Frequently Asked Questions for Microsoft Partners

The news of the week

Back in November, we announced that the next version of Lync will become Skype for Business. Delivering technology that helps people connect--to discuss, share and collaborate--is core to Microsoft's mission to reinvent productivity, and Skype for Business is central to our efforts. Skype for Business brings together the familiar experience of Skype that people have come know and love, with the trusted platform in Lync that businesses around the world count on. This week marks a significant leap forward in our efforts to deliver communication-powered productivity, with the announcements of the technical preview of the new Skype for Business client is being available now, and the new client, server and service will be generally available starting in April. Our entire partner ecosystem is ready to help customers deploy Skype for Business.

STRATEGY AND BRAND

What is Skype for Business?

Skype for Business (formerly Microsoft Lync) is a communications and collaboration platform that brings together an experience inspired by Skype with enterprise-grade security, compliance and control. It offers features including presence, IM, voice and video calls, and online meetings. It is a built right in to Microsoft Office, so initiating chats, calls and meetings is an integrated experience within Office.

Is Skype for Business a rebrand or a new product?

Both. We are releasing a new client experience for mobile, tablets and desktops, new server release, and updates to the service in Office 365 under the Skype for Business name.

Why are you renaming Lync to Skype for Business?

Skype for Business brings together the familiar experience and user love of Skype with the enterprise security, compliance, and control from Lync. End users get a familiar Skype experience that is as easy to use at work as it is at home. Organizations gain reach into a network of hundreds of millions of Skype users across the globe. And, IT remains confident they are providing secure, reliable, high-quality communications to their organizations.

Why announce the details of the new product in advance of the general availability release?

We are making this announcement now in order to give our customers time to learn about the product and prepare their organizations for the general availability of client, service and server. Partners are ready today to help plan, implement, and support Skype for Business upgrades.

When is Lync actually changing to Skype for Business?

The Lync 2013 client will become Skype for Business with the April Office update. The new Skype for Business Server will be available for download from VLSC on May 1. We will begin releasing the new Skype for Business service to Office 365 customers in late April, and will roll it out to all customers by the end of May.

Is there any change to the existing Skype brand used by consumers?

No. The consumer experience that people around the world know and love will continue to be referred to as Skype. Consumers will still be able to use Skype the way they always have – with the same user account, contacts, user interface and functionalities that they have always used.

CLIENT PREVIEW, PRODUCT & SERVICE DETAILS

How and when can customers access the Client Preview?

Current Lync customers in the U.S. can access the Skype for Business Client Preview in the TechNet Evaluation Center from March 16 - April 30, 2015.

How do I install the Client Preview?

The Client Preview is an update to the Lync 2013 MSI client.

Will the Client Preview work with my Office 365 account?

The Skype for Business Client Preview will work if you have the ability to download Office 2013 Pro Plus (MSI) from the Microsoft Volume Licensing Download Center.

Will the Skype for Business client work with Lync Server 2010?

Yes. The Skype for Business client will work on Lync 2010, Lync Server 2013, Lync Online and Skype for Business Server. If the client preview is used with Lync Server 2010, only features supported by Lync Server 2010 will be supported in this case.

Will you deliver another server after the new Skype for Business Server?

Yes, we do have plans to deliver another server.

When will the new client be generally available?

The Skype for Business client will become generally available with the April Office update.

Once available, how can customers obtain the new client?

Customers simply need to buy or have rights to one of the Office plans that include Skype for Business.

Will Skype for Business automatically replace Lync Online for Office 365 customers?

Yes. We will automatically update the Lync Online service to be Skype for Business Online, and all customers should be transitioned by the end of May. This change will result in new branding and messages in the administrator portal, but is independent of the Skype for Business client change. Customers can obtain the new client as described above.

When will the server be available?

The Skype for Business Server 2015 will be available for download on May 1, 2015, and will be added to the pricelist at the same time.

What is the impact to customers of having the client and service available ahead of the server?

Having the client available early will enable customers to begin using and benefiting from the new user interface while they plan and execute an upgrade to the new Skype for Business Server. Once they upgrade to Skype for Business server, their users can begin taking advantages of new features such as native interoperability with select Cisco Tandberg VTC systems.

How will the product experience change when Lync becomes Skype for Business?

The best features of Lync and Skype have been combined in a Skype-inspired user interface for an intuitive experience that is similar whether you are in a work environment or communicating with friends and family.

Skype for Business features will include:

- Full Lync feature set

- Familiar Skype icons for calling and video

- A call monitor to keep active calls visible while switching between apps

- Enterprise connection with the Skype network with IM, audio, and video

What are the new Skype for Business Server features?

The Skype for Business Server has significant availability, manageability, and functional enhancements over Lync Server 2013. It will include the full Lync Server 2013 feature support, plus:
- SQL Server Always On support
- *Native video interoperability service* for select Cisco Tandberg VTCs
- Call via work for PBX phone interoperability

Improved support for hybrid scenarios with Office 365 including future auditorium style meetings

We've also made upgrading to Skype for Business Server from Lync Server 2013 easy, with no additional server hardware requirements.

Will Skype for Business customers be able to contact Skype users with full functionality?

Skype for Business users will be able to use IM/chat, audio, and video to communicate with users of Skype consumer clients. Skype for Business users can also invite anyone, including Skype consumer client users, to join a Skype for Business meeting using a browser.

Which functionality won't be available in communication between Skype for Business users and Skype users?

Skype users will be unable to see shared screens and join multi-party meetings.

Will Skype for Business work with Windows 10?

Yes, once Windows 10 is released.

Will I be able to merge my Skype for Business and Skype log in and password?

No. Skype and Skype for Business are two separate offerings with different user IDs and passwords.

Will users of Skype consumer clients have access to the same features as Skype for Business users?

No. Skype consumer clients will maintain the same communications calling capabilities that they have today, but will not have access to the full Lync feature set available in Skype for Business. In addition, Skype consumer clients do not provide administrators with the security, compliance, and control features available to enterprises who use Skype for Business.

Will there be any changes for Lync 2010 or Lync 2013 customers and users?

We are updating the Lync 2013 client to enable 2013 customers to use the new Skype for Business UI immediately. There are no changes for Lync 2010 customers.

How do the security features of Skype for Business compare to Lync?

Skype for Business has all the same security features and mechanisms as Lync: end to end encryption of all signaling and media, authentication and authorization through Active Directory control, and eDiscovery and other compliance capabilities.

Will there be a new Skype for Business mobile app?

Yes, new Skype for Business mobile applications will be available on iOS and Android in the coming months. In the meantime, customers can continue to use the Lync mobile clients with Skype for Business.

Will government entities be able to monitor communications in Skype for Business?

Microsoft follows clear principles and policies in responding to government legal demands for customer data. Microsoft will continue to evaluate and respond appropriately to any information requests from law enforcement and other governmental entities for information related to any Office 365 online services, including Skype for Business.

How does the user experience compare between Skype and Skype for Business?

Skype for Business is designed to take advantage of the familiarity people have with Skype, making it simple and easy to adopt. It adds features from Lync that are valuable in a work context.

How will a user know if they are using Skype or Skype for Business?

While the Skype and Skype for Business clients share a common look and feel, they remain two separate clients with distinct branding and feature sets.

Will Lync users lose any functions or features when the product becomes Skype for Business?

No.

Have you made any improvements to the upgrade process?

Yes. Lync Server 2013 customers can upgrade easily to Skype for Business Server. We support the same hardware profiles and are providing tools to simplify the process.

PARTNER IMPACT AND READINESS

What happens to partners who invested in Lync 2013?

Partners are able to carry investments they've made in Lync 2013 over to Skype for Business, and benefit on the expertise, knowledge and experience they've built over the years. In fact, they're best positioned to serve Skype for Business customers and benefit from the new technology.

What resources do you have for training partners for Skype for Business competencies?

Partners can learn what's new in technology by visiting the Skype for Business part of the Office 365 Summit Readiness online resource library and joining the series of Skype for Business live webcasts.

Are partners ready today to help customers plan upgrades to Skype for Business?

Yes, more than 80% of the partner channel has been trained on the new technology and is ready to engage with customers to roll out Skype for Business.

How can I find a list of partners ready to help customers plan their deployments?

Customers are encouraged to engage with the partners listed here: https://products.office.com/en-us/Lync/microsoft-lync-partners-lync-support.

What is the opportunity for partners with the release of Skype for Business?

With interest already high in the new Skype for Business product, partners have a unique opportunity to capitalize by being among the first businesses with the skills and training necessary to offer customers end-to-end deployment of Skype for Business solution.

PRICING/SKUs

Will Lync 2013 customers with SA be able to upgrade to Skype for Business at no cost?

Yes. Customers with SA or an active subscription that covers Lync 2013 can upgrade to the new client at no cost.

Can you still purchase Skype for Business Online as a standalone service?

Yes.

Will Lync Server customers need to invest in new servers?

Because we support the same hardware profile, existing Lync Server 2013 customers can continue to use the same hardware. Of course, as these customers expand their deployments to cover more users and functions, they may require additional hardware.

Are there any changes to the O365 business SKUs?

Any changes in SKUs or pricing will be reflected in the official pricelist. We expect to update the pricelist for any online changes on April 1, and any server changes on May 1.

THIRD PARTY SOLUTION CERTIFICATION

Will qualified Lync solutions work with Skype for Business?

Skype for Business will support backwards compatibility with almost all third party devices, hardware and networking infrastructure, and communication services solutions that have been qualified on Lync 2013. While the majority of these solutions will work with the next release, please refer to TechNet for more details and any updates starting 3/16.

What is the Skype for Business Certification Program?

We are launching the Skype for Business Certification Program which encompasses all our third party devices, hardware and networking infrastructure, and communication services solutions that have passed the specifications outlined in the Skype for Business Certification Program. This new program brand will replace the Lync Qualification Program, UCOIP or Lync logo Program. The tiers, partners and products have not significantly changed; however, the former designations "Optimized" and "Compatible with" Lync, will be replaced with more simple terms "Certified for" and "Works with" Skype for Business, respectively. For more details please refer to TechNet starting 3/16.

COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

How will Skype for Business compare to the offerings from Cisco?

Skype for Business is uniquely positioned by virtue of its familiar, much loved user experience inspired by Skype, as well as the strength and scale of Office 365 as the most comprehensive collaboration and productivity solution available. All of this is underscored with the Microsoft's industry-leading security, compliance and IT control.

How will Skype for Business compare to Hangouts?

Skype for Business and Skype are differentiated with the ability to bring together businesses and consumers while maintaining the appropriate features and benefits for each audience. In addition, Skype for Business supports to 250 endpoint devices per meeting vs. the much smaller limit for other meeting solutions purported to work for businesses.