Tyler Carmody:

Welcome back to another episode of UCX USA Talks. As always, my name is Tyler Carmody, and I'm the conference operations manager for UCX USA. And today I am joined by the principal consultant at CRG Telecom, as well as the President for the Society of Communications Technology Consultants, Denise Munro. In today's session, she will tell us how to sustain IT budget survival in uncertain times. Let's get started. Okay, Denise, so obviously as we were going into the pandemic, everyone had the flip to all new models of unified communications, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, and all that. What do you think were some big wins for technology during the pandemic?

Denise Munro:

Well, thank you for having me, first of all. To answer your question, I think the big win was technology itself. That the technology was mature enough to actually meet the challenge that the pandemic created. I think also it required end users to adopt the technology that they may have been kind of dragging their feet on adopting prior. So I think that was a really big win. In addition to that, I think that the IT professionals themselves were just heroes during that process because they really had to scramble to meet a lot of the demands that their work from home environments were really asking them to do.

Tyler Carmody:

Absolutely. So we're not really in the same level of the pandemic as we were coming on three years ago. Things have sort of started to wane off. People are coming back into the office. Now what would you suggest to IT stakeholders? What would you suggest IT stakeholders do as we emerge from pandemic level operations?

Denise Munro:

Yeah, I think that we feel like we are getting back to normal, to the degree that we can. I think one of the things that we really have to look at is how we are operating today versus how we were pre-pandemic. There are many organizations that have had an situation where they're closing offices or they are downsizing facilities, and how do we operate in response to that? So what do I mean by that is if you had an office that had 100 people three years ago and now those 100 people are coming in two days a week, even if that, how are your communications right sized for those changes?

Tyler Carmody:

So we had obviously a lot of damage caused to companies during the pandemic. Like you just said, companies had to shut their doors, operations had to change completely. How do you think IT leaders could assess the damage caused by the pandemic?

Denise Munro:

Whew. That's a big job really to do because not only are IT leaders being asked to work within the pre-pandemic levels, they're also having to take on and embrace where they are today. So how do you shed the skin of the pandemic? How do you take and shift those gears? Clearly, we're not doing it in an emergency situation, but how do we do that when it comes to refocusing and moving forward? So some things that you can do is get a handle on what you're spending, because there's a lot of money that was spent that was way over budget during the pandemic. The shift was really fast and very sudden. So

money was spent where if it had been planned out a little bit better or there were more time to plan, then they could definitely have looked at how they could stay within their budget to do that.

So the first thing I would say is to look at where you're spending your money. Second, the next thing I would do is look at how your people are working now. Do you have employees that are 100% working from home? Do you have folks that are not coming into the office? I mean, you might have some situations where you don't really even need services that you might have needed pre-pandemic. So that would be the second thing I'd look at. Then the third thing is, do you have things that, maybe old services that you have, maybe you can shift to a newer technology that might really better serve you going forward.

Tyler Carmody:

Obviously, one thing that's on everyone's mind is a potential economic downturn. Everyone's talking about recession, inflation and all that. What are some things that IT leaders can do during this potential economic downturn?

Denise Munro:

Wow. Well, I think you probably have seen it as I have. There have been significant layoffs across particularly the tech industry, and that is in response to the potential for a downturn in the economy. And when I see a downturn in the economy, I look at that as an opportunity to really look at how you can reduce your costs. Has your company laid off 10% of their workforce? Are those licenses for services that they would use in their everyday operational or job situation? Do you still pay for them? Do you think that there are ways to right size the licenses and services that you have? Another thing you could do is look at your contracts. If you have vendor contracts, how do we go about making sure that those contracts are still in line, with you meeting the criteria for that contract?

Are there clauses in there about downturns in business? Are there clauses in there about what happens if you close a facility? What kinds of things can you do to look at your contracts and make sure that your organization is operating in line with those? And probably the third thing I would do is to make sure that you have what you need. It is a good time to look at where you can reduce your costs by taking a snapshot of where you are today. Do you need all those services that you needed pre-pandemic? Do you need to eliminate some things that are no longer in use? This is a really good time to do that. It's just like when you tighten your belts in your own economic issues, why wouldn't you do it for your IT budget?

Tyler Carmody:

Absolutely. Now actually brings us to our final question of the day. This went by in a flash, I swear. So what steps can IT leaders take to move forward with projects during these uncertain times?

Denise Munro:

Well, I have to say, if you find ways to save money, that always funds something new. So it's a good time to assess what you're spending, assess if you're paying the right rates for those services, to just audit inventory the services you have and make sure that they are in line with what your operations look like today. I can't tell you how many times I've worked with clients where we've been able to eliminate a significant amount of money from their budget and it goes on to fund projects that they have on the table that really are going to serve them going forward.

Tyler Carmody:

Absolutely. Well, this was all extremely insightful, especially for someone who is not in charge of IT budgets. So I really appreciate all the information. Before we sign off today, do you have any final takeaways for our viewers?

Denise Munro:

Well, don't be afraid of an economic downturn when it comes to it. It is an opportunity to really reset, refocus, and move forward with projects that you probably can fund with money that you have sitting in your budget that you didn't know was being spent where it really shouldn't. So that's always a great opportunity to get yourself re-centered and take on what's next.

Tyler Carmody:

For sure. Well, Denise, thank you so much for your time today. And as always, thank you all for your time and attention. Today's session will be available on UCXUSA.com. And as always, if you found this valuable, please share it with your colleagues and peers and you can follow us on social media at UCXUSA and at UCXUSAExpo, for more information on today's session, as well as other trends and topics in the unified communication space. Have a wonderful day.