years later, of the 35% of business that now have access to a business VoIP line – 34.5% of businesses have a fully hosted option.

Why have businesses added a hosted option? To start, companies are less concerned with VoIP quality and overall reliability due to ever-accelerating internet speeds.

This, coupled with failover facilities, robust SLAs and concurrency fail-safes — fully hosted reliability is trending upwards.

Large Enterprises (37.5%) with multiple global offices have a hosted system either as a primary or failover system.

Larger businesses find value in their ability to gain immediate oversight on global operations and communicate from a centralised location.

With a fully hosted solution, customers can remotely manage their communications infrastructure without the costly upfront investment.

SIP Trunking and data compliance are just two of the reasons why On-Premise PBX remains a top solution for 28.5% of businesses surveyed.

Premises-based PBX systems are more reassuring for businesses — particularly to larger, sensitive-data organisations like financial and medical services, as mentioned earlier — who need reliable, regulation-compliant systems.

The fully hosted solution is more attractive for legacy-free companies but for decades-old incumbents, it can be difficult to reason away the sizable investment placed in telecoms infrastructure.

Job security is another concern as removing a significant amount of maintenance and admin is counter-intuitive to job security.

Smaller SMEs with up-to-50 employees often have an On-Premise PBX or a hybrid solution as a result of earlier legacy equipment.

On-Premise

Hybrid

Solutions are available for the 26% who have invested in on-premises equipment but need IP-enabled telecoms services.

Hybrid allows slow-adoption companies to introduce VoIP gradually and is a clear sign of intent as 86% will opt for fully hosted when their current contract expires.

Some prefer to have a self-maintained IP-enabled in-house system but the focus in competitive industries should be on core competencies.

Logistics, pharmaceuticals, and academic institutions are just three of the industries that currently lean toward a hybrid solution if they’re upgrading.

There are clear signs of intent from hybrid organisations to upgrade to a fully hosted model, however, legacy systems can often make transitioning immediately a difficult proposition.
Mobile Devices

In 2014, 97% of respondents agreed that mobile was a key communications tool. As businesses place more emphasis on workplace mobility and technology becomes more integrated, mobile devices are crucial to business success in 2018.
Primary Mobile Use

The ubiquity and office-integration ability of mobile has created interesting use patterns. Paramount is the prominence of voice calls at 57%, although it is unclear whether these calls are terminated via cell signal or VoIP.

Data usage — which includes VoIP-messaging and call-carrying services such as WhatsApp — takes a close second for primary business functions at 33.5%. Standard SMS messaging still accounts for high primary use at 6.5% and a select few (1.5%) allocate their mobile use equally.

The remaining 1% use mobile primarily for Softphone integration, which is notable considering the relative novelness of soft clients.

One of the reasons for the boost in business Softphone use is the ability to immediately link mobile devices to a network thanks to BYOD policies. These innovations have breathed new life into existing phone setups and swayed people towards VoIP.

Bring Own Device Policies

Hardware and upgrade overheads have always been a strain on businesses, particularly during growth periods where budget allocation lies elsewhere.

Equipping staff with the tools needed to perform optimally and collaborate with colleagues is expensive and can be a costly administrative process in high turnover fields.

Network security advances have enabled device strategists to loosen their BYOD policy with the assurance that their data is safe.

So much so that 61% of businesses allow their staff to work from their own devices, removing some technology barriers.

Despite stricter data legislation, BYOD has grown 2% since the 2014 ICT Insight Report.

Device standardisation and the modernisation of data protection legislation may explain the 39% of businesses resistant to outside technology.

Soft Clients

As 24% were unsure about Softphone usage, this chapter begins with a short definition of the feature to dispel any confusion. Softphone apps allow devices—such as tablets, laptops or mobile phones—to remotely connect to a fixed-location network, granting a range of office communications functionality.

Some businesses are starting to understand the utility of the feature as 32.5% now use soft clients daily. Blueface believe soft clients are stunted by education barriers, and our hypothesis is supported by the 24% who are unsure if they use a soft client.

44% of all softphone users access their office communications from their Mobile, while 38.5% of Softphone users access via desktop/laptop.

Workers who wanted the best of both worlds accessed Softphones from personal tablets (17.5%), gaining full mobility with extra processing power.

61% of businesses allow the staff to work from their own devices.

39% of businesses resistant to outside technology.

BYOD Growth since the 2014 ICT Report:

2%
Consumer Behaviour

New technologies and myriad methods of contact has placed pressure on businesses to create an “Always Open,” 24/7 impression. A trickier task for international, multi-site businesses.
Call Preferences: Mobile or Landline?

The Blueface team was surprised when our 2014 research revealed that 55.6% of customers preferred to call mobile numbers. An interesting detail if you consider long-established consumer behaviour theories on permanency.

2017 flipped this figure as 50.2% now prefer calling a fixed landline number over mobile.

Reliable, business-friendly and semi-permanent in consumer’s eyes — fixed-line numbers have again taken charge in 2017.

Apathy ranks second as 38.5% are unphased by what device or number they’re calling, they just want a resolution to their query, issue or purchase.

Mobile numbers have fallen by the wayside since 2014, as only 13.3% prefer calling unfixed numbers. For mobile-only businesses, this is a simple fix.

With Blueface Softphone, mobile devices can capture the perceived comfortability of a landline with the mobility of a cell phone.

Preferred Communication Methods

Voice communication remains the preferred communication method for businesses. Connecting with someone through voice communication adds much needed context, flow and resolution to conversations that other avenues struggle with.

Instant messaging slides into the number two spot (18%). The Blueface team are optimistic that integration-packed IM-platforms will continue to grow in popularity for businesses and consumers.

Voice has a significant role to play in instant messaging popularity as IM-giant, Whatsapp reported their userbase sent over 200m voice messages per day.

SMS ranks in third (13%) as businesses continue to create communication avenues with their customers via the traditional, character-counting messaging feature.

Video – while increasingly popular, particularly for conferencing – is not the most important feature for business customers at 3.5%. Blueface project that figure to drastically rise by 2020.
Call Recording & Quality

For both staff training and compliance, the importance of call recording cannot be understated. Call recording is the law in many countries and is key in the resolution process in many others but do customers believe that it improves overall service?

There is a relatively equal split in those who believe it improves quality (52%) and those who don’t (48%).

People are generally aware that call recording is to safeguard the company they’re calling from legal action. For compliance or dispute resolution, if the dialled company benefits from call recording, it can be difficult to believe there are customer benefits.

However, advances in call recording have made it easier to organise, store and use recordings as a staff learning aide and can boost operational efficiencies.

It may not have an immediate benefit for staff and in high turnover industries – such as customer care – often the trained employees are not retained.

Since call recording is the law, customers will call some companies that invest heavily in CX training and some that are simply complying. This – in the Blueface Research Team’s opinion – is the most likely reason for the representative split.

There is a relatively equal split in those who believe it improves quality (52%) and those who don’t (48%).

48% of businesses believe call recording does not improve quality.

52% of businesses believe call recording improves quality.

Time Drain

Professionals are often impeded by time draining activities. These activities – like meetings, emailing and admin – are often essential to business processes but are disruptively time consuming. This section explores what activities absorb the most professional time.

Blueface research has found that meetings (face-to-face and digital combined) are the biggest drain (81%) on a professional’s day.

Face to face meeting is the most draining activity with 61% of people in agreement. Arranging around someone’s schedule, travelling and the time spent talking (inaction) can derail a business day.

18% believe meeting via conference call is the biggest drain while a remaining 2% grow most frustrated with Skype-based video calling.

Admin (5%) is second and due to the nebulous nature of the term and tasks involved, and finally, email was the next-closest specific drain (4%).

The remaining respondents selected other which included commuting, project pivots and tracking down the right person.

Cloud-based phone systems and IP-hardware combine to make conferencing a simple, high-quality experience.

Users can converge all of their communication touch points and save time through presence technology.
One Provider, Multiple Sites

With cloud-based telephony, it has never been easier to rollout a new location with immediate localisation via virtual numbering. Blueface wanted to discover if businesses preferred a sole provider for service, or splitting their contracts across multiple providers.

Over 55% of our total respondents have operations across multiple sites, which makes account maintenance difficult on the consumer’s end.

67% who operate across multiple-locations have chosen one provider for their service, which is usually in their headquartered country.

24% have contracts with multiple providers. This number is set to change as 35% of all businesses surveyed have a VoIP line, and a single VoIP carrier can serve all global sites for a business.

Businesses need to upgrade or consolidate their telephony services to reduce opex. We expect the number of consolidated providers to grow.

As M&A continues to grow in telecommunications, many companies will acquire or be acquired by another technology integration, as they seek to expand their service portfolio.

67% of all businesses will be staying with their current provider. This number is set to change as 35% of all businesses surveyed have a VoIP line, and a single VoIP carrier can serve all global sites for a business.

Provider Loyalty

With so many telecoms providers to choose from and a divergence of services, customers can now choose a company that has a plan to match their business needs. As we approach the IP-migration tipping point, this section investigates whether or not respondents were considering switching in the next year.

Contractual obligations or otherwise, more than half of all businesses surveyed (52%) will be staying with their current provider through 2018.

37% are unsure, which can be attributed to the sheer number of companies, features, and services available in the market.

This is particularly relevant if a company is considering an upgrade from a physical PBX system to a fully hosted cloud-based model.

Only 10% are committed to switching provider in search of more features, better support, lower cost and easier account administration.

Migrating your business phone system is a rare resource-drain that can show dividends very quickly, as a significant number of bills analysed by the Blueface team have been agreed to years prior.

The cost of certain services – high-speed 4G data for example – has significantly decreased in the last two years.

As a result, many businesses are in long term contracts overpaying for standard services.
Technology empowers businesses to innovate in a new way, but the rapid addition of new tech can cause security issues. This chapter explores the risks brought by new technologies, including compliance, cyber-crime, and AI-unease.
Innovations such as the Internet of Things — our device-rich internet ecosystem — made us more connected than ever but severe security issues have created interconnected apprehension. This section asked businesses if they have been hacked in the last 12 months to understand the scope of the problem.

According to Gartner, experienced middle-skill employees with little role modernisation are at risk of redundancy by automation. Constant upskilling with new technology appears to be necessary for job security.

Rapid introduction of these technologies has left many businesses open for malicious attacks and is estimated to cost $6 trillion annually by 2021 (CSO).

38% of businesses who have already endured a cyber attack

62% of businesses who have not had to endure a cyber attack

Unifi ed Communications (UCaaS) — equipped with TLS Encryption — offers heightened security for all communication methods and empowers better collaboration between IT stakeholders through visibility.

Modern phone systems — such as Blueface UC — feature Anti-Fraud A.I. that prevent, log and notify users of malfeasance.

The lucky 62% who have not had to endure a cyber attack must remain vigilant as the CSO predict the cost of cybercrime will swell by 2021.

Our research suggests that 25% of those surveyed are concerned about their future job security with 5.5% of those being deeply concerned.

The majority (42%) are still comfortable in their jobs and satisfy that they have the skills to continue their career fruitfully.

Interestingly, a third are neither concerned or unconcerned with the creeping AI-threat and are perfectly satisfied with their position.

Company culture or a lack of AI-understanding could contribute to this fi gure but the same could be said for those who are concerned and cannot see the technological evolution of their role.

With a quarter concerned about their job security, it’s no surprise that many fi rms are heavily investing in learning, development and knowledge transfer.

25% of those surveyed are concerned about their future job security

42% of those surveyed are still comfortable in their jobs

The lucky 62% who have not had to endure a cyber attack must remain vigilant as the CSO predict the cost of cybercrime will swell by 2021.
Simple billing is a big concern for prospective Blueface clients which is why the 18% who do not understand their bill is a startlingly low representation.

The Blueface team took a deeper dive into this statistic number and discovered that of this 18%, over half are from organisations with 6+ locations.

65% of these have different providers across their locations which invariably leads to multiple billing companies and extra murkiness.

One of the reasons why 82% have full comprehension is due to the leap towards unified billing, i.e. one bill, one provider for all geographic locations.

Cloud-based telephony does not require physical equipment and as a result, it’s easy to choose one provider for all locations.

As VoIP becomes the default fixed-voice communication method, we predict that more businesses will gain a firm understanding of their communications overheads.

Billing Comprehension

No hidden fees” is a telecoms marketing cornerstone but Blueface Bill Analysis revealed that this is rarely true. Bills are initially simple but additional services, sites, and users can increase overheads and can render a bill incomprehensible.

Unsurprisingly, reliability stands as the highest priority issue facing businesses with 19.7% saying it was their biggest concern.

As the telecommunications industry moves towards a full IP-migration, that impetus will only grow.

A litany of factors such as internet upload and download speed and ping can limit VoIP services but with the rapid fibre roll out, speeds are expected to increase markedly.

Biggest Concerns

Services integration ranked as the second highest priority issue facing business VoIP at 16.3%, the desire to smoothly converge services – i.e. conferencing with your phone system – is high.

VoIP-awareness has increased. Now, customers can work with willing companies to tailor their accounts and match them to their service level needs.
This chapter is an exploration of our key findings refined by industry size. For the purpose of this report, industries are defined by staff size. Defined as:

- **Startups**: 1 – 5 Employees
- **Small & Medium**: 6 – 200 Employees
- **Large Enterprise**: 200+ Employees

The Blueface team understands the definition of a Startup varies and we wanted to hear the voice of companies who are invariably in a growth phase.

This report highlights selected metrics that are most relevant to each business size, although some features and questions are applicable to all business sizes.
Startups

With a 50% representative sample, the whirlwind growth of the Startup sector has given life to countless ideas, innovations, and integrations.

In this chapter, we look at the highly saturated Startup sector and discuss the impact of business communications technology on fledgling businesses.

STARTUP BROADBAND
83% of Startups have at minimum a 20Mbps internet connection speed, with 7% boasting 100Mbps – 1Gbps connections. This is essential because although their staff numbers might be small, often these software-oriented Startups would pay a high bandwidth toll.

VOIP LINE
Note that small businesses have the internet speeds to accommodate multiple VoIP calls with their available internet speed. 63% of Startups surveyed have a business VoIP line. 24% have yet to install a VoIP system, although 68% of those without are either unsure (60%) or have decided (25%) to upgrade.

13% are committed to traditional line-based telephony.

DELIVERY METHOD: HOSTED | PREMISES | HYBRID
86% of Startups surveyed have affordable cloud-based telephony with a fully hosted solution. Given the early-stage of many survey respondents, it’s understandable that their communication architecture is suitably modern. 15% have a hybrid mix while another 8% have older on-premises systems. The remaining 20% were unsure.

DATA PROTECTION
Startups struggle to store data securely. Suspect data security and BYOD out-of-necessity (limited resources) can open promising companies to attack. 29% of Startups surveyed have suffered a phishing or hacking attempt in the last year. As data legislation grows strong, we expect data protection to tighten up.

LINE RENTAL
Companies operating on a tight budget need to cut costs anywhere they can. Line rental often doesn’t feature in this equation. This considered, it was surprising to see so many Startups still paying for the charge (42%) while only a slightly larger group have dropped the charge (46%). The remaining 13% are unsurprisingly unsure.

STARTUP SERVICE PRIORITIES
Reliability is the key caveat for companies who provide phones for Startups, as 67% hold reliability as their most important service aspect. Startups aspire towards immaculate client relations, which explains the focus on reliability. Price at 22% is important to economising Startups while another 7% want a feature-rich experience.

NEXT TELEPHONY SOLUTION?
With no legacy equipment or software in place, most Startups have the flexibility to work on the cutting edge of business technology. 86% of Startups surveyed will choose VoIP as their next provider. This sample is ten-times more than the 6% who have decided against VoIP and another 34% are unsure.
Small & Medium Businesses

Small & Medium (SME) businesses are the foundation of most economies.

After years of sustainability, SME businesses are poised for growth with the resources – both technical, monetary and human – to develop their offering.

In this section, we explore the relationship between SMEs and relevant BCT in 2018.

VoIP: Hosted | Hybrid | PBX?

34% of SMEs have a VoIP line, as small – particularly scaling – businesses need overhead flexibility. Of these VoIP powered businesses, 22.5% have a Hosted solution, 56.5% have a combination of Hybrid / On Premise equipment and just over 29% are unsure.

The heightened accessibility of data services is punctuated by a large portion of SMEs upgrading to high quality, cloud-based telephony.

Multi-Site

Maintaining a guided strategy across multiple sites can be challenging for SMEs during a growth period. 68% of SMEs operate from more than one location, with most running from 2 – 5 locations (55%). 56% use the same provider across multiple locations, which is remotely managed by their provider.

Workplace Flexibility

There is a talent landgrab – particularly in technology SMEs – and this has forced businesses to change their approach to remote working. 71% of all SMEs allow remote work to accommodate their specific staff needs and access a global talent pool. 13% are opposed, believing optimal performance happens in the office.

AI, SMEs & Job-Security

There is a perception that automation has left many middle-skill employees fearing redundancy. Despite this, our research shows that few people (20%) in the SME sector are concerned about their future role security. With job security, 20% is quite high; but the remaining 80% are either indifferent or comfortable.

Time Drain

Service consolidation has drastically cut the time-spent traveling to meetings, as companies can create conference calls and virtual meeting rooms with software. Staffers (56%) find face-to-face to be the most time-draining, while only 15% are frustrated with virtual meetings.

SME BYOD

Bring your own device is divisive in the SME sector as 51% permit the integration of from-home devices, 49% disagree and in the Blueface Research Team’s opinion, this is due to data protection or a lack of standardisation. It’s also worth noting that the majority of SME businesses in opposition to BYOD do not have a VoIP line.

Provider Loyalty

A small 7% are committed to switching – all of whom pay line rental – but it appears as if the rest of the SME sector are in a thoughtful period. 40% are unsure about their next provider, if they’ll switch or if they’ll move for a more refined service. 53% are staying with their provider, waiting for more developments before moving.
VOIP LINE
32% of all large organisations have a business VoIP line, 54% have yet to upgrade to VoIP telephony and 14% are unsure of their connections. One of the challenges facing large-scale organisations comes in the form of operational inefficiencies. 32% who have invested will begin to see dividends of advanced communication infrastructure.

CLOUD | PREMISE | HYBRID
Large enterprises are pressing forward with cloud-based telecommunications as 37.5% already have cloud-solutions in place, 42.5% have a mix of hosted and hybrid legacy equipment, while 20% are unsure; as gaining the full details of your communications tech in large organisations is often challenging.

CALL SECURITY
An incredible volume of data is created globally, none more so by large enterprises. Large enterprises at the forefront of the zettabytes of information generated yearly. As such, 86% of all enterprises consider call security to be very important, and 14% do not.

PHISHING OR HACKING
The complexity of corporate communication infrastructure can create ICT vulnerabilities. 57% of surveyed enterprise reported a hack-attack in the past year, which is particularly problematic due to the large quantities of data created by these enterprises. Only 14% are aware of an attack, while the remaining 29% are unsure of any damage caused.

REMOTE WORK
Large enterprises with more than 200+ staff worldwide are forced to embrace new methods of recruiting talent and – eventually – enabling employees. One of these methods is remote work or telecommuting which is favoured by 84% of large organisations. 14% want to keep work in-house and an additional 21% have yet to find out.

SERVICE PRIORITIES
Large enterprises unanimously hold reliability to be the most important aspect of their phone service at 79%. 14% hold price as the most important element while the remaining 7% want flexibility in a system. Scalability and features are not the most pressing feature of service for large enterprises, where bad service can be extremely costly.

NEXT TELEPHONY SOLUTION?
Influential as they are, large enterprises with more than 200 employees can be the difference between mainstream and alternate. It’s a curious time for large-scale communication technology as 57% are unsure about their next solution while the remaining 43% have decided to upgrade. Interestingly, no enterprise businesses surveyed said no to VoIP as their next solution.
In this chapter, the Blueface Research Team were asked to posit predictions based on 2018 BCT data and emerging trends. Exploring the IoT, Public Sector Partnerships, AI and more, opportunities in telecommunications are growing with each new integration.

Blueface 2025 Predictions

- **IP Migration Tipping Point**: VoIP will replace cellular voice termination.
- **Mobile Data & VoIP to Eclipse Cellular**: Remote working will challenge fixed offices.
- **Service Consolidation**: New age of public & private partnerships.
- **A New Age of Public & Private Partnership (ppp)**: Mergers & acquisitions will intensify.
- **Remote Working Will Challenge Fixed Status Quo**: VoIP to unlock next generation connectivity.
IP-Migration Tipping Point

As announcements have been made by major telecommunications providers around the world, the IP-migration is no longer a prediction – it is a deadline.

The upgrade from traditional line-based telephony has been made possible by noted enhancements in our global broadband infrastructure (see Broadband, BCT Report 2018).

Due to the disparity in countries’ IP-migratory readiness, some have later dates. Ireland’s, for example, has not announced a cut off date.

With the countries listed above switching off the old PSTN (POTS) system, the tipping point for IP telephony is very close and smaller countries will follow suit.

Standard lines will not be switched off – viable alternatives need to be in place – but we predict 2025 to be a marquee year for telecommunications, as even the most stalwart telcos begin to embrace future of voice.

Service Consolidation

Disruption is an excellent business motivator. Declining profitability for traditional telephony incumbents has left them scrambling to fill their product and feature portfolios.

Telecoms value-chains have been disrupted and they have sought to create new opportunities in OTT (over-the-top) Content, Platform-as-a-Service, IP-services but are either slow-to-adopt or undermined by tel-tech specialists (EY, 2015).

Service consolidation also presents growth opportunities for smaller competitors in the telecoms industry who wish to remain independent.

While labelling proprietary software is nothing new, but consumer expectations of telecommunication has created an entirely different marketplace.

As larger telcos hastily expand their portfolio of services and products, customers may experience teething pains (4G LTE, for example).

We predict that by 2025 – with the help of specialist firms – much of these teething pains will have disappeared as we embark on the IP-age.
In the 2014 ICT Insights Report we asked was “mobile” an essential business tool and there was very little doubt – it is vital for business communications.

5G data services’ projected 2020 deployment will further imperil traditional telco value chains as a more streamlined voice experience will be available.

The Blueface team predict that data-powered VoIP will become the primary voice-call carrying method for mobile.

Cellular networks will remain to provide data connectivity but it is expected that voice services be terminated through integrated VoIP applications.

Expect this to come in the form of messaging applications such as Whatsapp & Viber or soft clients – such as Softphone – linking back to the headquartered site.

Reliability had been previously suspect on mobile, particularly in low-coverage regions. 5G will increase high-end mobile VoIP call quality as well as improving low-end quality for underserved areas.

As a final BYOD-business benefit, interconnecting mobile and fixed-line will be easier than ever; cutting on device overheads and enabling standardisation through cloud-platforms.

According to BCT 2018 research, most businesses prefer a combination of mobile and fixed-line (50.2%) and over 35% already have a VoIP line. Infrastructure for VoIP becoming the primary voice-call carrying termination method for mobile is already in place.

A New Age of Public & Private Partnerships (PPP)

Fast introduction of new technology can drastically alter the workplace and as a ripple effect, societal equity.

New technologies can cause widespread redundancy (Frey, Osborne, 2013), by “economising labour” in countries without strategies to retrain displaced employees.

To proactively introduce tech, government bodies and academic institutions will seek to increase partnerships with private organisations to refine tech-skills gaps.

Job security is not the only motivation. To fully leverage technology like the IoT to create smart cities with smart traffic flow, governments are seeking counsel from private pioneers. (GITR, 2016)

Optimising the positive impact (new jobs / trained workforce / Civic IoT) while mitigating the negative impact (digital divide / redundancy) of technology is the primary reason for these partnerships.

It is expected that the number of public and private partnerships and the speed of technology introduction to increase.
Remote Working Will Challenge Fixed Status Quo

Since the 1600s, employees have congregated in fixed locations to work for fixed periods of time, which would become the contemporary business premises. As 78% of businesses embrace remote-working policies, it’s clear that software is not just “eating the world,” it’s changing the way we eat.

For modern job roles, the boon of technology has made travelling to a fixed location an unproductive, low-morale activity. Employees can now produce the same project delivery (Trello), customer relationships (Zoho) and collaboration / customer care (UC) with many reports citing boosts in morale and productivity.

Improved broadband infrastructure and cloud-based telephony augmented with video streaming will negate the need for physical meetings.

There is even a host of large companies – such as Apple & Xerox – who have expansive remote working strategies while other companies have fully embraced telecommuting.

Software companies like Buffer, Toggl and Zapier operate with fully distributed global teams with no fixed location.

These companies in particular specialise in software that makes traditional work processes easier, whether it’s scheduling, monitoring or integrating. They are focused on disruption to improve business operations.

The relationship between automatic speech recognition (ASR) and telephony has improved since early auto-attendant (IVA) integrations that has helped manage business call volume.

Google estimate that they will be processing over 2.4 trillion voice searches by 2020, and that’s strictly search.

With significant enhancements to voice isolation and noise cancellation, ASR – when integrated with AI and other software – can now search, dictate, command, contextualise and more. Voice messaging is already one of the most popular means of communication.

Where once businesses would have to separately manage devices, users, calls, emails, messages, IMs and more separately, they can now be managed under the “unified communications” (UC) umbrella.

According to BCT 2018 trends, 78% of businesses have implemented remote policies and the Blueface team believe remote strategies will rival fixed-location working as the default method of work.

PREDICTION 2025

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PREDICTION 2025

Through integration with modern phone systems, ASR technology will become the primary access point. AI, ASR and UC will create a fluid, easily controlled communications platform for the next generation business.

Voice Will Unlock Next Generation Connectivity

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It’s not just ASR that has evolved, phone systems have transcended their original purpose. Once used to manage calls, now they can be used to manage communications infrastructure.

Where once businesses would have to separately manage devices, users, calls, emails, messages, IMs and more separately, they can now be managed under the “unified communications” (UC) umbrella.
SUPPLEMENTARY REFERENCES

For further context, the Blueface team consulted excellent works from around the telecommunications industry. In no particular order, these works were:

- Global Telecommunications: Navigating the Road to 2020, EY
- Remote Work Trends and Benefits, SoCo
- UC Revenue to hit $96bn by 2023, Global Market Research
- 2017 Human Capital Trends, Deloitte
- Ireland CEO Pulse Survey, PwC
- 2017 Telecommunications Trends, PwC
- Global Information Technology Report, WEF
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