dstny

Direct Routing - The easiest way for providers to grow with Microsoft Teams

Contents

Direct Routing is one of the most dominant ways of getting voice into and out of the Microsoft Teams platform, but unlike Microsoft calling plans Direct Routing gives providers ultimate flexibility and choice over how their call control interacts with Teams, what features can be added and what hardware it is compatible with.

Direct Routing gives UC vendors the ability to give their customers a voice option that in a way that works for them, with all of their added features, all within the world's most popular work app.

But how does Direct Routing work? Where did it come from? How has it been adjusted to modern ways of work? And of course most importantly - How can providers make Direct Routing, and by extension the growth of Microsoft Teams as a whole, work for them?

What is **Direct Routing?**

Direct Routing is **one of the most popular methods of enabling external calling in Microsoft Teams**. It does this by connecting an existing phone system, via a third party voice provider, to Microsoft Teams so that users can make inbound and receive inbound calls from their Teams client.

With Direct Routing, **calls are routed through SIP Trunks to a Session Border Controller and onwards to the Microsoft Teams network**. This means people on the Public Switched Telephone Network can reach, or be reached by a Microsoft Teams user with just a Teams Phone license and a Direct Routing solution.

A business could technically build their own Direct Routing solution by putting all of these components together themselves, or go for the vastly more popular version of subscribing to a Direct Routing service. Vitally **a Direct Routing solution can be integrated into virtually any existing hardware and virtually any existing PBX/UC**.

To be a bit more specific Direct Routing is actually the name of a Microsoft feature which allows third parties to use a toolkit to enable a connection between Microsoft Teams and an existing phone system. Without a method like Direct Routing, calling externally with Microsoft Teams using an existing phone system would be impossible.

Like all good toolkits, a Direct routing solution is made up of a number of parts, so explaining exactly how it works can be done in stages. Starting with the most important part, the first thing we need is a line that is connected to a business phone system at one end (these can be desk phones or softphones), and the Microsoft UI at the other. We then add the SIP Trunks to that line that manage the calls and get them where they need to go.

But Direct Routing laid out like this is not secure. As part of the Direct Routing package a Session Border Controller (SBC) is deployed to fully secure a line. With an SBC the Direct Routing framework is complete!

Direct Routing benefits

There's a reason why Direct Routing is at the top of a lot of people's lists when it comes to picking an option for Microsoft Teams Phone. The upsides of Direct Routing include:

- **Added flexibility that is unavailable in other options**
- **The ability to save on costs**
- **It allows businesses to have all of their communication, collaboration and productivity tools in one place**
- **It can be the cornerstone of a remote of hybrid workplace model**
- **It can be used side-by-side with other Microsoft Teams capabilities like CoPilot**

Even though Direct Routing can allow a business to deploy voice with a lot of added flexibility, if they chose to try and build a Direct Routing stack themselves, they can expect high resource costs and a need to bring in a lot of expertise.

This is why Direct Routing as a Service (DRaaS) has become so very popular - all of the benefits at a fraction of the risk or overheads... But more on this later.

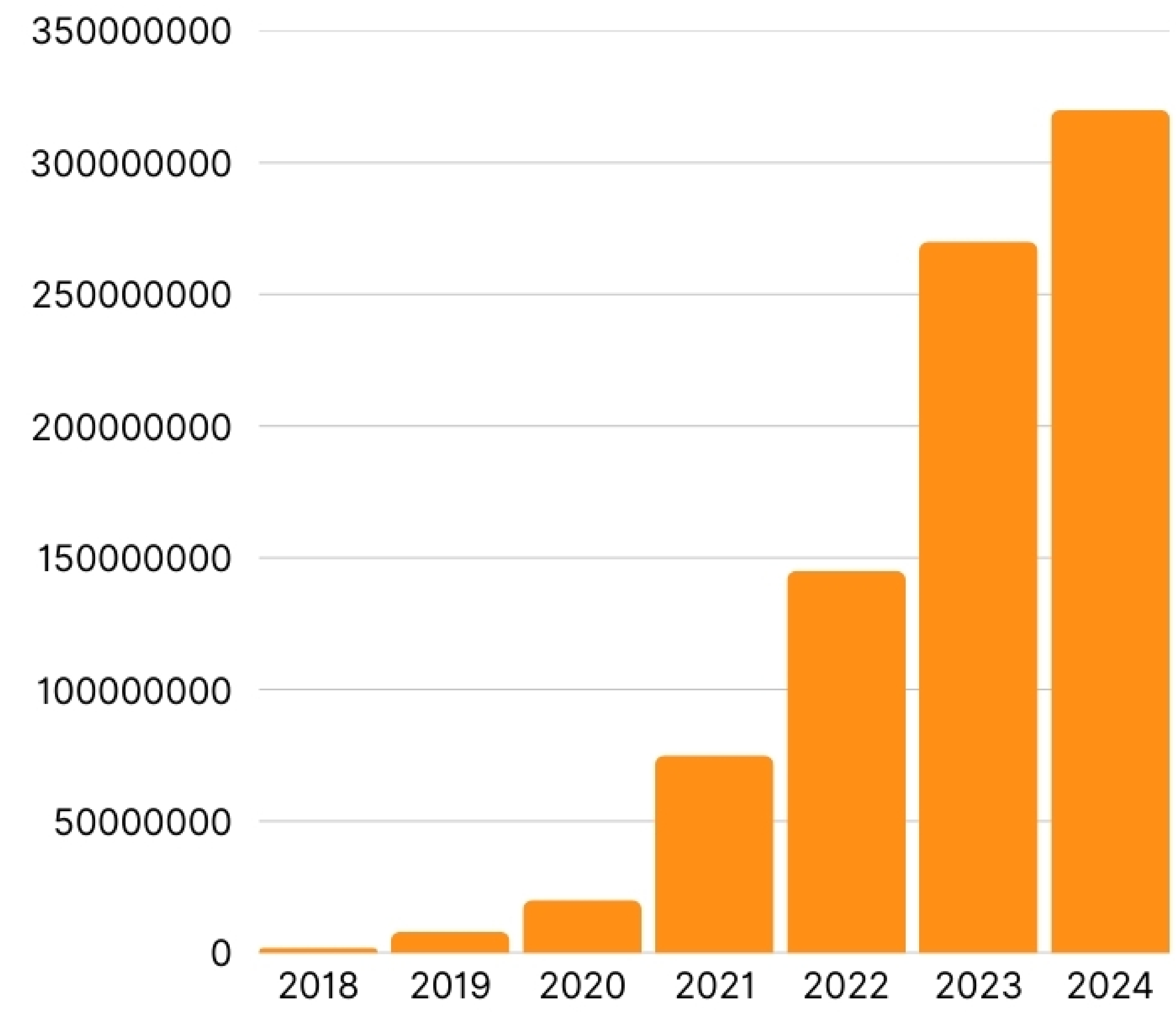
The **past, present and future** of Direct Routing

In the modern communications market you now have to look at new and emerging technologies in dog years. A product, feature or service that has been around for just a few months can have a lasting impact, a few years and it's seen as a cornerstone that many businesses can't envision life without.

With the rate of change being accelerated to near light speed, the way in which we view business communications seemingly shifts every other day. Everything has been squeezed into a much shorter period of time.

Case and point - Microsoft Teams has gone from being an underdog in the UC&C space at the turn of the decade to being an industry staple with a daily active userbase equivalent to the entire population of the United States of America. What's more important however is what Microsoft are doing with this growth in terms of communication capability.

Microsoft has added a few ways of enabling voice with their own calling plans and the Operator Connect Marketplace, but voice adoption in Teams has largely been driven by Direct Routing, which lets people bring their own SBCs to enable voice on the platform.



Microsoft Teams Daily Active User growth

But this adoption wasn't always easy.

As with pretty much all things telco, the early iterations of Direct Routing were complex to say the least, needing huge amounts of expertise and support to effectively enable. But now the creases have been ironed out, Direct Routing is forging ahead as an incredibly popular option when it comes to getting voice into Microsoft Teams.

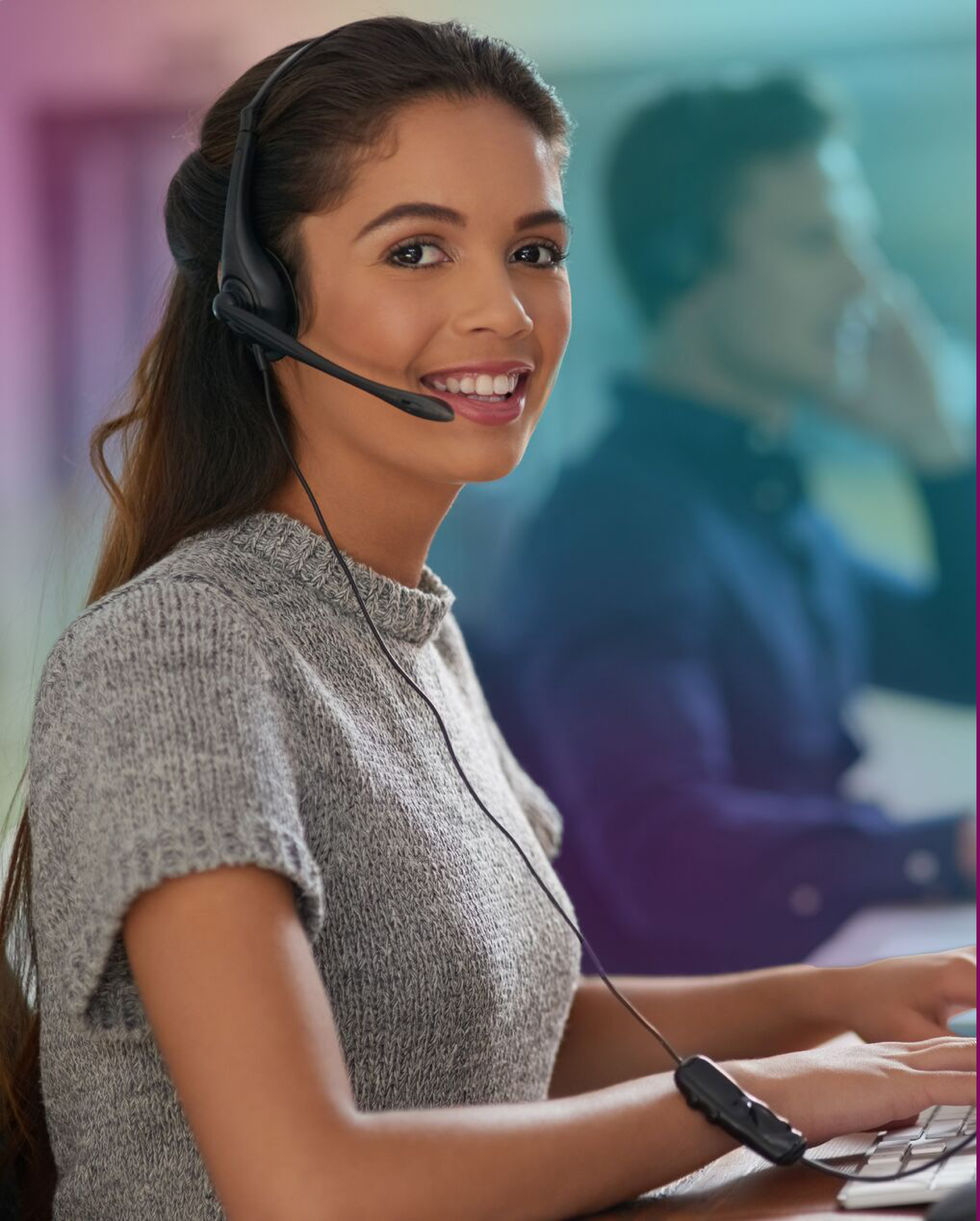
So how did the Direct Routing of the past become the Direct Routing of the present? Crucially, how do both of these add up to where Direct Routing is going in the future in the grand scheme of Microsoft Teams calling and integrated voice?

Before Direct Routing

Going right back to the start, the rise of Direct Routing heavily relied on three main components – VoIP coming into full swing, the idea of unified communications taking shape and SBC deployment being in a place that could support scalable integrated voice communications.

But just as Direct Routing was not the last option that Microsoft would offer to connect external calls, it most certainly was also not the first.

There were in fact two voice options that came before Direct Routing - Microsoft Calling Plans & Skype for Business (previously branded as Lync which was originally Microsoft Office Communicator)



Skype for Business originally stepped to the table with a decent amount of functionality, and its initial impact on business communications cannot be understated. It helped a lot of businesses make their first transition to VoIP on top of being a part of the initial push to enable both remote and hybrid work models.

Largely, the downfall of Skype for Business could be attributed to a few things; It being in the wrong place at the wrong time, the rise of Teams and Microsoft's need to shift users to one central platform. After all, Microsoft couldn't battle the like of Zoom, Webex and Slack from two fronts.

2015

1

Lync rebranded as Skype for Business

Leveraging their $8.5 billion acquisition of Skype, Lync is rebranded as Skype for Business

2017

2

Microsoft Teams is launched

Microsoft Teams was initially launched in 2017 to act as a competitor to Slack and Zoom

2018

3

Microsoft Calling Plans introduced

Microsoft Calling Plans were introduced to enable simple, built-in calling for Microsoft Teams users

2018

4

Direct Routing introduced

After Calling Plans came Direct Routing - A route into Microsoft Teams Phone that added maximum flexibility.

2019

5

Skype For Business shutdown announced

In 2017, the brand underwent rebranding to better align with its evolving vision and market trends.

2021

6

Operator Connect introduced

In 2022, the brand received multiple awards, earning recognition for its excellence and innovation.

You could technically get a form of calling plan as a part of Skype for Business while it was still operational, but Microsoft Calling Plans were largely introduced shortly after the launch of Microsoft Teams as a quick and easy way to get dialling. But there were certainly limitations...

Microsoft Calling Plans had no flexibility. In the early days coverage was quite limited and even though they were seen as a fairly 'out-of-the-box' solution they were also pretty barebones. As businesses required flexibility more and more, even back then there were requirements above just a dial tone for organizations looking to get calling with Teams.

Early Direct Routing

So now that you're all caught up with what came before Direct Routing and the general context surrounding it (or not if you skipped, don't worry, I won't judge). But how did Direct Routing fare upon launch and how did it stack up to the alternatives that were being offered at the time?

In short, Direct Routing fully delivered on its promise to inject the maximum amount of flexibility available to the Microsoft Teams Phone platform and add to the calling capabilities that Teams could offer users in general.

It was a way for organizations to connect their existing PBX and existing setups with Microsoft Teams in a way that suited them. Microsoft had flung open Pandora's box, and let businesses have at it, letting them play with the entire feature set that Teams Phone had to offer, no restrictions, no limitations.

If you were asked to sum up the early days of Direct Routing into one word however, your two main choices would be either 'Chaotic', or 'Complex. Compared to the easy-to-use Calling Plan option, Direct Routing, although far superior in terms of potential functionality, was infinitely more complex to set up, provision and manage.

Direct Routing promised so much, including more features, a larger reach and lower costs, but all of that was behind a wall of complexity, where the bricks were technical implementation and the mortar was Microsoft PowerShell. It wasn't until a certain global pandemic came along where providers and businesses alike really started to accelerate adoption and iron out the complexities. Which leads on to the next phase of Direct Routing's lifecycle...

Modern Direct Routing

With further development of SBCs and the advancement of Direct Routing in both geographic reach and compatibility, more carriers were seeing the upsides of getting a direct line between their services and Teams. But as providers were racing to get solutions set up, overall reliability dipped. Compliance and security were also two big barriers to adoption, which both varied from country to country and getting a Direct Routing solution spun up was still complex no matter which way you cut it.

As remote work became a necessity across the globe there was suddenly a massive demand for voice solutions that could be accessed from anywhere and Direct Routing ticked a lot of boxes for a lot of businesses. After all, effective communication was, and still is, at the centre of practically all organizations. This forced even more accelerated change that were tailored to remote work – Adaptive SBCs, enhanced security and compliance measures, better encryption, easier setup methods, more practical implementations, all made ready for those who could now not return to their offices.

Because of the pandemic, traditional on-prem communication stacks were suddenly not fit for purpose in a lot of cases and many rushed to the cloud just to keep the wheels turning. And as organizations large and small started heavily relying on the like of Teams, Webex and Zoom for internal collaboration, they realized that they could also get their communications from the same place. Better yet they could use Direct Routing to keep their existing physical assets in play for if and when things returned to normal. After all, with so much uncertainty, why throw out what still works?

Taking the complexity out

At this point efficiency had improved and the infrastructure for Direct Routing was more settled. But the final hurdle to global adoption still remained – Complexity.

For a business to build their own Direct Routing solution, they needed their own SBC (and a redundant SBC to act as a failsafe). They needed the expertise necessary to boot up, configure and maintain a Direct Routing solution. On top of this they needed to commit the resource to keeping up with Microsoft and all the changes that they make on their end.

This remained out of reach for even some larger organizations, let alone the SMBs who also needed to bring their communications up to speed.

Enter the Direct Routing as a Service (DRaaS) model, which allowed providers to deliver Direct Routing as a part of their UC or voice services, giving their customers all of the benefits with none of the complexity – A win-win. The fact remained however that these providers still needed to source the expertise and tech stack to keep up with demand and the shifting workspace, all of which were still complicated and found scattered in different places.

At this point, for providers Direct Routing was still as complex as ever. Hot on the heels of this complexity, Dstny Call2Teams was born. Effectively sitting in between the provider and Microsoft Teams, Call2Teams was able to flatten out the jagged edges of Direct Routing and make things a lot easier for the partners that chose to implement it.

With no more barriers for entry, providers were able to freely offer Direct Routing options, and as more and more businesses moved their users to their preferred UC platform, the partners who had integrated their voice services into these platforms saw massive uptake.

People were able to keep using their existing telephony setups in the cloud, even after returning to the office and the ability to use their existing setups no matter where their employees were helped to shape the hybrid work environment as we know it today. Not only this, but with a Direct Routing setup, businesses can also now lean on the suite of features that Microsoft has developed and have them act as a part of their communications infrastructure.

And as they say, the rest is history. But what does the future have in store for Direct Routing?

The future of Direct Routing

Microsoft Teams has now cemented itself as the world's most popular work app. And the world has shown that its preference is to have everything in one place wherever possible. Because of this, integrated voice has massive potential as more and more businesses move to the cloud and towards their favourite collaboration platforms.

The only real question that remains is which Microsoft Teams Phone option are the masses going to gravitate towards? And this one is slightly trickier to answer. Those who want just the basic calling function, who won't be looking to scale massively or don't want to mess around with setups and implementations will always look at Microsoft Calling Plans first, after all that's who they're aimed at. But for businesses who want to have any sense of flexibility or ownership over their call control will almost certainly pick either Direct Routing or the up and coming Operator Connect.

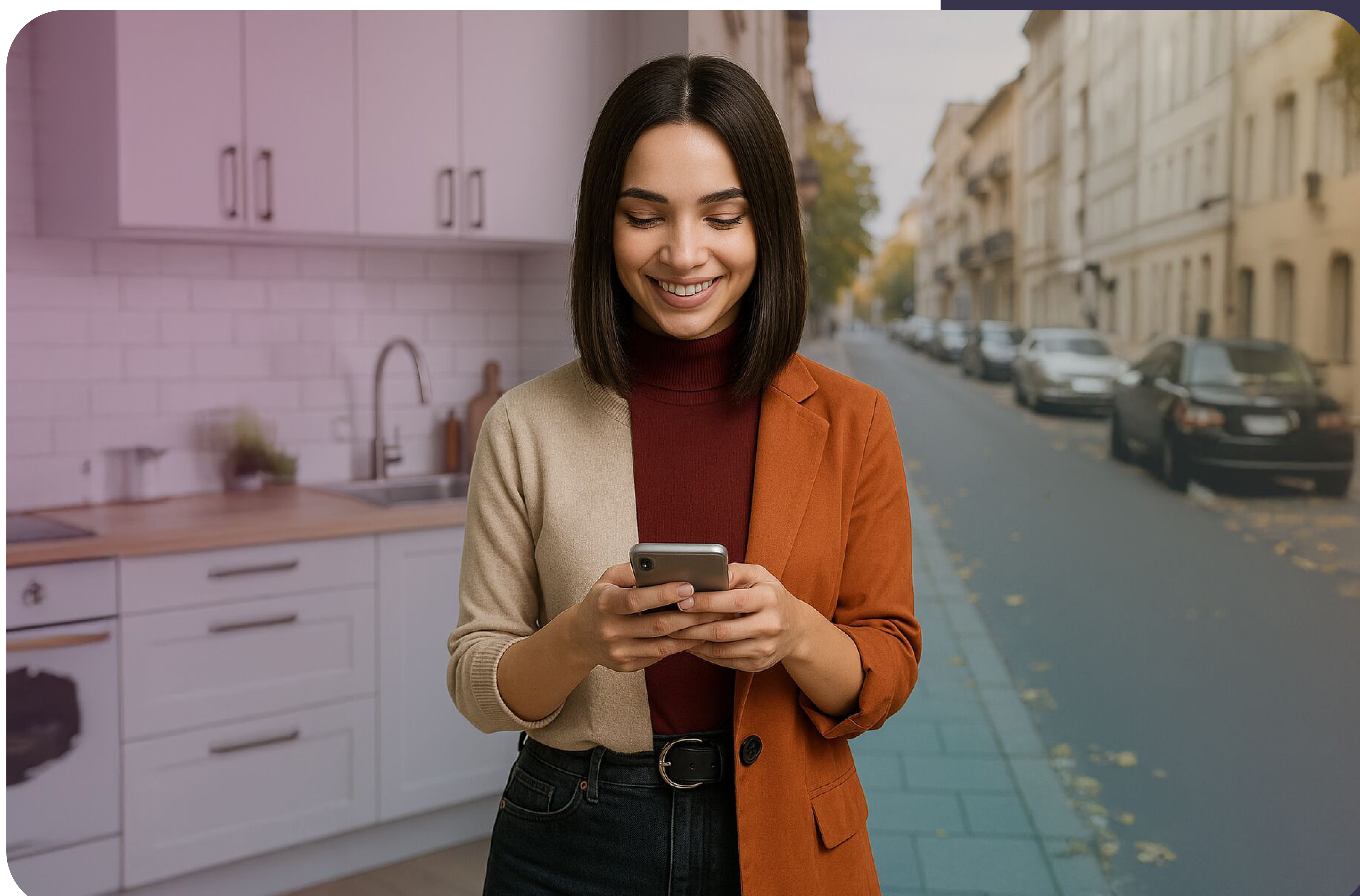
It's true that in recent years, these two services have become more and more alike, but Direct Routing remains the only option to bring existing setups to the Microsoft Teams platform – A factor that many businesses consider vital even to this day. Microsoft Teams Phone has positioned itself to cater to all business audiences, with each option having it's own flavour, and providers are now going to have to decide which flavour they want to deliver in order to give their customers what they want in a way that works for them.

The **complexity killer** for hybrid work communications

The whole world is going hybrid, and for some organizations it's all they've ever known. But as we all rush towards everyone's favourite work model, a whole lot of businesses are still dealing with the inherent complexities of having a communications stack that keeps up with a workforce that is no longer in just one place.

From reporting, compliance & security to functionality and user management the list of things that need to be kept in check in brand new ways is quite a bit longer than a lot of people realize.

But as this laundry list of complexities unique to hybrid companies gets longer and longer, there is one app which is at the core of solving all of your customers' problems and the best part is that they're probably already using it. Unless you've already guessed it, I am of course talking about the one and only Microsoft Teams. More specifically I'm talking about the current most popular option for enabling voice within the platform – Direct Routing.



One of the most important hurdles for a business looking to get their communications stack going is of course the initial setup process.

Whether it's getting their company onto a service or subsequently getting their people calling, keeping things as simple as possible in this area is often key.

Direct Routing simplifies both of these areas by leaning on the power of Microsoft Teams and allowing everything to be connected to the platform. As a native integration, the learning curve for getting on board with Direct Routing is relatively non-existent, and with the right Direct Routing option, user provisioning and syncing can even be handled automatically for new starters and leavers.

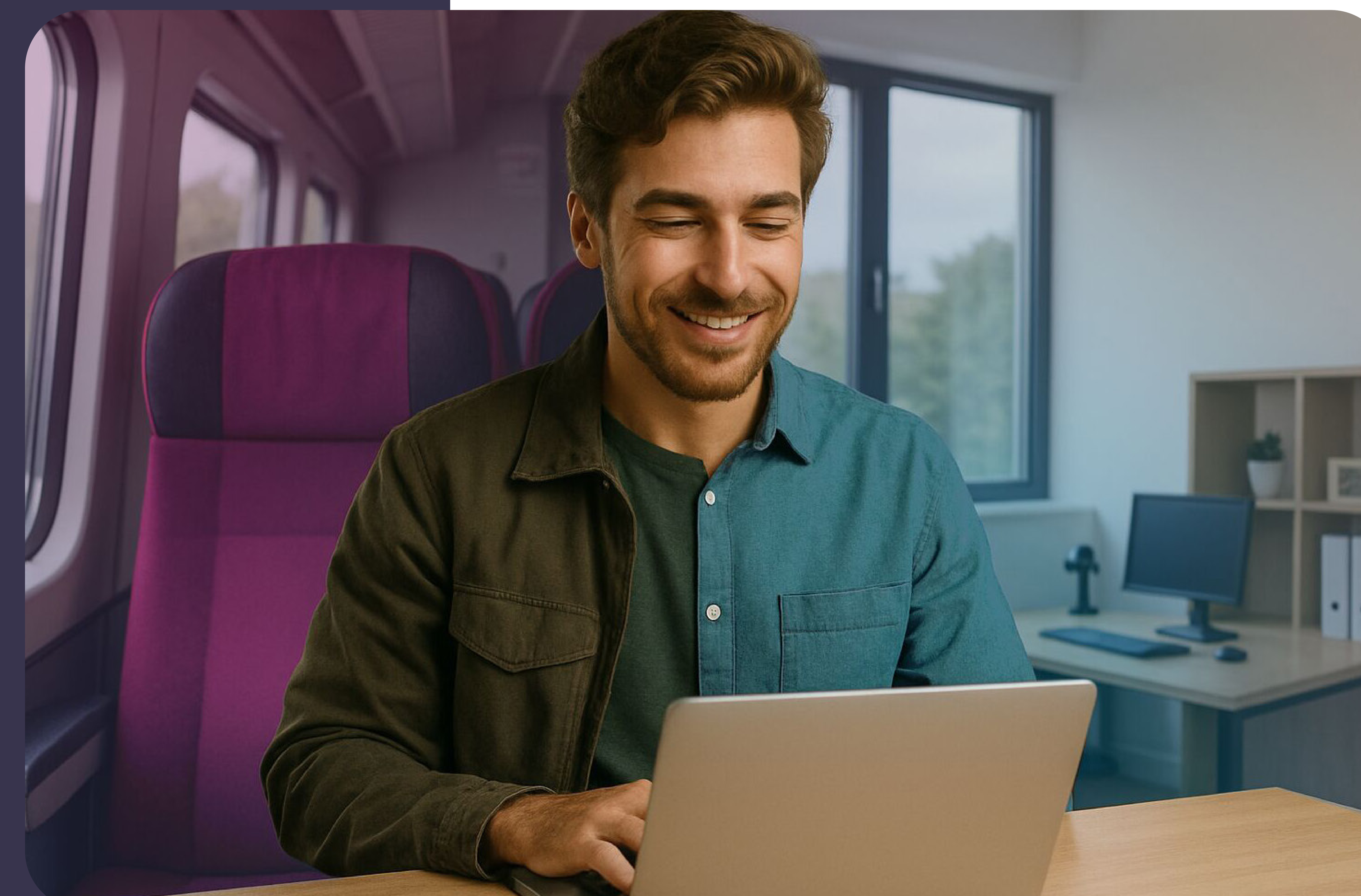
On top of this, with the right Direct Routing solution, a business doesn't even need the extensive PowerShell knowledge that even some of the larger companies don't have in-house.

For things like emergency call handling and tackling the maze of regulations that come with both multi and single region communications, Direct Routing allows both end-businesses and providers to easily find their way through. It does this in a number of ways:

By centralizing everything in Microsoft Teams – With Direct Routing, businesses effectively centralize all of their communications, making it a lot easier to manage call data. Call recording, analytics and data management are all in one place. This unlocks the ability for businesses to have more consistent communications policies

By ensuring existing call policies remain intact – For businesses who already have a strict compliance structure in place, Direct Routing allows for organizations to plug existing policies directly into their new calling solution.

By offering an inherently secure platform – The last thing that an SMB is going to think of when they're finding their feet is if their calling solution ticks all the compliance boxes, often leading to bumps when they get further down the road. Direct Routing allows them to continue to use the devices and processes that they're used to but now with an added layer of compliance and security, keeping them secure and compliant in any environment.



Reduce initial costs and simplify billing

Cost is usually the main reason that stops smaller or more price sensitive businesses from adopting a new technology as instead they struggle on with what they already have.

The beauty of a Direct Routing solution is that it can lean on existing infrastructure, completely eliminating the need for any drastic rip and replace. And even if a business is starting entirely from scratch and simply want to be more Teams-forward (after all, they use it for collaboration), Direct Routing clocks in at around 56% cheaper on average than alternatives such as Microsoft Calling Plans.

Direct Routing allows a company to take the collaboration software that they're already using and paying for, and the communications that they're already using and paying for and puts it all into one place for very little cost.

Get everything into **one place**

Perhaps the most obvious way that Direct Routing keeps things simple is in how it keeps everything a hybrid business needs in a single pane of glass.

No more managing multiple apps, no more constantly switching windows and no more having to choose between collaboration and communication. With Direct Routing, suddenly a business has a true unified communications system that doesn't compromise on functionality.

Ultimately by plugging your voice solution into Microsoft Teams you enable your customers to have the best of both worlds – On one side they have the power, flexibility and familiarity that Teams adds on the collaboration side (with some pretty great native voice features built in) and on the other is your calling function and all of the voice functionality you have to offer.

For CSPs looking to cater to hybrid models

In one sentence, Direct Routing gives service providers an easy win when it comes to targeting hybrid organizations.

With Direct Routing you can lean on the massive amounts of brand recognition, growth and availability that Microsoft Teams has built up over the past few years and turn it into something you can use to your advantage.

By integrating your services into Teams and building a Direct Routing solution, you can offer a unified solution that hybrid businesses truly want, with minimal effort and cost. In doing so, you can craft unbeatable customer and employee experiences. By blending your services into the Teams environment you accomplish two things as a Provider:

1. You give users a consistently high quality calling experience, regardless of if they're at home, in the office or on the move.

2. You futureproof your services by becoming increasingly scalable in a way that lets you expand globally or locally. With the right partner you can bring down regional barriers that may be currently slowing you down and cut out the need for complex deployments or even a physical local presence.

Building your Direct Routing solution with Dstny

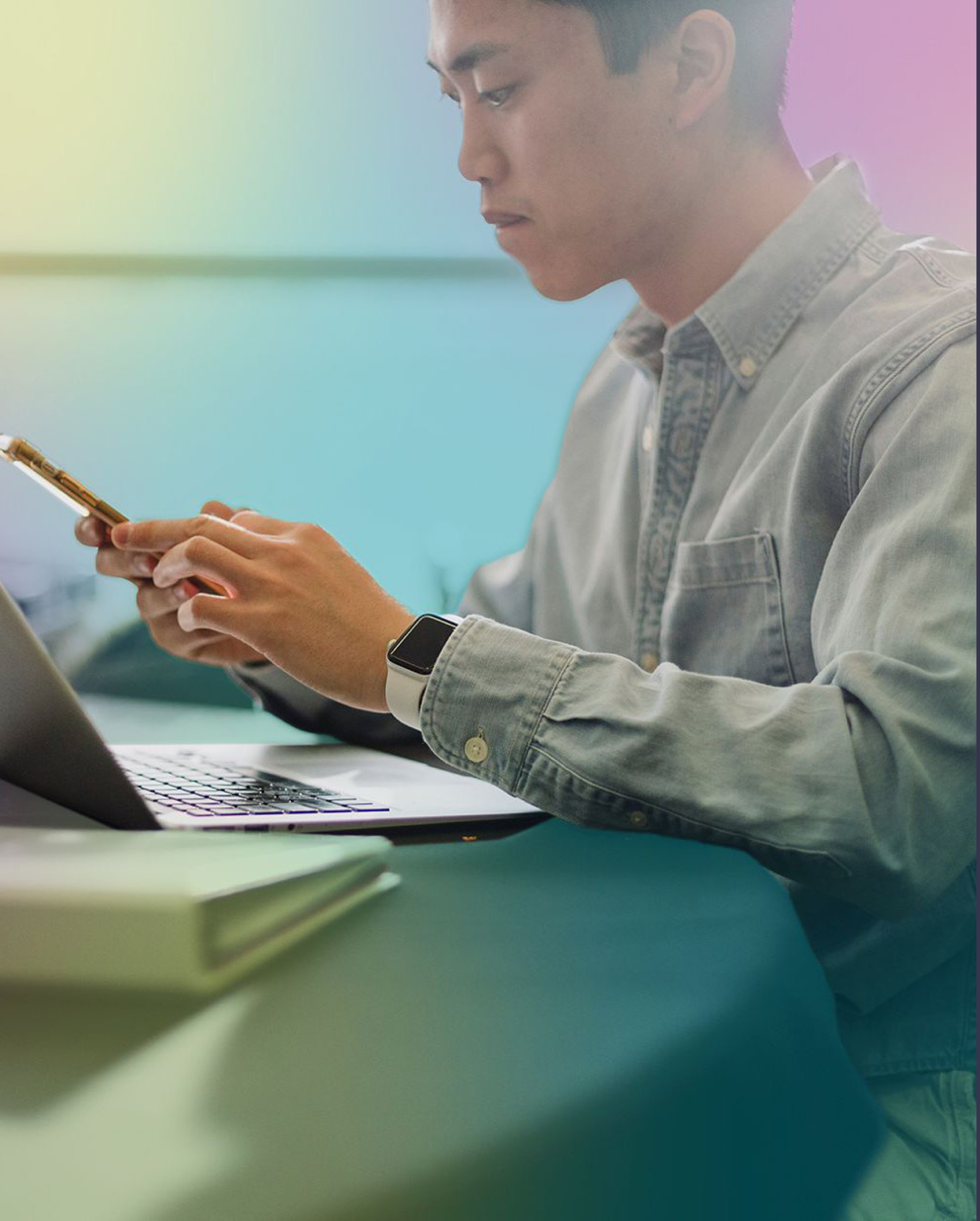
With our Direct Routing enabler Call2Teams, providers are now able to deploy a resilient calling solution that is natively integrated into Microsoft Teams.

With us as a partner you gain access to proprietary tech which allows you to simply connect to the nearest Microsoft point of presence and bring your solution to your key audiences no matter where they are or what device they're using. Crucially, all of this can be set up for you not in a number or years or months but weeks.

A Direct Routing solution adds flexibility, reliability and scalability to your calling options in a world where all of these are top priorities for hybrid businesses. Not only this, but your potential audience is already familiar with the platform where your voice is delivered.

You don't have to convince anyone to switch apps or migrate, simply add to the skyrocketing numbers of voice enabled Teams users across the globe without any heavy infrastructure spend or resource commitment.

Enabling Microsoft Teams Phone with **your voice services**



The modern workforce is now more dynamic than ever, it almost all instances. People move, teams grow, contractors come and go. By providing a Direct Routing solution you allow your customers to scale up or down as they please whilst being as flexible as they like in terms of functionality. Even geographical changes are no longer an issue as you're using Teams as an endpoint.

With our Direct Routing integration Dstny Call2Teams you're able to provide voice in Teams at scale because we make everything as easy as possible - SIP registration, PowerShell expertise, provisioning, support and development, the list goes on.

We do all of the hard work so that you can focus on what you need to – Growing as a provider and remaining agile without being bogged down.

Desk sharing, hybrid models, remote work, sweating existing infrastructure, getting your voice into more audiences, giving your customers what they want, all of this is possibly with a Direct Routing solution with Call2Teams sat in the middle.

As a Provider, you already play a vital role in your customers' communications stack. By offering Direct Routing, enabled through Dstny Call2Teams, you can elevate that role to deliver a solution that's in demand, easy to deploy, and packed with value.

We've been working hard since Microsoft launched Direct Routing capabilities to be able to smooth out the edges and help you deliver powerful integrated voice to as many people as possible, and now is the time to do it.

So if you're looking for the easiest way to get your voice services into Microsoft Teams, get in touch so we can talk you through your first steps or book a demo to see what Call2Teams is really capable of.

Dstny Global Services

dstny.com

Dstny Global Services

dstny.com