The future of business collaboration is moving fast, and if you don't keep up, you risk your company being left behind! The technologies are ever-changing, as new cutting-edge developments constantly come into the market, and times, trends and concepts evolve. The Internet and the Workplace of Things are becoming more prevalent, and will be increasingly important to collaboration. In this article, we will take a look at these, as well as other important trends such as Big Data technology, asynchronous work, anywhere-ization and convergence, all set to shape and impact the future of business collaboration. First let's look at why business collaboration is so important.

Importance of Collaboration

As most businesses know, a successful future is the result of effective collaboration with your on-site employees and your customers. However, success increasingly also lies in collaboration within your company's own virtual walls, in collaborating with employees, more and more of whom are working remotely. Collusion and communication is essential to getting an entire company on the same page to work toward a common goal. Your business must stay ahead of the game in terms of technology in order to make collaboration effective and efficient. In a market where many companies are taking advantage of the technology advances to improve collaboration, it is essential to adopt and integrate them to stay competitive.

Mobile Workforce (Anywhere-ization)

The first trend that is blatantly apparent due to the wide use of smartphones is the mobile workforce, which has enabled employees to stay in touch from anywhere. The terms BYOD and BYOT (bring your own device, and bring your own technology) entered the dictionary in August 2013,and most businesses have already implemented BYOD initiatives. This is a clear indication of where things are going in the environment of business collaboration; employees want to work anywhere on devices they are comfortable with. The days are gone where an employee sits at an allocated desk, restricted by a personal computer. Companies utilize skills and talents across geographical borders for maximum

productivity. With cloud-based applications, this is becoming more and more of a possibility.

How effective is BYOD in the workplace? Research has shown that 42% of employees report increased efficiency and productivity when they bring their own device to work. However, anywhere-ization brings with it a whole realm of concerns as employees access sensitive data outside of the protected business environment. 73% of IT Managers cite security implementation as being a key concern surrounding BYOD, with 83% citing round the clock access to corporate networks as being the most pressing threat to security. It is crucial then, that your IT department and company is on the cutting-edge of technology too, so you can enable effective control of data for security reasons. This will become more and more essential for safe, risk-free business collaboration as the workforce can, and does, work from anywhere.

Workplace of Things

Next up is the aforementioned Workplace of Things, which is a step beyond BYOD. We are talking about all the BYOD's, computers, wearables, printers, and more being connected together wirelessly. Up until now, The Internet of Things has predominantly included objects in the home like your alarm, dishwasher and garage door. However, the development of technology that allows objects to send and receive data and information to one another, will continue to find its way into the working environment.

It is estimated that there will be 26 billion autonomous internet-connected devices by the year 2020, and research shows that 96% of businesses expect to be using the Internet of Things devices within the next three years. Your business will be required to embrace the Workplace of Things to keep up with the demands that are presented by an increasingly efficient and optimized marketplace. From web conferences, to data collection, to wearable devices, to virtual reality, technology can boost and improve operations to ensure a seamless flow of information across employees, right through to customers.

Collaboration Without Space and Time Boundaries

WIth this increasingly connected, while geographically separated, workforce, collaboration can not be bound by space and time as before. If your business tries to collaborate with an "old school" mindset, you will run into more problems. Employees working in different locations, can mean they are working in different time zones. This can result in difficulties communicating in real-time, documents becoming lost, or communications being inadequate or inefficient. Additionally, problems associated with arranging virtual meetings with individuals who have different commitments can be difficult. Your business can see negative outcomes; inefficiencies within the business, inadequate planning, a deterioration in business relationships, poor team-work, and ultimately, lost business. Research shows that as many as 86% of executives cite a lack of collaboration, or ineffective communication, as being to blame for failures in the workplace.

Although email can be sufficient for many business communications and transactions, it does have its limitations. Many people find long email threads tiresome, emails can be easily missed, deleted, or misunderstood, and there are limitations in terms of tracking and accountability. As for scheduling

meetings, this presents a whole host of problems when people are scattered all across the globe and have different working patterns, different means of access to technology, and varying communication skills.

The problem is being addressed with cloud-based collaboration technologies, a "new school" way of collaborating. Asynchronous collaboration means that businesses and employees can work together, even when they cannot be in the same place at the same time. The cloud and software as a service (SaaS) creates the possibility of the creation of team workspaces, which enable files, projects and documents to be effectively tracked. The workspace can be accessed both inside and outside the business by anyone authorized to enter the cloud, and the problems associated with emails and meetings are automatically resolved. Collaboration without space and time boundaries is the way forward for the future of businesses, whatever your trade or service, and wherever you(and your employees) are in the world.

Embracing Data

Next, comes the extensive amount of data now available to business and the dilemma of what to do with it all. It is not enough to simply collect and assemble data and statistics anymore. Collaborating and analyzing that data is absolutely essential for your business to succeed, and more and more technology is becoming available to enable data to be processed effectively. Advances in systems, and new and improved technology, are making data collection even more expedient. The effective analysis of Big Data helps your business to maintain a competitive edge, boost productivity, and drive innovation.

With social media, you are seeing more vocal workforces and customer bases, and will need to identify even more opportunities to explore and monitor customer's habits. A whole realm of information is available concerning sales and key performance indicators, and how these relate to business goals. Additionally, there are ever more ways and means of gathering that information. New data that is available, and advances in technology, mean that you can gather the information and analyze it for your benefit. You can, and must, adopt a data-driven approach, using those statistics to measure your performance, and that of your employees, to ensure that you invest in the right technology.

It might require a new mindset and a culture shift, as teams may need to be educated to work together, but the impact will be well worthwhile. After that investment in new technology and training, the result is that you will be better able to understand your performance, act strategically, recognize where your problems or stumbling blocks actually lie, and the make the necessary plans to streamline, or make amendments in areas where things are going wrong. It is estimated that 2016 will see a 20 billion dollar growth in Big Data technology and services; statistics show that the biggest benefit will be seen in operational efficiency.

Convergence of Collaboration

In summary, creating a collaborative environment is crucial for your business, and the advances in technology with regard to smartphones and cloud communication are hugely beneficial for a middle

sized company and especially for a multinational enterprise.

The advantages of creating such a system are:

- clear communication, reporting and data exchange;
- decrease in hardware costs;
- saving time;
- availability of the integrated data for making more informed decisions.

This process should end up with a completely smooth user experience for every individual involved, right through to the end user. In order to ensure a successful implementation, your standard and bespoke software integration should be performed by professional developers, as it's not a trivial task. If you are thinking about the implementations – we are here to help you and answer any questions you may have.