

# 5 considerations in choosing a collaboration platform in the digital age

WHITE PAPER

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Picking the right collaboration platform can mean the difference between an agile, efficient and fully informed organization and one hamstrung by high costs and lack of user buy-in. Here's how to make the best decision.

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The way organizations conduct business in the digital age necessitates collaboration. Trends such as distributed teams, virtual workforces, around-the-clock and around-the-world commerce, pervasive mobility and rapidly changing regulatory requirements are just some of the factors driving dramatic changes in the way work gets done. Given today's rapidly shifting competitive landscape and user requirements, organizations must become more agile.

That means organizations are investing – heavily – in collaboration tools that help them better leverage widely available information from across the extended enterprise (partners, vendors and customers) to make smarter, faster decisions. Fortunately, the rapid acceptance of cloud computing has made it easier for organizations to drive content collaboration in a cost-efficient manner. As a result, the global market for cloud-based collaboration tools is projected to spike to nearly \$43 billion by 2021.<sup>1</sup>

There's just one problem with this surge in interest for collaboration tools: There are dozens of different options from which to choose, making it difficult to sort through competing claims and differing features and functions, and winnow down the solutions to a manageable short list. For IT and line-of-business decision-makers to successfully navigate the maze of collaboration tools, they need a roadmap to help them prioritize what to look for in a content collaboration platform that delivers on all counts – ease of deployment, user experience, simple management, broad functionality, robust security, strict compliance and attractive economics.

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<sup>1</sup> "Cloud Collaboration Market: Global Forecast to 2021," MarketsandMarkets, June 2016



Custom Media





Here are five key points to consider when choosing a content collaboration platform:

1. **Across-the-board employee buy-in is driven by focusing on ease of use.** By definition, collaboration requires multiple parties – often with different skills and goals – to work together in sharing content in its many formats. This means that while IT organizations are vitally important in evaluating, selecting and implementing collaboration tools, ensuring that the tools are easy to use is essential if you want business users to actually adopt them. Specifically, solutions must be designed for easy collaboration that aligns with the processes users normally follow to search for and share information. Tools also must be highly accessible – at any time and in any place – because that’s how organizations work.

Of course, this emphasis on accessibility must coexist with organizations’ risk mitigation efforts – security, compliance and governance – as discussed later in this paper. And because true collaboration allows users to work in a seamless, unified manner across applications and devices, IT professionals need to take the lead in ensuring that potential collaboration tools offer a prebuilt, innately integrated hook to both widely used and highly specialized third-party applications. That includes not only popular apps like Microsoft Office

365 and Salesforce, but also applications for specialties such as engineering, finance, legal, marketing and human resources, among many others. After all, users in a truly collaborative organization don’t care where the content resides; they only need to know that it exists and can be reliably and securely accessed when needed.

2. **Tools need to promote business process efficiency and be led by end users.** Two drivers shape these requirements: First, collaboration and business processes need to work across the extended enterprise, and second, collaboration and business processes need to be tightly connected – not in self-contained silos. To achieve the agility necessary to compete, organizations must have a single platform that supports both.

Falling into the trap of deploying multiple systems and solutions to address different problems forces employees to continuously shift between disparate applications and sources of information, resulting in a lack of standardization, user frustration and lost productivity. Instead, tools should embrace flexible and customizable workflows, particularly document-based process automation that can be built and owned by end users. Such collaboration solutions need to support the ability to automate common, repeatable processes, from employee onboarding to claims processing.

**3. Intelligence — in all its forms — matters a lot. We've all heard the saying, "Less is more."** But when it comes to collaborating in the digital age, more is more. The digital age has brought with it a proliferation of new platforms, applications and devices that are fueling an unprecedented creation of business content. In fact, Gartner projects an 800% growth in data volume in the next five years. Today's innovative and highly functional collaboration platforms should offer users the ability to leverage the insights within this content, which often can't be realized through manual processing. That includes recognizing patterns and automatically surfacing high-value content tailored to users' specific interests and needs. At the same time, these platforms should eliminate rote, repetitive tasks that take up IT and business users' time and energy.

Additionally, organizations should seek out a collaboration platform that provides tools to easily apply powerful machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) techniques and technologies to solve their unique business challenges. Intelligence gleaned from actual usage is essential, but tapping into the potential of machine learning and AI can help organizations develop entirely new capabilities to intelligently process content, guiding them toward better business decisions without taxing already-stretched internal teams.

**4. Security and compliance must be achieved universally. Organizations need solutions that are secure and compliant for every industry and geography.** As collaboration and content-centric processes become more sophisticated across the virtual enterprise, securing that content and achieving regulatory compliance becomes an even bigger requirement. After all, risk mitigation is everyone's responsibility — not just the focus of IT security staff or the compliance officer. As collaboration increases the flow of content and interaction among users, the potential for risk typically expands as new devices, applications, users and business processes touch and shape all that content.

Look for collaboration tools that easily integrate with existing policy management systems that recognize and govern rights, privileges and access against an ever-expanding regulatory footprint and legal constraints. Your collaboration platform should enable centralized control and visibility into content access; secure

content management infrastructure and operations; simplified governance; and the ability to treat compliance as an integrated, ongoing business function — not just something you need to pass an annual audit. Your collaboration platform must support the full range of industry- and geographic-specific regulations, from HIPAA in healthcare and FINRA in financial services to GDPR for organizations doing business with anyone in Europe.

Of course, collaboration in today's and tomorrow's business environment means widespread, often global connectivity of both the glass house and the consumer-grade devices now proliferating along the network's edge. And your collaboration tool must be designed for scalability and fluidity, because security and compliance are not static. When it comes to security and compliance, you need to do more than just meet guidelines, and your collaboration platform must reflect that.

**5. Simply picking a vendor is not enough. You need a cloud-savvy partner that knows how to deliver ROI.** Let's face it: There are a lot of vendors that can and do sell collaboration tools. But how many of those vendors know how to design, deploy and manage collaboration in today's rapidly evolving cloud computing environment while at the same time enabling your business to achieve significant ROI? With the right platform, you can realize cost savings for replacing legacy infrastructure and storage such as file shares, FTP sites and backup storage, while simplifying IT administration and avoiding the costs of data loss and breaches.

But savings are not limited to just physical hardware; they can also be achieved through improved collaboration and productivity gains. That's why a single platform — balancing user experience with strong security and compliance — is essential in order to compete, and your vendor evaluation and selection must reflect that requirement. You aren't buying a content collaboration platform off the shelf as much as you are investing in a long-term relationship with a smart partner that understands how to leverage the cloud and a flexible platform that adapts intelligently to your unique collaboration needs, practices and processes. The ideal partner will not only bring a great technology platform to the mix, but also make your

onboarding process faster, easier and more satisfying for users from IT to lines of business. That is the new reality of becoming a successful organization in the digital age.

## CONCLUSION

Collaboration in the digital age is fundamentally changing, and organizations need tools that will help them embrace new challenges, promote agility, enhance the customer experience and achieve competitive advantage.

Collaboration tools are essential to all solution portfolios, and organizations are continuing to fine-tune their collaboration platforms to take advantage of important

technology advances such as cloud computing, content management and mobility. But it's easy to become confused, and even lost in the weeds, when evaluating collaboration platforms.

Decision-makers that focus on the five key factors covered in this paper — ease of use, business process efficiency, intelligence, security and compliance, and cloud-savvy partners — stand the greatest chance of turning collaboration into a powerful lever for substantial improvements in business results.

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