

The rise of collaboration apps in China, and how marketers can harness their potential

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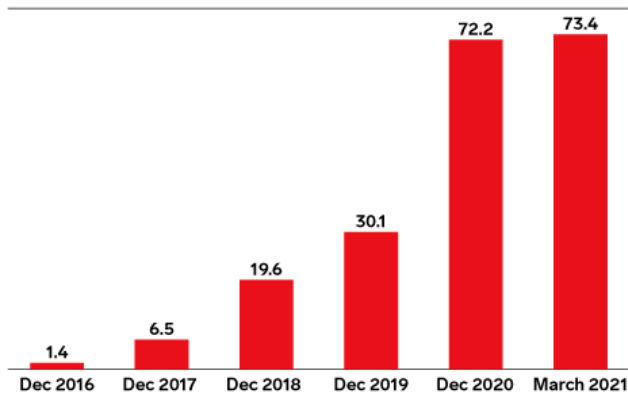
Workplace transformation remains one of the pandemic's biggest stories. As companies shifted to remote work in 2020, adoption of collaboration tools in China skyrocketed—and

Tencent's app for enterprises, WeCom, was no exception. The app's interoperability with WeChat and arsenal of business features will make it a valuable asset for marketers even after offices reopen.

In April 2016, WeCom launched as WeChat Work in China, to only moderate success. The pandemic has turbocharged its user growth, however. In December 2020, the number of monthly active users (MAUs) in China more than doubled year over year to reach 72.2 million, per research firm QuestMobile.

**Monthly Active WeCom* App Users in China,
Dec 2016-March 2021**

millions



Note: represents activities in the QuestMobile network, broader industry metrics may vary;
*also known as WeChat Work
Source: QuestMobile, April 30, 2021

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Alibaba's own collaboration app, DingTalk, also saw tremendous uptake in China during the pandemic, among not just knowledge workers, but also students using it for remote learning. In March 2020, there were 61.9 million new installs of DingTalk in China, up 436% year over year, according to QuestMobile data.

Another trend driving work collaboration platforms is that companies in China are increasingly stringent about business conversations on non-official channels--which are often conducted on WeChat.

It's no surprise, then, that China's digital giants see the B2B space as the next frontier. ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok, launched collaboration app Feishu (known internationally as Lark) in 2019, and ecommerce giant Pinduoduo also entered the space last March with the app Knock.

In addition to the usual videoconferencing and file-sharing tools, one of WeCom's core strengths is its interoperability with WeChat's ecosystem (The super app had 1.23 billion MAUs worldwide as of Q4 2020, according to Tencent), which enables WeCom users to easily communicate with existing users of WeChat, even if they don't have WeCom downloaded.

By sharing a miniprogram specific for this purpose with participants, WeCom enables users to "flip" a group chat on WeChat into company-owned conversations.

Also sharable are miniprograms developed for WeCom, along with promotional materials and industry insights, to their WeChat contacts.

"All kinds of classic B2B marketing scenarios, where you provide support through sharing content, are supercharged within WeCom," said Aaron Chang, founder of China-based marketing automation platform JINGdigital.

He pointed to three areas in particular where the app could be a powerful marketing tool. The first was guiding prospects at the top of the funnel to engage one-on-one with the sales team and reassign as needed.

The second was sharing content with various account segments. Marketers can add clients or prospects to different group chats, via an invitation or QR code, to provide personalized engagement and push targeted content. "We've seen much higher response rates [for content shared in group chats] than for content pushed through an official channel, like a company account," Chang said.

The third is intracompany marketing communication. When opted in, business partners or different branches of a company can access each other's organizational structures and contact lists, according to Chang, enabling marketing and sales teams to send campaigns, product announcements, and other content directly to decision-makers. This is particularly useful when marketing to dealers and distributors.

In the increasingly crowded enterprise app landscape, platforms can stand out by elevating not only workflows, but the work experience as a whole. Expect collaboration apps in China to expand beyond productivity and into content and services, particularly in healthcare and fitness.