

PLANNING FOR THE END OF SKYPE FOR BUSINESS

With support for SfB around the corner, organisations are planning their next steps - we talk to CallTower

February 22, 2021

Gabriel Avner
- UC Today Technology Journalist

For many of us, Skype for Business (SfB) was the original unified communications platform. Voice, video, chat, it was the first mass platform that brought together the elements of communication that make the baseline for today's platforms.

Sure, there was Microsoft Lync and Office Communicator before that, but none of them ever reached the coveted verb status.

But now after years of loyal service, the powers that be out in Redmond are preparing to put the beloved Skype for Business (SfB) out to pasture.

• • •
Microsoft recently sent out a reminder of their July 2019 announcement that they would be **ending service Skype for Business Online in July of this year.**

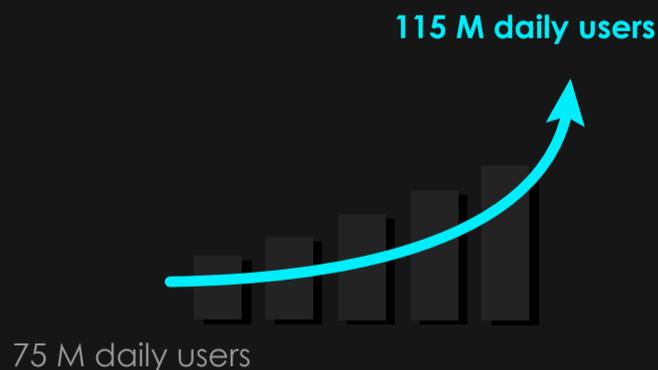
To clarify for those less familiar with this particular service, this is the offering of SfB that is hosted by Microsoft as opposed to the other options where an organisation can either host the instance of SfB themselves or work with a hoster that provides them SfB services.

A visit to the SfB web page makes it exceedingly clear where Microsoft thinks that SfB customers should migrate in the lead up to the dropping of service in July.

In a word: Teams.

TEAMS TAKES CENTER STAGE

For the past few years, Teams has fast become the dominant UC platform for the Microsoft ecosystem. In October, Microsoft announced that Teams had grown to 115 million daily users, showing a nearly 50% jump over the 75 million daily users that were on the platform just six months earlier.



The COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden shift to remote work have played an undeniable role in making Teams the dominant player in the market. But beyond those factors, Microsoft has decided to put its chips behind Teams as the future of UC.

This decision makes a ton of sense when you consider how smoothly Teams integrates with the Office 365 suite. There are a lot of good reasons to make the move to Teams and we have some good advice on how to make that transition when the time comes.

But not everyone may be ready to leave SfB in favour of Teams just quite yet.

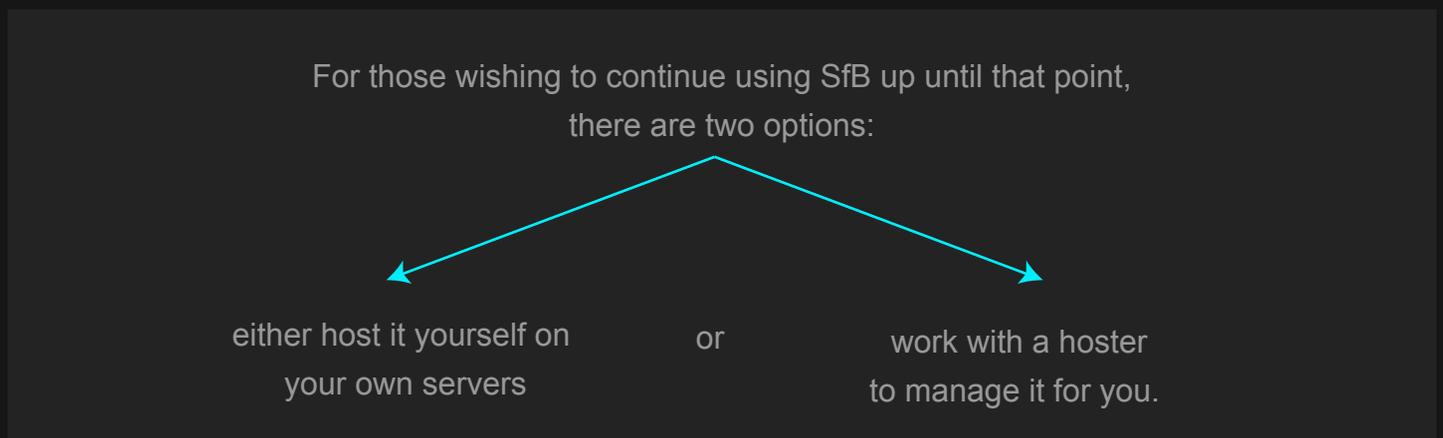
SKYPE FOR BUSINESS — WHAT'S NEXT?

Many organisations have relied on SfB for years and simply do not feel compelled to make the switch just because Redmond is encouraging them to do so.

SfB did a really good job of integrating itself into the handsets of many companies as their voice component, and a fair number of organisations are not ready yet to move over to the app-based Teams.

Thankfully, they have options.

As noted above, the SfB that is being wound down now is the offering that Microsoft hosts themselves, SfB Online. As a product, SfB Server 2019 will continue to receive what is being termed “mainstream support” through January 9, 2024. An extended support package will then be available through October 14, 2025 when its lifecycle is due to reach its end.



Some large organisations with the resources to manage the integration and upkeep of the instance may choose to run SfB on their own bare metal, but then they shoulder all the responsibility. On the other hand, working with a hoster allows organisations to buy the specific SfB services that they need without the management costs. In this case, the hoster takes care of the security and reliability of service, which can be beneficial and reduce commitment for organisations as they weigh their next steps.

TIPS FOR CHARTING YOUR COURSE FORWARD

For those organisations that are mulling their next steps with SfB as the Microsoft hosted service winds down, we recommend that they take the opportunity to do some internal assessments on their team's needs.

For some, the right move might be to make the jump over to Microsoft Teams since it is clearly the direction that the Redmond crew is pushing their customers.

Speaking with CallTower's CRO William Rubio, he recommends doing your homework and speaking to your departments to find out what their UC needs are before deciding which direction to take. As one of the leading providers of voice solutions for UC, CallTower offers service for both SfB as well as Direct Routing for voice in Teams.



He says to ask your organisation if they are ready to make the move from the handset to the headset. "It can be pretty extreme to go from a traditional PBX into a Team's environment," he says of different peoples' level of comfort about jumping into a new system. However, he noted that:

"Once you do that learning curve of moving to Teams, the pain is over after a month or two"

In either the Teams or SfB scenario, getting buy-in from stakeholders is essential, he explains. One way to get everyone on board is to ensure that you are keeping them in the loop. Send out updates to help everyone understand the purpose for why you are following a given IT course of action. This can help to reduce friction and avoid pushback that can follow with any significant internal changes to how people do their work.

Rubio says that if your organisation is heavily reliant on using handsets, then moving to working with SfB through a hosted provider might be the best middle-ground option for now before eventually making that jump over to Teams.

However, he notes that organisations can run into trouble if they attempt to straddle the two options and run what he terms a hybrid model. Running a shadow IT system, especially with various 3rd party products in the mix can lead to confusion among your team and technical headaches that will make the transition far more difficult.

Working with a provider like CallTower allows organisations to pick and choose the Microsoft solutions they need without taking the responsibility on themselves for additional infrastructure. As a longtime provider of SfB service, they have the expertise to ensure a smooth transition from the SfB Online to the hosted provision of service. Their ability to provide strong security and redundancy can ensure that there are no interruptions to the quality of service as organisations move away from the Microsoft hosted infrastructure.

And when the time does come to make the leap over to Teams,

CallTower can help make that an easier process now, in 2022 or when 2025 rolls around.