

The Right Network: **Delivering Business Value for the Future**

Feature-rich, next-generation networks help drive innovation and value to midsize companies and position them for competitive advantage.



IT departments today are facing pressure from all sides. Externally, the uncertain economic climate is squeezing budgets, curtailing new technology acquisitions and leveling—even shrinking—IT head counts. Meanwhile, the pace of technology advancement has quickened to a breakneck speed, keeping IT professionals in constant evaluation mode to determine which technologies are a must for their organizations and which are largely hype.

From the inside, technology advances that have been viewed as enabling and beneficial are also placing new pressures on IT. Business departments looking to deploy new processes and systems aren't always willing to wait for IT; more and more of these departments are striking out on their own to make deals with cloud service providers for the infrastructures and/or applications they need. And employees—not IT—are starting to dictate which endpoints they use to access networks and data, as the march of the consumer device into the corporate world continues. An



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organization may end up with a “shadow IT” department: employees using collaboration services such as DropBox, Google Mail and Skype without even realizing that they are using cloud services or apps. Such changes are resulting in a lack of control for IT, even over assets that should be within their purview.

Amid these forces, IT departments at midsize companies find themselves particularly challenged. These companies aren’t as nimble as startups and small businesses, which, because of their size can more readily course-correct and revamp their strategies as needed. Midsize companies also don’t have large staffs or big budgets typical of enterprises, which can leverage bandwidth and funding to run pilots before deploying a solution across the company. IT departments in midsize companies are under pressure to choose technology solutions that are the right fit for today’s challenges but are also feature-rich enough to meet the demands of tomorrow while keeping the network and business secure. Making strategic technology decisions means

choosing the right solutions the first time. “Midsize organizations need to operate very strategically in how they manage their investments,” says Joel Conover, director of enterprise marketing at Cisco. “They can’t afford to be on the trailing edge of technology, because a nimble competitor will outmaneuver them. They need to stay at the forefront.”

Beyond Operations

Strategic thinking in IT can be a lofty goal. Studies show that approximately 70 percent of the average IT department’s time is spent just providing basic connectivity and security, leaving few hours for strategic projects that actually enhance the business and drive value. This is particularly true for midsize organizations, which can grow to the 1,000-employee mark but may still have only two or three technology professionals on staff. These outnumbered departments need products that help drive down that 70 percent through intelligent, strategic technology that minimizes the strain on IT resources and maximizes the potential for innovation.

Undoubtedly, the most important component of strategic IT systems is the network. IT departments need to be able to cut through the hype and hoopla of new releases to choose strategic network solutions that address the challenges of today but also have the feature sets to meet the requirements of tomorrow. Although opting for point products may reduce capital expenditures and solve discrete problems facing the business today, many midsize companies have found out the hard way that good-enough offerings often fail to include the features required for future business needs. Tactical network solutions are often low-cost, but due to the ongoing operational support and upgrades they require in addition to their inability to meet new business challenges, they often prove to be hindrances to organizations in the long run. And because these tactical network offerings aren’t built for the future, choosing these options can mean having to replace products much sooner than expected so that IT doesn’t end up holding back the business.

A recent Cisco study found that building a tactical network based on low-cost point products and services increases the total cost of ownership (TCO) for most organizations by at least 20 to 35 percent over a three-year time period.

Thinking Strategically

On the other hand, when strategic network solutions are adopted, IT puts itself in a position to drive the business by supporting advanced capabilities. Having the foresight to look beyond capital expenses to TCO—including operations—and return on investment (ROI), midsize companies can easily recognize the benefits of strategic, next-generation network options. This foresight also helps IT regain control by preventing the development of shadow IT departments that spring up across an organization when employees feel that corporate IT isn’t responding adequately to their needs. When IT can

quickly and efficiently support—even anticipate—new business requirements, control is regained and IT is back in the driver's seat.

Next-generation strategic networks form the basis for enablement. Unlike tactical point products, strategic networking solutions integrate and offer key enterprise features such as built-in security, automation and management. These features are particularly important as device proliferation grows. Employees demand easy access to corporate assets anywhere, from any device, and the network must be able to ensure the necessary security, compliance and management of the endpoints. In the context of virtualization and cloud computing services, the network becomes the common thread that brings all these systems together, providing a consistent flow of intelligence end to end while also reducing power consumption. And trends such as globalization and virtualized teams are necessitating more-demanding applications such as video and desktop virtualization, applications that will frustrate and fail without the proper network underpinning them.

"All these trends have one platform in common: the network," says Conover. "There are a lot of moving parts, and the network is the only common thing that links them. If organizations look at the network as simply plumbing, they're going to face some backups. The right network changes everything."

The right network empowers IT departments at midsize companies to:

- Enable users to connect with any device anywhere, at any time—securely, reliably and seamlessly
- Ensure a consistent, high-quality user experience
- Support an increasingly mobile workforce, exploit cloud services and address new security threats
- Create a critical asset that drives business and keeps companies competitive by taking the focus off

Products that offer IT a unified view of their wired and wireless networks and include diagnostic tools that help resolve log-on issues without requiring help desk escalation also save time and money.

IT operations and emphasizing value to the organization

Solutions built for the long term ease the operational burden on IT while enabling the business to do more. For example, networking products that feature deep application intelligence can look at video streams and determine where in the network latency is occurring—be it due to dropped packets, insufficient bandwidth or other factors—so IT can quickly resolve the problem. Products that offer IT a unified view of their wired and wireless networks and include diagnostic tools that help resolve log-on issues without requiring help desk escalation also save time and money, not to mention limit end user and help desk staff frustration. And with the explosion of smart mobile devices—according to the Cisco Visual Networking Index, there will be nearly one mobile connected device for every person on earth by 2015—and employee demand to allow these devices on the corporate network, products must have security, policy, compliance and remote-management capabilities built in so that IT can embrace the mobility trend, not shun it.

Tried and Tested Globally

Cisco is the worldwide leader in delivering strategic, next-generation network options and claims leadership on several fronts:

- Market share leadership enables Cisco to understand customer requirements better and innovate for future services.

- Its breadth of product offerings (including switching, wireless local area networks (WLANs), wide area network (WAN) routing, Internet Protocol (IP) telephony [IPT], network security, data center and other network-related areas) gives Cisco a holistic, end-to-end view of the network.
- Cisco offers innovative products and best-in-class services built on years of experience in customer deployments, with 20 worldwide centers, more than 630 Cisco employees with CCIEs and a global network of more than 25,000 CCIE certified customers.
- Cisco offers centralized policies that enable IT personnel to define business rules once and apply them holistically across the entire network.

What's more, Cisco works with its customers to create networks that are future-proof and respond to the following industry trends:

- **Security and policy** — Limiting risk means ensuring that an end-to-end security and policy architecture is in place. Cisco offers the Cisco SecureX Architecture, which delivers pervasive visibility and control with full context awareness to provide security across the network, from headquarters to branch offices, and for in-house employees as well as remote workers on wired or wireless devices.
- **Interactive multimedia awareness** — Adoption of video and

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interactive multimedia is on the rise within enterprises, although IT departments are rightfully cautious about the effect higher-bandwidth video will have on the network as a whole. Cisco Medianet provides a network-wide strategy for deploying, optimizing, monitoring and troubleshooting video on the network.

- **Virtual desktops** — This computing model has a firm foothold in the financial services industry and is making advances in health care, manufacturing and other industries, because thin-client computers can be centrally managed from the data center, which greatly reduces IT complexity, drives efficiency and helps with regulatory compliance. Cisco's Virtual Experience Infrastructure (VXI) helps virtual desktops execute more-complex functions such as IP telephony or streaming video with a heightened-quality experience.
- **Cloud services** — As organizations move toward cloud-based services as a means of reducing operations costs, the traditional IT challenges of security, performance and availability are re-focused on this new business model. The Cisco architecture for cloud-based service delivery—whether private or public clouds—has solutions for each of these areas and is centered on the Cisco Unified Computing System™, which brings together the network fabric, computing resources and virtualization and management software to simplify setup, improve business metrics and support just-in-time provisioning for service deployment.

In addition to offering the most comprehensive networking solutions on the market, Cisco has a community of highly trained and certified partners that understand the unique needs of each customer. Customers are guided through the selection, deployment and management processes so that they can continue to focus on their business.

Among Cisco's technical support and services offerings are the following:

- **Cisco SMARTnet**, which gives IT staff direct, anytime access to Cisco engineers, the Technical Assistance Center (TAC) and an extensive range of online resources. Customers receive fast, expert technical support; flexible hardware coverage; and smart, personalized capabilities to help resolve critical network issues.
- **Cisco Smart Care Service**, which leverages the capabilities of Cisco partners to verify that customers' networks are secure and efficient, delivers dashboard visibility into network performance, provides information that helps customers better manage and improve their networks while reducing the time and effort needed to run them and enables customers to foresee potential problems before they have an impact on the business.
- **Cisco Security IntelliShield Alert Manager Service**, which provides a comprehensive, cost-effective solution for delivering the intelligence organizations need in order to identify, prevent and mitigate IT attacks. This customizable threat and vulnerability alert

service gives a customer's security staff access to timely, accurate and credible information about threats and vulnerabilities that may imperil their environment. Organizations can save time they would otherwise spend on researching threats and vulnerabilities and focus more on taking a proactive approach to security.

- **Cisco Base** provides support for Cisco operating system (OS) software. Customers receive access to software updates within their licensed OS feature set and technical support for Cisco OS software. Support includes registered access to the software selection and other OS-related technical assistance tools available on Cisco.com and access to Cisco TAC engineers who can assist with OS-related support issues.
- **Cisco Application Support** is offered by Cisco and its authorized partners to help customers maximize the availability, security and performance of important business applications.

Conclusion

Next-generation networks give midsize companies a competitive advantage. By removing many of the operational headaches of running a network, Cisco's solutions free up IT departments to focus on driving business value and innovation. Feature-rich, strategic networks built for today and tomorrow remove the barriers to growth and give midsize businesses the agility they require to lead their markets. ■

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