

WHITE PAPER

How Partners Can Help Build a Distributed Workforce Strategy

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Executive Summary

The distributed workforce is creating enterprise-class challenges for midmarket organizations. TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group has performed research to understand the impact of these challenges and to help devise a solution to address them. Several notable data points are discussed in this white paper, such as:

- 52% of midmarket IT decision-makers said that their IT environment had grown more complex or significantly more complex over the last 2 years, with 39% of respondents attributing this increase in complexity to supporting remote and hybrid users.¹ These numbers are nearly identical for enterprises.
- 92% of users in midsize organizations work from multiple devices per day, and 44% use four or more devices to work in some way every day.² Each device, managed or not, represents a support, management, and security challenge for IT.
- 43% of companies between 100-999 employees have deployed 11 or more tools for management and security,³ often as problems arise. This tactical approach to problem solving has led to sprawl and increased interest in consolidation of IT teams and platforms.
- 69% of midmarket research participants noted that their organization used six or more unified communications and collaboration (UCC) platforms,⁴ further contributing to technology sprawl.

Technology is being used to address these challenges, but care must be taken to build and implement a comprehensive distributed workforce strategy to avoid contributing to any existing sprawl. A complete strategy reaches many areas of the business outside of IT, including procurement, finance, and individual business areas themselves.

Many IT departments would benefit from assistance in building and implementing such a strategy, and seeking a trusted partner that can build upon organizational strengths and provide assistance where needed can be a valuable first step for those trying to modernize their support for remote and hybrid users.

Introduction

Organizations of all sizes are tasked with supporting an increasingly distributed workforce, ensuring productivity, collaboration, customer service, and security regardless of where end users are located. At the same time, the devices that people work from are multiplying, creating management and security challenges that further tax limited procurement, IT, and financial resources. While these problems may seem relegated only to large enterprises, the reality is that midsize companies find themselves in the same position and are left with fewer resources dedicated to overcoming them.

Too often, problems are addressed only after issues arise, and this reactive approach leads to tactical solutions that ultimately increase the sprawl of tools, devices, and apps that need to be managed and secured. These tactical solutions require resources to implement and support, which further contributes to the increased demand on operational personnel.

To get a grip on the situation, a comprehensive hybrid and remote work strategy is needed. These strategies take resources to develop and implement, but fortunately, there is a clear path forward that can leverage services from trusted partners to help.

¹ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [2023 Technology Spending Intentions Survey](#), November 2022.

² Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [Managing the Endpoint Vulnerability Gap](#), May 2023.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [Unified Communications and Collaboration Integrations for Modern Business Workflows](#), February 2023.

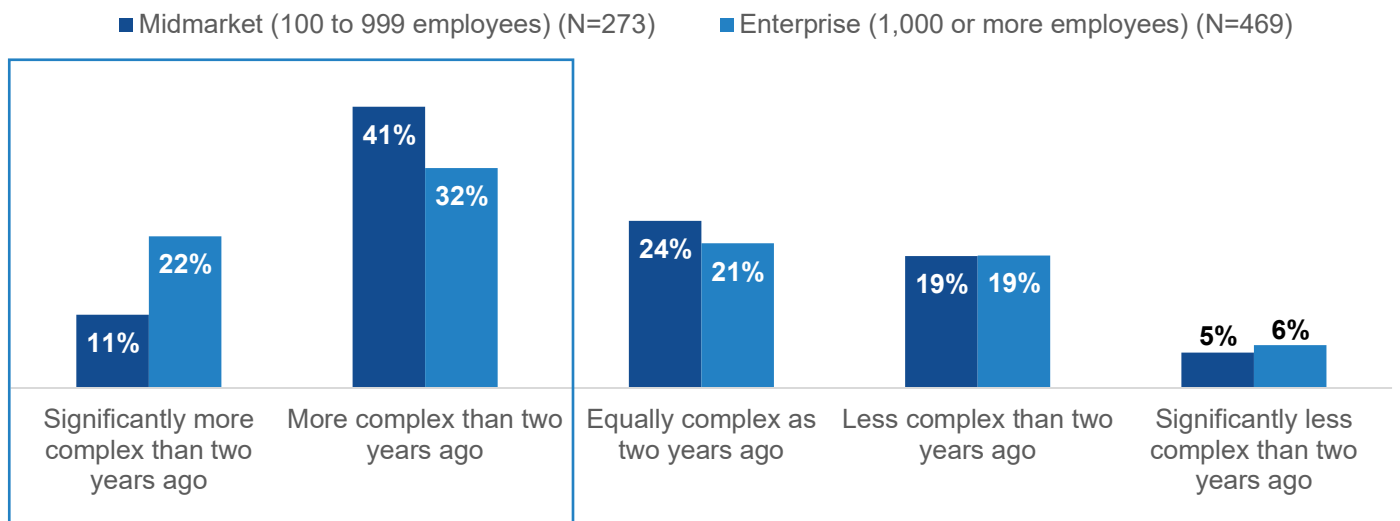
The Challenges Associated with Today's Distributed Workforce

Among the many technology-related trends that have developed in recent years, it's hard to spot a more impactful trend than the distributed, or hybrid, workforce. While end users are clearly affected by the change, the impacts across the business should not be overlooked. Historically, the vast majority of people worked from an office shared by coworkers. This allowed organizations to focus operations on these offices, ensuring the location had all that was required to maintain productivity, collaboration, and customer support. IT teams especially benefitted from this because efforts put into office technology affected all the employees of the office rather than a single user at a time.

While supporting staff in offices was by no means easy, the shift toward a hybrid workforce, with workers distributed across towns, countries, and even continents, has resulted in increased IT complexity across midmarket and enterprise customers. Recent research from Enterprise Strategy Group indicates that 52% of midsize organizations (those with 100-999 employees) reported that their IT environments were more complex or significantly more complex than they were just two years ago (see Figure 1).⁵

Figure 1. More Than Half of Organizations Feel Their IT Environment Is More Complex Than Two Years Ago

In general, how complex is your organization's IT environment relative to two years ago? (Percent of respondents)



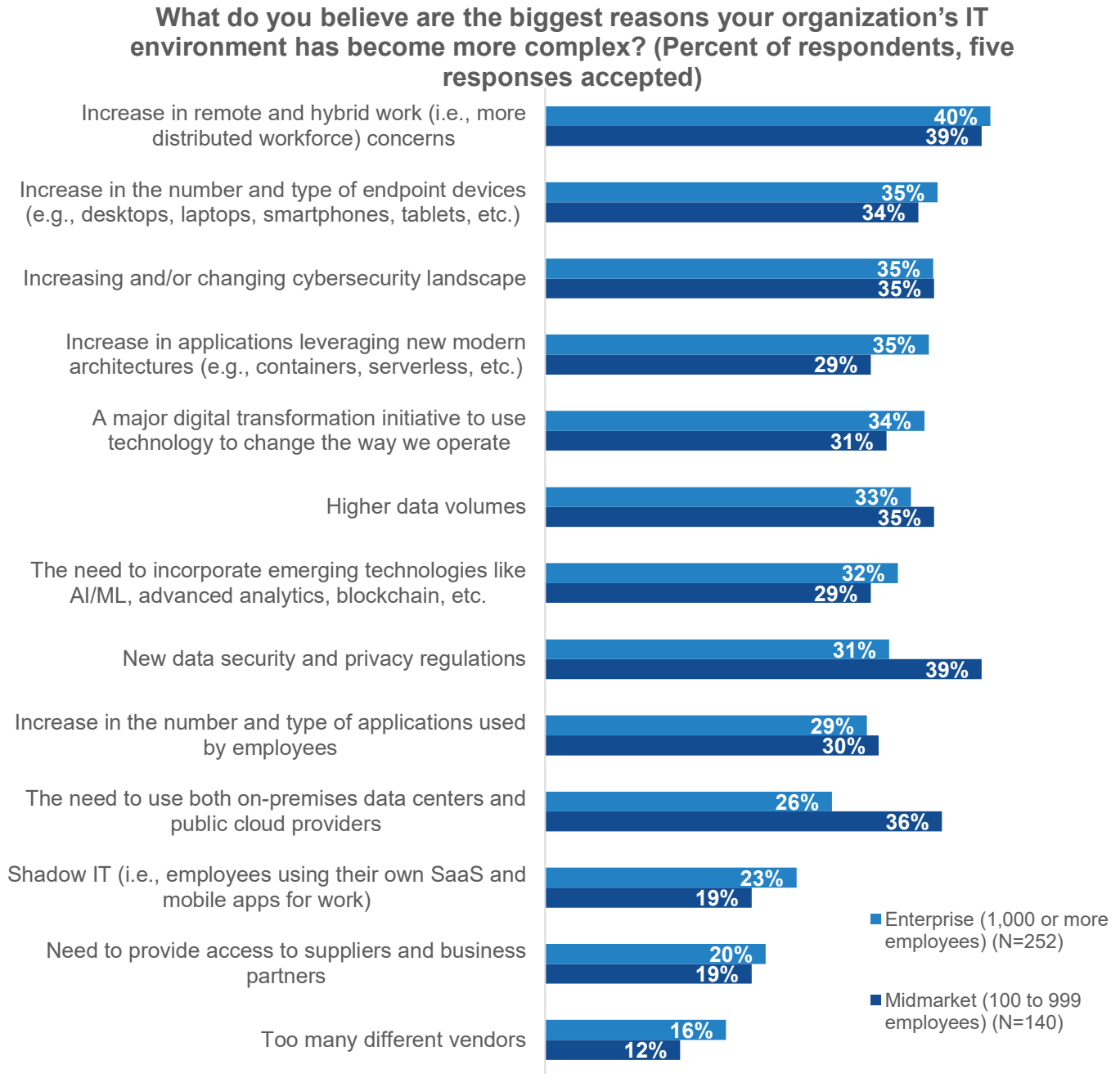
Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

With so many organizations dealing with a more complex IT environment, respondents were asked about the factors that were contributing to this trend. Unsurprisingly, an increase in remote and hybrid work concerns was overwhelmingly the most commonly cited response by both midsize and enterprise respondents. Other areas that are directly related to an evolving workforce, like a changing cybersecurity landscape, an increase in the number and type of endpoint devices, overall digital transformation efforts, the increasing use of cloud and on-premises resources, an increase in the number of apps used by employees, and shadow IT (where users take matters into their own hands and the IT team isn't aware of it) were also cited.⁶

⁵ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [2023 Technology Spending Intentions Survey](#), November 2022.

⁶ Ibid.

Figure 2. An Increase in Remote and Hybrid Work Is the Most Common Driver of IT Complexity



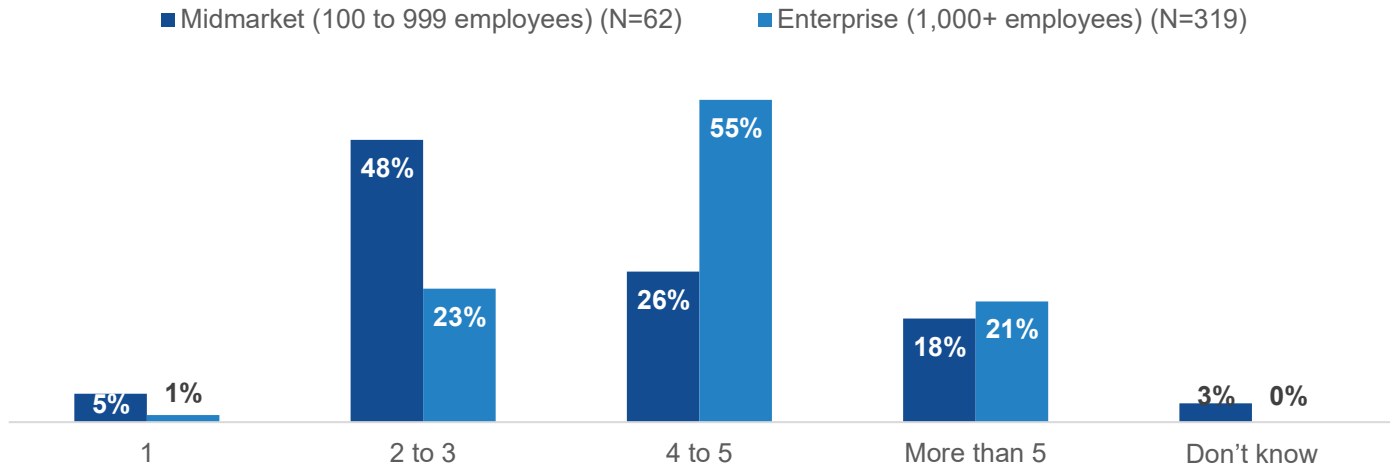
Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

In a separate Enterprise Strategy Group research survey, 92% of midmarket organizations reported that their employees used multiple devices per day, and though the majority (48%) use 2-3 devices (compared to enterprise, where the majority uses 4-5 devices), the challenges this influx of devices creates remains the same (see Figure 3).⁷

⁷ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [Managing the Endpoint Vulnerability Gap](#), May 2023.

Figure 3. The Vast Majority of Users Interact with Four or More Devices Per Day

On average, approximately how many endpoint devices does each employee in your organization interact with daily? (Percent of respondents, N=381)



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

It's a tall task to ensure everything works great on one or two devices that are under IT management, but the more devices in use, the more operating systems and app ecosystems that need support. The challenge increases when some of the devices are not under IT management. These unmanaged devices are often acquired and maintained by the end user, which can—and often does—constitute a security risk.

The problems created by unmanaged device use are widespread and by no means limited to large enterprises. Further research indicates that 36% of midmarket organizations noted that between 500 and 4,999 unmanaged endpoint devices are in use in their organization.⁸ While a number that large may seem incongruous with the number of employees, consider that 92% of midmarket organizations report that their users interact with more than one device daily (whether managed or unmanaged), so a 500-person company can easily have between 1,000 and 2,000 unmanaged devices accessing its systems.

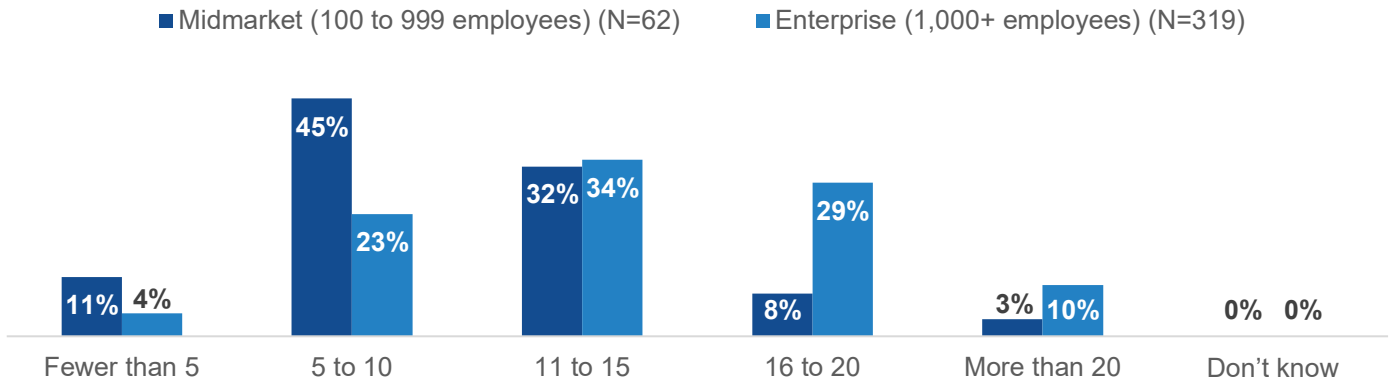
Managed or unmanaged, the burden of supporting, securing, maintaining, and ensuring the overall user experience falls to IT. To deal with these challenges, organizations have turned to management and security tools in droves, with 88% of midsize respondents reporting that they have deployed five or more endpoint management and security tools (see Figure 4).⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Figure 4. Endpoint Security and Management Tools Are Abundant

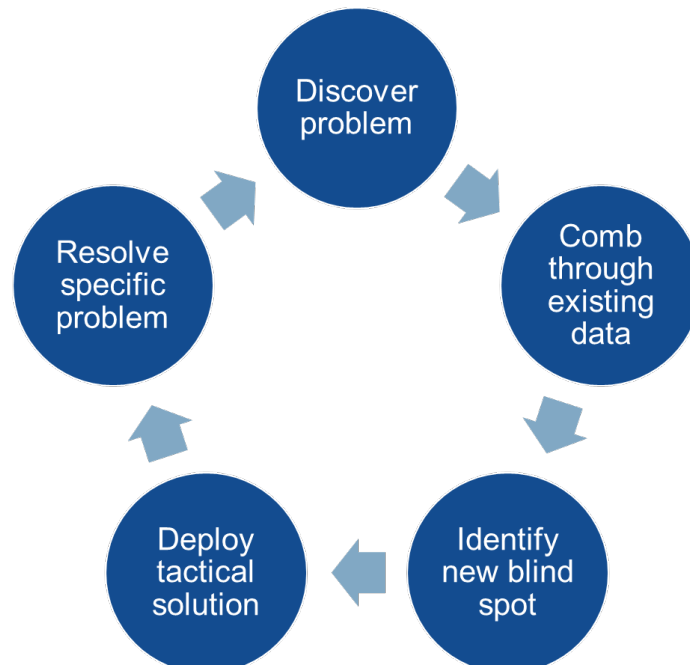
Approximately how many different tools and technologies (i.e., commercial, homegrown, open source, etc.) does your organization use for endpoint management and security? (Percent of respondents, N=381)



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Despite this proliferation of tools, the capabilities and data they provide are often only available to one group within IT, like security or endpoint management, so blind spots still exist. Additionally, there's a direct correlation between the number of tools in use, the number of unmanaged devices, and the number of security events that an organization has experienced, leading to the conclusion that this management and security tool sprawl is, at least in part, related to taking a tactical, reactive approach as opposed to a strategic one (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The Sprawl Cycle That Leads to the Proliferation of Endpoint Management and Security Tools



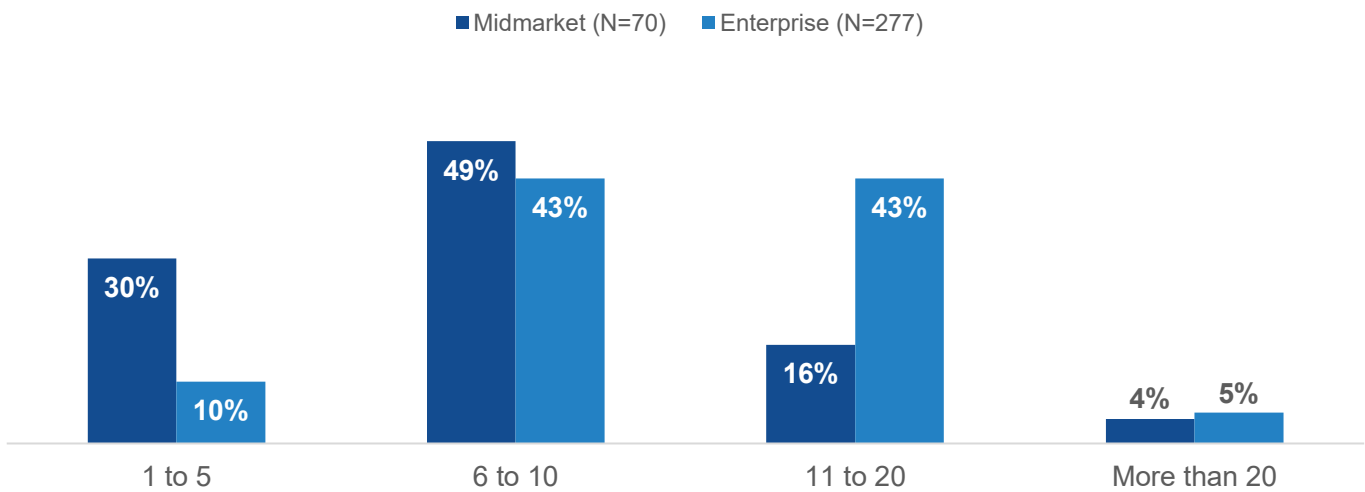
Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

The sprawl cycle is dangerous because each step along the way has a cost that can affect IT staff or budgets, the end user, the business, or the customer experience. The more this cycle repeats, the more it negatively affects these areas.

Finally, like the sprawl experienced by endpoint management and security, UCC platforms have also proliferated as employees scrambled to remain collaborative and productive. In fact, Enterprise Strategy Group research shows that 69% of midmarket organizations reported having 6 or more UCC apps or platforms in use within their environment (see Figure 6).¹⁰

Figure 6. Number of UCC Platforms per Organization, Midmarket and Enterprise

Approximately how many communication and collaboration applications or platforms are currently supported by your organization? (Percent of respondents)



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Though not identical to the challenge faced by larger companies, it's clear that midmarket organizations are experiencing enterprise-class sprawl in their UCC platforms. And while enterprises typically have resources available to deal with a certain amount of inefficiency, midmarket organizations typically have less headroom to spare.

Ultimately, the inefficiencies created by the rapid increase in work locations, endpoint device types, and applications, along with all the systems in use to manage, monitor, and secure them, have combined to create an untenable environment that is ripe for consolidation and simplification. Building a comprehensive distributed workforce strategy is the key to increasing operational efficiency and simplifying otherwise complex IT environments.

¹⁰ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [Unified Communications and Collaboration Integrations for Modern Business Workflows](#), February 2023.

Building a Distributed Workforce Strategy

To build and implement a successful distributed workforce strategy, it's important for organizations to take stock of their current environment. This process can help identify inefficiencies within existing teams and processes, as well as areas of strength and weakness. At a very high level, the result of this effort should shed light on:

- Which user personas and teams are having success working in a hybrid or remote manner and which ones are struggling.
- Which IT, procurement, and business processes are effective and which need some attention.
- Which IT teams are involved with day-to-day operations, what tools they use, and what data they collect.
- The number of operating systems, applications, and devices in use and their current maintenance security status.

After completing an initial assessment, the next step is to align around a common goal. Often, organizations prioritize consolidation of teams and tools, as well as investments in technology that specifically support remote work, like desktop virtualization and collaboration platforms.

Consolidation

One way that organizations are attempting to deal with the sprawl is to consolidate various IT teams and technologies, like security and endpoint management. Enterprise Strategy Group research shows that 39% of midmarket respondents have completely consolidated their endpoint security and management teams, while another 56% are in the process of consolidating those teams or have consolidated them to a limited extent.

The reasons for this consolidation are varied, but respondents expect to increase their ability to deliver new applications to users; support all endpoints with standard tools and processes; ensure proper endpoint management, patching, and security; and better support remote workers.¹¹

New Technology Adoption

At first, adding technology to a situation that's already likely dealing with tech sprawl seems counterintuitive, but successful organizations will incorporate the consolidation of teams and technology with the addition of new tech as part of their overall hybrid work strategy. There are several core priorities common between enterprises and midsize organizations.

Desktop Virtualization

In lieu of maintaining software and applications on the multitude of endpoints that each user interacts with, a desktop virtualization solution that centralizes the delivery of Windows desktops and apps could be deployed to provide the same interface and experience regardless of what device they're using or where they're working from.

In fact, organizations that adopt desktop virtualization often cite improvements in key areas like reduced operating expenses, improved security, and support for mobile/remote users. Because of this, desktop virtualization solutions are often at the center of a remote work strategy.¹²

Unified Endpoint Management

Enterprise Strategy Group research indicates that 26% of midsize organizations are prioritizing unified endpoint management (UEM) over the next two years.¹³ UEM standardizes management of various devices under one

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, [Managing the Endpoint Vulnerability Gap](#), May 2023.

common platform and interface, rather than managing each device or OS in its own silo. It allows for consistent enforcement of policies and applications, while also simplifying onboarding of all device types, regardless of ownership (corporate or employee).

Though fully managed devices are the only way to receive all the benefits of a UEM platform, organizations that allow the use of employee-owned devices can still enroll those devices in a UEM platform to ensure basic requirements such as patch levels and passcodes before allowing the device to access corporate resources.

Zero Trust Security

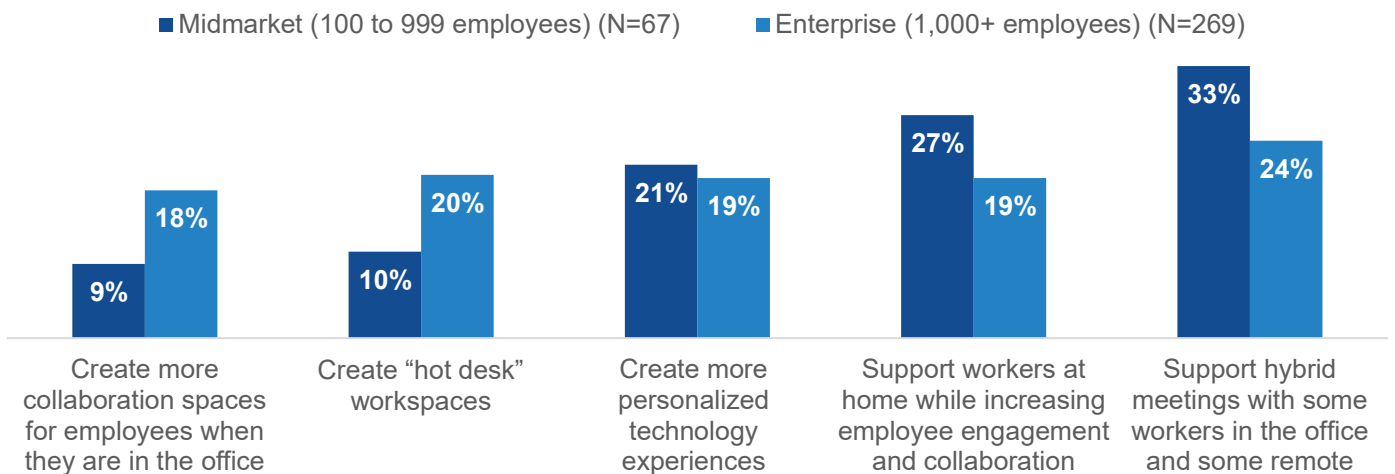
Zero trust security is also receiving broad attention since distributed workforces lack a well-defined edge and there is an increase in unmanaged device usage. Traditionally, security relied on the concepts of internal versus external users and resources to grant access, but this also assumed some level of device management and verification. Without a traditional network edge, and with so many unmanaged endpoints, the traditional approach is no longer suitable for many organizations. For this reason, adopting a zero trust architecture should be a top priority today, though midmarket interest (19%) tends to lag behind enterprise interest (38%).¹⁴

Unified Communications and Collaboration

Finally, UCC technology is being prioritized as part of many distributed work strategies, with the goal of helping team members communicate more effectively with each other, with other teams, and with customers. When asked what their UCC priorities were with regard to supporting their hybrid workforce, midsize companies were far more likely to prioritize hybrid meetings (33% compared to 24% for enterprises), support for workers at home (27% versus 19%), and creating personalized experiences (21% versus 19%), see Figure 7).¹⁵

Figure 7. Support for Hybrid Workers and Support for Home Workers Are the Top UCC Priorities

In terms of improving your organization’s communication and collaboration strategy to better support its hybrid workforce, how would you rank the importance of the following priorities? (Percent of respondents, N=336, percent ranked #1 displayed)



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Complete Survey Results, UCaaS Platform Requirements of Hyperconnected Enterprises, March 2023.

Easier Said Than Done

While there are many approaches that can be used to address the challenges created by a distributed or hybrid workforce, there is often a learning curve for organizations that haven't had to leverage them in the past. As IT departments are spread increasingly thin, fewer resources are available to deal with current initiatives while also getting up to speed on new technology in order to design and implement a well-formed strategy. It's in these situations that trusted partners can be engaged to help design and implement a distributed workforce strategy to resolve the challenges they currently face while freeing up IT resources to deal with other IT priorities, like digital transformation.

What to Look for in a Trusted Partner

When choosing a partner to help with your distributed workforce strategy, it's important to look for one that takes a customer-centric approach that allows it to understand the current state of the business, the IT team's capabilities, any challenges the organization is currently facing, and the desired outcome. Partners that demonstrate proficiency working with multiple parties beyond IT teams, like finance, operations, and procurement teams, are also important. These qualities contribute to a tailored approach specific to each of their customers, rather than a one-size-fits-all solution.

When evaluating partners, organizations should look for those that offer expertise and services across a wide range of technologies, including:

- Managed IT services to help strategize, build, and deploy solutions that meet remote and hybrid work objectives.
- Procurement services that leverage close relationships with leading IT manufacturers to acquire, configure, and deploy assets and get direct support when issues arise.
- Automation tools and services that can eliminate sprawl and reduce costs while freeing up organizational resources.
- Voice and video collaboration expertise to create an immersive, collaborative experience for people regardless of their location, device, or connection.
- Networking capabilities that emphasize the individual rather than the workplace, ensuring a consistent user experience across devices and locations.
- Security expertise that can help with penetration testing, malware production, and endpoint security so that security issues can be detected and resolved before they become "security events."

The distributed workforce has contributed to increased complexity for IT teams and the overall business at large. Ensuring users can work, collaborate, and communicate among themselves and with customers is more important than ever before. Getting in front of the trend, rather than reacting to it, is critical, and taking a proactive, strategic approach today will help ease the workload on IT teams and other areas of the business in the future while helping people remain engaged, productive, and collaborative in the modern, distributed workplace.

Conclusion

The demand placed on all facets of an organization by the distributed hybrid workforce is the defining trend in an era where cloud computing, digital transformation, and even artificial intelligence are also top of mind. Aligning current business practices and priorities with this fundamental change in the way people work, all while navigating unique economic conditions and IT resource shortages, means that organizations can quickly find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their competition. That's where partners can be immediately helpful, and organizations struggling to build a comprehensive remote and hybrid work strategy, or that have a strategy in mind but no time to

implement it, would be wise to seek a full-stack partner that not only has the experience necessary to work with all facets of the business, but also listens to their customers before suggesting solutions.

About Xerox

Xerox understands the challenges the evolving digital workspace is creating and the need for a dedicated strategy using a client-centric approach. As a company with a long history of leadership in IT, office, and production print technology, Xerox has evolved its products and services to meet the needs of IT, procurement, operations, and finance teams at every step along the way, including today's global, distributed workforce.

In addition to services, Xerox has productivity tools and apps that can help remote workers remain productive from home, the office, or the coffee shop. Xerox Workflow Central, for example, enables knowledge workers to collaborate from any device using physical or digital documents, while Xerox DocuShare is a content management platform that can be deployed on-site or in the cloud to support users in any location around the world.

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