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BEST PRACTICES



2026

GLOBAL HYBRID ENTERPRISE COMMUNICATIONS

COMPETITIVE STRATEGY LEADERSHIP

CISCO

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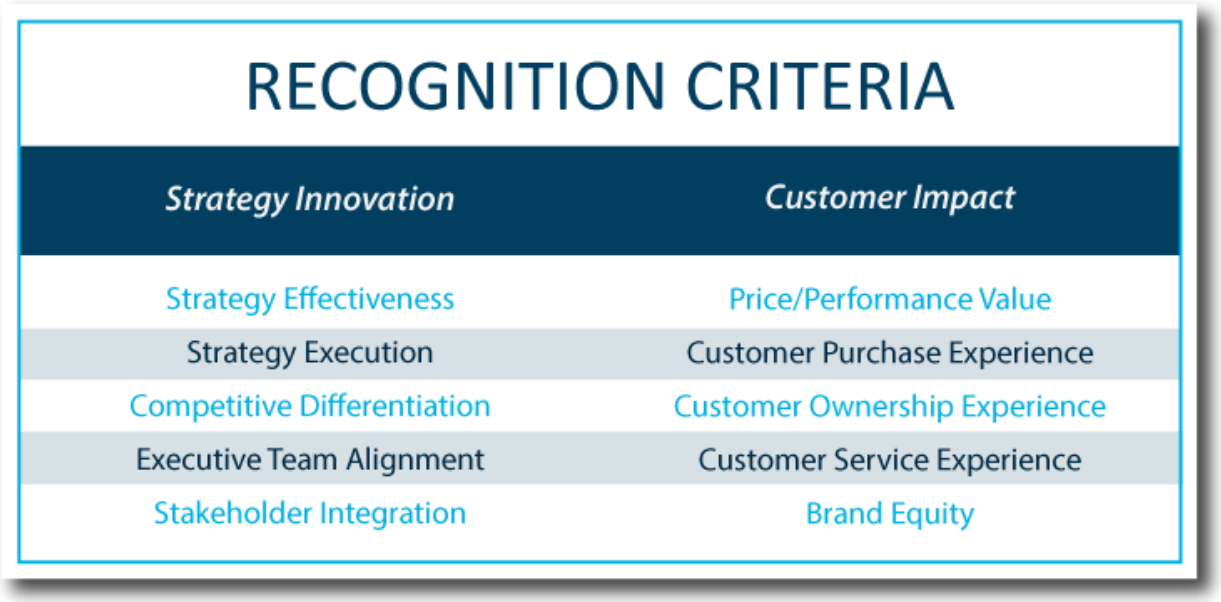
The Growth Pipeline Generator™ 11

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Best Practices Criteria for World-Class Performance

Frost & Sullivan applies a rigorous analytical process to evaluate multiple nominees for each recognition category before determining the final recognition recipient. The process involves a detailed evaluation of best practices criteria across two dimensions for each nominated company. Cisco excels in many of the criteria in the hybrid enterprise communications space.



RECOGNITION CRITERIA

Strategy Innovation	*Customer Impact*
Strategy Effectiveness	Price/Performance Value
Strategy Execution	Customer Purchase Experience
Competitive Differentiation	Customer Ownership Experience
Executive Team Alignment	Customer Service Experience
Stakeholder Integration	Brand Equity

The Transformation of the Enterprise Communications Industry

Hybrid Communications Dominate

Frost & Sullivan IT/telecom decision-maker survey data indicate that, even as cloud communications adoption advances, the majority of organizations will continue to operate premises-based telephony systems within their environments through 2028. Key factors compelling organizations to maintain premises-based telephony include concerns related to security, selected by 32% of IT/telecom decision-makers, reliability, 29%, and compliance, 27%. Hybrid telephony deployments incorporating a mix of cloud and premises-based solutions will remain dominant in the near term and present in 82% of organizations' environments in 2028.

Volatile political and macroeconomic conditions are prompting many organizations to delay long-term communications investment decisions, while simultaneously reshaping deployment criteria. Rising geopolitical tensions, in particular, are driving a surge in data-sovereignty requirements, with many businesses and institutions placing greater emphasis on where communications data are processed, transmitted, stored, and governed. These heightened regional compliance expectations are increasingly shaping decisions about whether to deploy fully cloud-based, hybrid, or local communications architectures, and they are pressuring vendors to expand regional hosting footprints and strengthen granular data-control options.

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Technology investment decisions are further complicated by a reversal in work-model trends. After years of widespread hybrid work following the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of organizations are shifting employees back to the office to strengthen culture, improve collaboration, or justify existing real-estate and infrastructure investments. These dynamics reinforce demand for hybrid communications solutions capable of supporting remote, office-centric, and mixed environments simultaneously.

> *"Cisco uniquely aligns with market realities in its persistent embrace of hybrid communications solutions that address the diverse operational constraints shaping enterprise decision-making. By offering flexible migration paths and deployment models that blend cloud innovation, advanced AI capabilities, and the stability of premises-based systems, Cisco is poised to meet organizations where they are—adapting to security, reliability, compliance, and evolving workplace dynamics rather than forcing abrupt architectural shifts."*
>
> ***- Elka Popova,***
> ***VP of Connected Work***

Providers that combine flexible cloud services with solutions to modernize office spaces—such as advanced desk and meeting room devices and software, workspace reservation, digital signage, wayfinding systems, integration with building management and control systems (e.g., power, lighting, HVAC), and managed support for premises-based communications, network, and security environments—will be best positioned to serve organizations navigating evolving workplace requirements.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Driven Communications Modernization is a Strategic Imperative

AI technologies are evolving rapidly, with agentic AI redefining how communications platforms orchestrate workflows and elevating the bar for customer and provider relevance. Organizations increasingly view AI as a strategic priority, with 79% of IT/telecom decision-makers stating they want to become more AI-enabled. Notably, 74% place high importance on agentic AI solutions that can act autonomously and drive smarter outcomes. When selecting their next communications solution, 86% will favor providers committed to an AI-powered technology roadmap and will prefer an integrated platform to leverage common AI tools across calling, meetings, messaging, and contact center applications.

Much of the AI innovation today is delivered from modern cloud-based platforms, effectively limiting access to AI-driven productivity enhancements and workflow automation for organizations relying on premises-based communications. This dearth of AI capabilities that integrate with premises-based and first-generation hosted telephony solutions creates opportunities for communications solution providers that can bridge legacy environments with advanced AI services.

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Strategy Effectiveness and Execution

Cisco's enterprise communications strategy reflects a pragmatic understanding of how organizations evolve their communications platforms. Many enterprises continue to rely on Cisco Unified Communications Manager (UCM) as their mission-critical telephony engine because it delivers the reliability, security, and control that highly regulated industries require. Cisco's acknowledgement of this reality is evidenced in its decision to strengthen rather than sunset UCM and pursue a portfolio strategy that balances continuity with innovation.

UCM has undergone hundreds of security and product enhancements in recent releases, which signals Cisco's dedication to long-term platform viability. By continuing to invest in the UCM family, including sustained release planning with software updates for UCM 15 and roadmap commitments well into the next decade, Cisco enables organizations to modernize operations without abandoning trusted infrastructure.

This approach extends into a broader hybrid strategy that enables a continuum of deployment models, including multitenant cloud, dedicated instance, on-premises, hybrid, and partner-hosted (BroadWorks). Cloud Intelligence for UCM NOT Cloud Intelligence for UCM is central to this strategy, allowing organizations to layer cloud innovation—including AI capabilities, cloud PSTN, and advanced queueing—onto existing environments without disrupting dial plans, workflows, or integrations. This flexibility is particularly valuable for regulated and distributed enterprises.

Cisco's vision is future-focused, aligning directly with macro trends around hybrid work, mobility, cloud expansion, and AI-driven automation, while balancing elevated customer requirements for compliance and data sovereignty. AI-powered innovations for hybrid communications environments, leveraging BroadWorks-based or UCM-supported calling, illustrate Cisco's strong follow-through on its AI-first strategy, extending advanced AI capabilities across both cloud and premises-based telephony environments.

Cisco's execution is reinforced by Collaboration Control Hub, which provides unified provisioning, analytics, and management across hybrid environments. Organizations can deploy capabilities incrementally—by site or user—while maintaining a consistent operational framework. Webex Suite, comprising a broad range of applications including Calling, Meetings, Messaging, Events, and Webinars, further streamlines adoption by enabling a unified commercial model and reducing friction when expanding across workloads and deployment options within the Cisco ecosystem.

Cisco also wins with its ability to unify collaboration with networking, security, and devices, while extending this integration into the physical workplace through solutions for workspace reservation, digital signage, and wayfinding that help organizations better manage and optimize office environments. This integrated approach is translating into enterprise pull-through: leadership attributed two $1B+ megadeals in FY2025 to broader platform wins that included Webex, highlighting the effectiveness of Cisco's unified go-to-market and its traction with the world's largest organizations.

Competitive Differentiation and Price/Performance Value

Cisco's competitive differentiation and price/performance value proposition in hybrid enterprise communications are built on four reinforcing pillars spanning hybrid telephony architecture, AI integration, ecosystem openness, and investment protection.

Cisco's architecture stands out for its combination of flexibility and integration. Few providers support an equivalently wide range of calling architectures while maintaining a unified innovation layer across environments. This enables enterprises to optimize for regulatory, geographic, and operational requirements without sacrificing access to modern capabilities.

AI is another key differentiator of Cisco's hybrid calling and broader enterprise communications strategy. Cisco embeds AI natively across communications workflows—including AI Receptionist, AI Assistant for Webex Calling, and Webex Calling Customer Assist—delivering intelligent automation, actionable insights, and consistent user experiences across applications. Critically, these capabilities extend to legacy environments through Cisco's hybrid architecture, enabling organizations to bring modern AI innovation into existing telephony deployments. This ability to unify AI-driven experiences across cloud and on-premises environments distinguishes Cisco from providers whose AI capabilities are limited to fully cloud-native platforms.

Webex Go for UCM, pending release later in 2026, will extend enterprise calling identities to mobile devices through eSIM and native dialer integration, supporting frontline and mobile-first roles in UCM deployments. Additional upcoming Cloud Intelligence for UCM NOT Cloud Intelligence for UCM features include the extension of core calling capabilities such as IVR, auto attendant, voicemail, emergency services, and call recording into the cloud, allowing organizations to reduce reliance on premises-based infrastructure, simplify service provisioning, and enable more scalable deployments.

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Complementing its hybrid collaboration and calling strategy, Cisco also differentiates through ecosystem openness. Support for Microsoft Teams and Zoom meetings on Cisco devices allows customers to standardize infrastructure while maintaining platform flexibility. Combined with Cisco strengths in networking, security, and observability, this creates a uniquely integrated and adaptable enterprise communications platform.

Cisco delivers strong price/performance value by enabling modernization without requiring customers to abandon existing investments. Organizations can preserve UCM-based infrastructure—including endpoints, dial plans, and integrations—while incrementally adopting Webex cloud capabilities, reducing risk and capital expenditure. Cloud PSTN further contributes to value by eliminating the need to maintain extensive on-premises telephony gateways, reducing operational costs associated with hardware, maintenance, and carrier complexity.

AI-driven capabilities such as AI Receptionist, AI Assistant for Webex Calling, and Webex Calling Customer Assist enhance Cisco's price/performance value in hybrid environments by improving efficiency and reducing operational overhead. AI Receptionist automates front-end interactions through intelligent call

handling, lowering the need for human intervention, while AI Assistant eliminates manual note-taking and follow-up tracking to improve accuracy and employee productivity. Customer Assist further reduces escalations and optimizes call handling through AI-generated guidance, sentiment analysis, and intent recognition. Together, these capabilities—combined with Cisco's global infrastructure and reliability—drive measurable productivity gains and cost savings, delivering strong ROI without requiring full platform migration.

Customer Purchase and Ownership Experience

Cisco provides a flexible and partner-driven purchasing model that supports phased workload adoption and cloud migration. Customers can procure solutions through direct sales, resellers, service providers, and agents, while programs such as Collaboration Flex and Webex Suite enable consolidated licensing across hybrid environments. Cisco's extensive partner ecosystem plays a key role in the purchase journey, providing advisory, integration, and managed services that help organizations with on-premises Cisco solutions successfully transition to hybrid or cloud communications.

Several PSTN connectivity options are similarly flexible, allowing customers to choose from different deployment models. The recently introduced cloud PSTN option for UCM environments allows customers to reduce on-premises telephony hardware while gaining access to a broad and deep global ecosystem of Certified Calling Providers. In other scenarios, UCM together with local gateway capabilities acts as a strategic bridge between existing on-premises PSTN infrastructure and cloud platforms such as Webex Calling.

Customers can combine Cisco PSTN services with partner PSTN providers or consolidate to a single carrier depending on operational preferences. These options give organizations a high degree of control and confidence that they are selecting the optimal solution for their operational realities.

Cisco ensures a strong ownership experience through continuous innovation and investment protection. Ongoing enhancements to Webex, UCM, and BroadWorks, combined with hybrid capabilities, allow customers to adopt new features without disruptive migrations.

Hybrid architectures offer significant investment protection by preserving customers' existing Cisco phone and video endpoints, survivability mechanisms, and call control capabilities while enabling targeted innovation such as AI, cloud PSTN, and advanced queueing. This modular approach minimizes disruption and training requirements while accelerating time to value.

Collaboration Control Hub provides a unified management experience across environments and across apps, with centralized visibility into users, devices, analytics, and performance. Cisco's continued investments in global infrastructure and a global push for 99.999 percent reliability further enhance reliability and long-term customer confidence.

Brand Equity

Cisco is one of the strongest brands in enterprise communications and is synonymous with reliability, security, innovation, and long-standing leadership. With more than 30 million UCM seats deployed, a similarly-sized BroadWorks base, approximately 20 million Webex Calling users, and a global presence across more than +200 markets, Cisco has earned the trust of organizations worldwide. Its reputation is

reinforced by its consistent execution, commitment to hybrid flexibility, and ability to anticipate and address emerging customer needs.

Webex is deeply embedded in mission-critical operations for thousands of companies, including the vast majority of Fortune 500 organizations. Its reputation for secure, high-quality, and reliable cloud services contributes to strong customer loyalty and high satisfaction scores. As Cisco continues to invest in AI, mobility, global cloud infrastructure, and integrated observability, it strengthens the brand's standing as a forward-looking leader committed to delivering superior customer outcomes. This lasting positive perception contributes directly to Cisco's strong brand equity and its ability to retain and grow its customer base year after year.

Conclusion

Cisco stands out by aligning its strategy with market reality: hybrid communications will remain dominant, and enterprises need flexibility to modernize without sacrificing security, compliance, reliability, or control.

Its continued investment in UCM, broad range of deployment models, and ability to extend AI innovation across both cloud and legacy environments give customers a practical, low-disruption path to modernization that few competitors can match.

Combined with Cisco's strengths in collaboration, networking, security, devices, and workplace technology, this creates a differentiated platform advantage that delivers both immediate operational value and long-term investment protection.

For its strong overall performance, Cisco is presented with Frost & Sullivan's 2026 Global Competitive Strategy Leadership recognition in the hybrid enterprise communications industry.

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What You Need to Know about the Competitive Strategy Leadership Recognition

Frost & Sullivan's Competitive Strategy Leadership Recognition identifies the company with a standout approach to achieving top-line growth and a superior customer experience.

Best Practices Recognition Analysis

For the Competitive Strategy Leadership Recognition, Frost & Sullivan analysts independently evaluated the criteria listed below.

Strategy Innovation

Strategy Effectiveness: Effective strategy balances short-term performance needs with long-term aspirations and overall company vision

Strategy Execution: Company strategy utilizes best practices to support consistent and efficient processes

Competitive Differentiation: Solutions or products articulate and display unique competitive advantages

Executive Team Alignment: Executive team focuses on staying ahead of key competitors via a unified execution of its organization's mission, vision, and strategy

Stakeholder Integration: Company strategy reflects the needs or circumstances of all industry stakeholders, including competitors, customers, investors, and employees

Customer Impact

Price/Performance Value: Products or services offer the best ROI and superior value compared to similar market offerings

Customer Purchase Experience: Purchase experience with minimal friction and high transparency assures customers that they are buying the optimal solution to address both their needs and constraints

Customer Ownership Excellence: Products and solutions evolve continuously in sync with the customers' own growth journeys, engendering pride of ownership and enhanced customer experience

Customer Service Experience: Customer service is readily accessible and stress-free, and delivered with high quality, high availability, and fast response time

Brand Equity: Customers perceive the brand positively and exhibit high brand loyalty, which is regularly measured and confirmed through a high Net Promoter Score®

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Best Practices Recognition Analytics Methodology

Inspire the World to Support True Leaders

This long-term process spans 12 months, beginning with the prioritization of the sector. It involves a rigorous approach that includes comprehensive scanning and analytics to identify key best practice trends. A dedicated team of analysts, advisors, coaches, and experts collaborates closely, ensuring thorough review and input. The goal is to maximize the company's long-term value by leveraging unique perspectives to support each Best Practice Recognition and identify meaningful transformation and impact.

		VALUE IMPACT	
STEP		WHAT	WHY
1	Opportunity Universe	Identify Sectors with the Greatest Impact on the Global Economy	Value to Economic Development
2	Transformational Model	Analyze Strategic Imperatives That Drive Transformation	Understand and Create a Winning Strategy
3	Ecosystem	Map Critical Value Chains	Comprehensive Community that Shapes the Sector
4	Growth Generator	Data Foundation That Provides Decision Support System	Spark Opportunities and Accelerate Decision-making
5	Growth Opportunities	Identify Opportunities Generated by Companies	Drive the Transformation of the Industry
6	Frost Radar	Benchmark Companies on Future Growth Potential	Identify Most Powerful Companies to Action
7	Best Practices	Identify Companies Achieving Best Practices in All Critical Perspectives	Inspire the World
8	Companies to Action	Tell Your Story to the World (BICEP*)	Ecosystem Community Supporting Future Success

*Board of Directors, Investors, Customers, Employees, Partners

About Frost & Sullivan

Frost & Sullivan is the Growth Pipeline Company™. We power our clients to a future shaped by growth. Our Growth Pipeline as a Service™ provides the CEO and the CEO's growth team with a continuous and rigorous platform of growth opportunities, ensuring long-term success. To achieve positive outcomes, our team leverages over 60 years of experience, coaching organizations of all types and sizes across 6 continents with our proven best practices. To power your Growth Pipeline future, visit Frost & Sullivan at http://www.frost.com.

The Growth Pipeline Generator™

Frost & Sullivan's proprietary model to systematically create ongoing growth opportunities and strategies for our clients is fueled by the Innovation Generator™.

Learn more.

Key Impacts:

- **Growth Pipeline:** *Continuous Flow of Growth Opportunities*
- **Growth Strategies:** *Proven Best Practices*
- **Innovation Culture:** *Optimized Customer Experience*
- **ROI & Margin:** *Implementation Excellence*
- **Transformational Growth:** *Industry Leadership*



The Innovation Generator™

Our 6 analytical perspectives are crucial in capturing the broadest range of innovative growth opportunities, most of which occur at the points of these perspectives.

Analytical Perspectives:

- Megatrend (MT)
- Business Model (BM)
- Technology (TE)
- Industries (IN)
- Customer (CU)
- Geographies (GE)

