

Skype for Business is End of Life

Five questions to help you find an alternative

Microsoft stops supporting Skype for Business Server in 2025. What's next for your organisation if you want to continue running your communications on-premise?



What we already know about Skype for Business

Microsoft announced the [deprecation of Skype for Business back in 2017](#), with the product being replaced by Microsoft Teams.

The migration for organisations using cloud-based Skype for Business Online is straight-forward. It will be [retired in July 2021](#), with users switched to Microsoft Teams; part of the cloud-based Microsoft 365 platform.

The path for organisations using on-premise Skype of Business Server is less clear as there isn't a self-hosted version of Microsoft Teams.

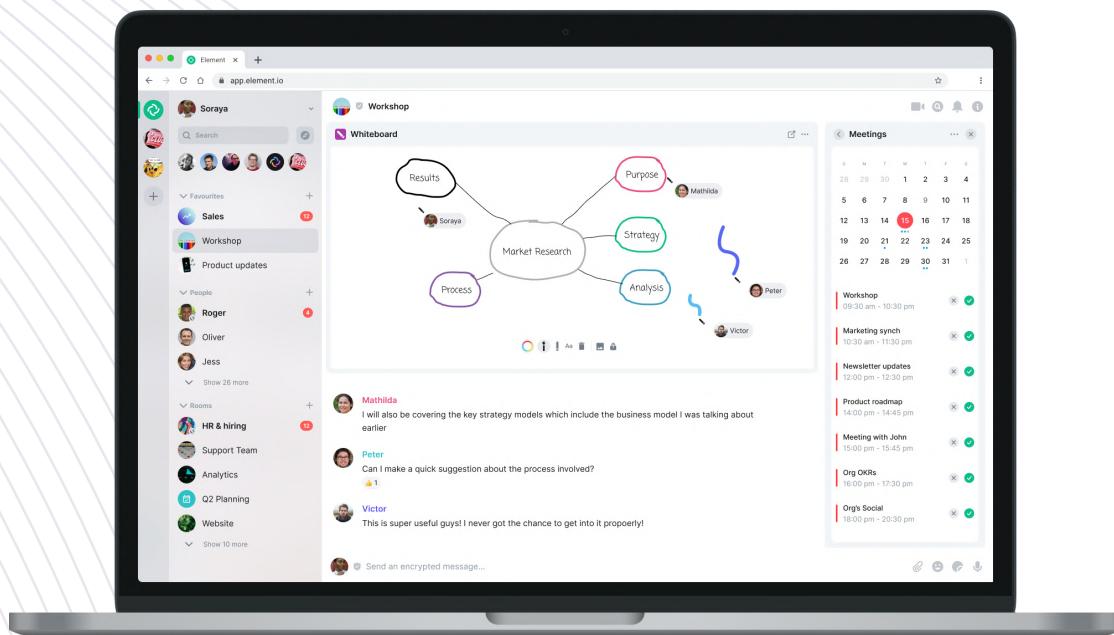
Skype for Business Server 2015 Mainstream Support ended in October 2020, with [Extended Support ending in October 2025](#).

Skype for Business Server 2019 will be [out of Mainstream Support in January 2024](#), with an unusually short Extended Support period meaning it'll also be fully End of Life in Q4 2025.

Skype for Business Server 2022 is due in H2 2021, but [only on a subscription-model](#). It is understood to be the last [classic on-premise product](#), and will offer little new functionality.

Whichever version an organisation is using, the message is clear; Microsoft is letting Skype for Business Server wither on its unloved, on-premise vine.

Security-conscious organisations that need to keep their communications on-premise need to look for self-hosted alternatives to Skype for Business Server.



1. Does Skype for Business Server have a convincing product roadmap?

In short, no. The roadmap is deprecation and a switch to Microsoft Teams.

Skype for Business Server 2015 is already in Extended Support and Skype for Business Server 2019 as it is out of Mainstream Support in January 2024. So the on-premise choice from Microsoft is to run a legacy version unsupported, or migrate to Skype for Business Server 2022.

Running unsupported software isn't a genuine option. It's prohibitively expensive and, more importantly, organisations use on-premise software because they are highly valued targets. Out-of-date software is ripe for widespread cyber attacks (think Petya and WannaCry), and a large attack vector for targeted exploits.

But migration to Skype for Business Server 2022 isn't viable either. It is the final on-premise version, and it promises zero innovation beyond subscription pricing.

Staying with Skype for Business Server is not a realistic option.

Viable product roadmap	
	✗
	✓
	✓
	✓
	✓
	✓
	✓

2. Do you really need to keep communications on-premise?

Presumably the answer is yes, you do need to stay on-premise. Any organisation using Skype for Business Server has deliberately foregone modern functionality in favour of data ownership and control. Otherwise Microsoft Teams would be a classic 'good enough' option if vendor-controlled, cloud-based communication was deemed an acceptable risk.

Governments, regulated industries and thousands of other regularly-targeted organisations need the digital sovereignty of a self-hosted communication platform.

You're committed to on-premise, so Microsoft Teams is out. What are your options?

On-premise



Cisco
webex



ROCKET.CHAT



Mattermost



element



3. Will your on-premise communication needs evolve?

Without a doubt. In fact the frightening truth is that the workforce's needs have already outstripped the capabilities of Skype for Business and other traditional platforms such as Cisco Webex.

Call it the consumerisation of IT, the trend for hybrid working or the fallout from the pandemic; employees are resorting to whatever works in order to get their job done.

The widespread adoption of messaging apps is just one example; and an ironic one.

WhatsApp and Signal are just as centralised and proprietary as Microsoft Teams or Slack.

The final edition of a legacy product, Skype for Business Server 2022 offers no innovation. It doesn't even offer competitive parity.

Your next on-premise system needs to be always updated, and constantly evolving to support new ways of working.

There are modern on-premise solutions that fit the bill.

Innovation



4. Is securing communication as important as keeping it on-premise?

Well, of course. If communication is worth keeping on-premise, then it needs to be kept secure. The very reason for not trusting a centralised cloud service such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, Signal or WhatsApp is that they are huge honeypots that are subject to all sorts of interest, from criminals to nation states.

But as we saw with the Microsoft Exchange Server attacks in March 2021, on-premise servers have vulnerabilities that can be exploited. Like Microsoft Exchange Server, Skype for Business Server is not end-to-end encrypted (E2EE) which means that if it gets owned in an attack, all its data is fully accessible.

Skype for Business Server is an on-premise system that is not end-to-end encrypted (E2EE). What's needed is an E2EE real time communication platform, and one that guards against eavesdroppers through cross-signed device verification.

	E2EE	Verification
 Skype	✗	✗
 Microsoft Teams	✗	✗
Cisco  webex	✗	✗
 Rocket.Chat	✓	✗
 Mattermost	✗	✗
 Wire	✓	✗
 element	✓	✓

5. Will your workforce be able to communicate with everyone?

Unless it's purely for internal use, the answer is no. Skype offers open federation of course, but all parties have to be Skype users. So like traditional vendor-hosted platforms, and most modern on-premise alternatives, Skype is a walled garden. A communications system needs to be open - just like the web or email - especially if it will be used to connect outside of the organisation.

The open standard for decentralised real time communications is Matrix; a protocol that already supports more than 30 million users. Whilst Wire uses the encryption open standard MLS, it does not rely on an open standard for communication, so its users are also locked in a walled garden.

And for connecting with others that are not on Matrix, Matrix-based bridges support interoperability with a wide range of proprietary platforms, including Microsoft Teams, Slack, Discord, Telegram, WhatsApp... and even Skype for Business!

By opting for a Matrix-based platform (for example Element), an organisation is able to keep its communications on-premise, end-to-end encrypted and open for easy connectivity.

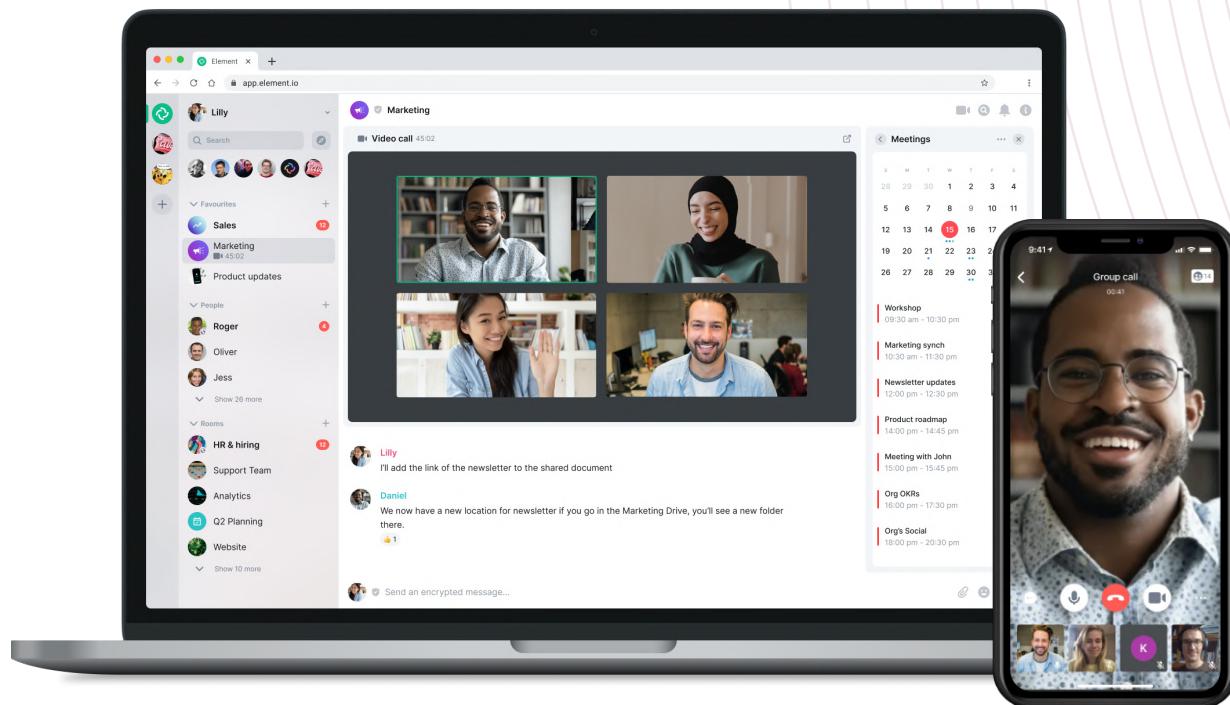
			 Cisco Webex	 ROCKET.CHAT	 Mattermost	 Wire	 element
Viable product roadmap	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
On-premise	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Innovation	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
End-to-end encryption	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Cross-signed device verification	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Open standard	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Open network	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
No vendor lock-in	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓

The answer is element

After five questions the answer is clear; Element is the most viable alternative to Skype for Business Server.

On-premise communications might be your priority, but it isn't Microsoft's. Skype for Business Server 2022 is the final version, is outdated at launch and will be increasingly expensive to maintain. If cloud-based Microsoft Teams isn't an option, you need to find a new on-premise alternative.

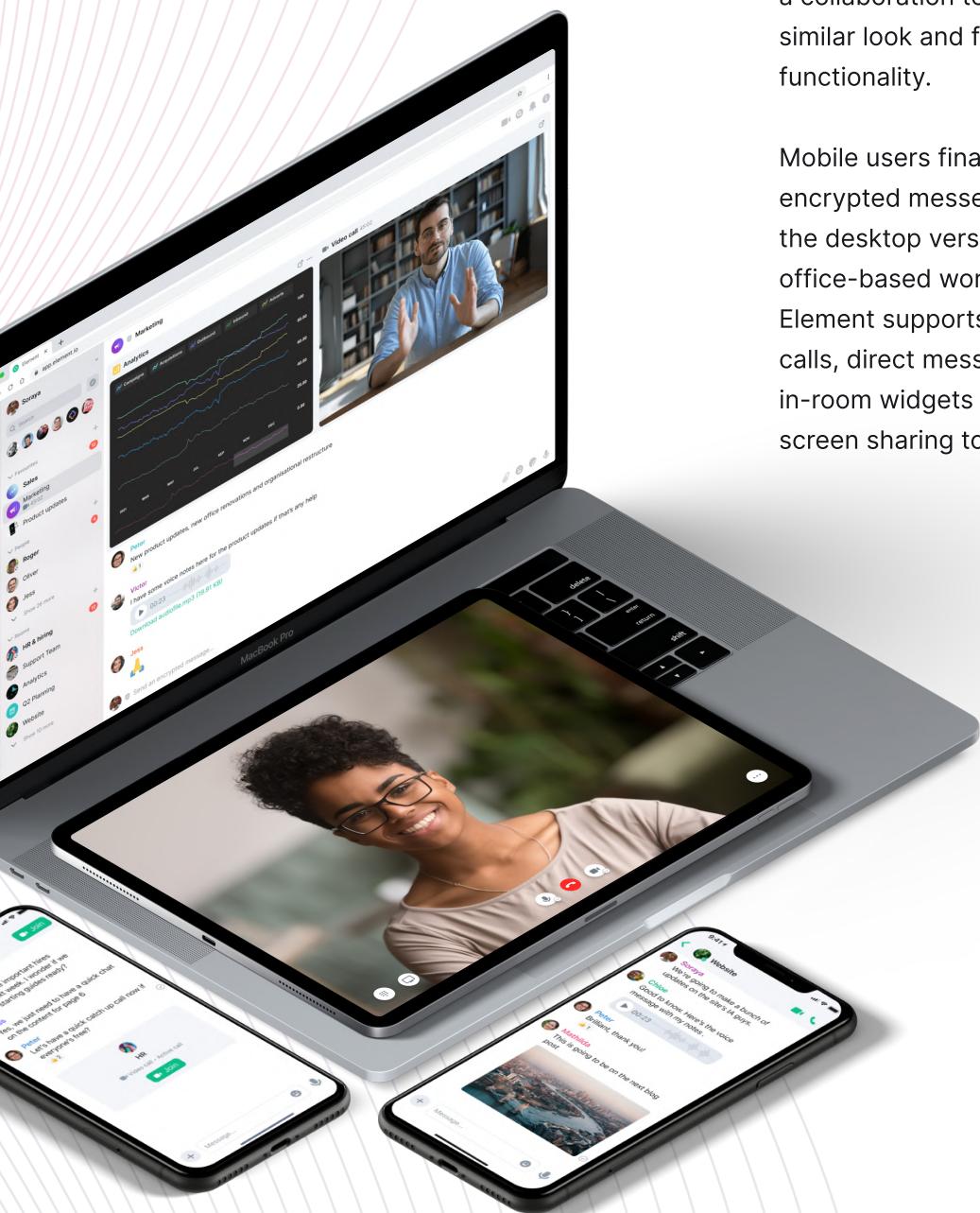
There is a range of on-premise real time communications platforms, but only Element offers end-to-end encryption, an open standard for easy connectivity, federation and bridging to traditional centralised proprietary systems.



The Element app is a combined collaboration tool and messenger

One of the reasons why Element is so popular with end users is its messenger-style app, which stops Shadow IT issues around the adoption of consumer messaging apps. It has the ease and speed of WhatsApp, but with the functionality of a collaboration tool. Desktop users enjoy a similar look and feel, and additional power-user functionality.

Mobile users finally have an end-to-end encrypted messenger that's fully integrated with the desktop version; so frontline, remote and office-based workers are constantly in sync. Element supports 1:1 and group voice and video calls, direct messaging and group chat, and in-room widgets to support everything from screen sharing to real time data feeds.



Element puts the enterprise in control

Element is a decentralised solution that supports on-premise deployment, and private (as well as open) federation.

Deployed at an enterprise level, Element supports the business with essentials such as single sign-on, auditing and moderation.

And because it's based on an open standard that's already adopted by 30 million addressable users, Element makes real time messaging as universal as email. And for connecting with other parties stuck in traditional walled garden systems, there is a wide range of bridging options.

Matrix is open source

Matrix is an open network for secure, decentralised communication. It supports both on-premise and cloud-based deployments, end-to-end encryption and cross-signed device verification.

Matrix-based solutions can be deployed using purely open source implementations, including the Element app. Companies can run them as they see fit. Element provides consulting, services and bespoke development to support and manage on-premise deployments.

Trusted by governments and businesses around the world



A secure messenger and collaboration tool for the French government



Germany's Bundeswehr use Element for secure communications



Element is used for safe, inclusive communications at the University of Innsbruck



Join the migration to Element, and Matrix-based real time communications

[Contact Element](#)