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SMB BUSINESS PAPER

New data shows the competitive advantage of a better network

Our fast-paced and digital-first business environment means that companies need to scale their network's capacity to support hybrid work, provide top-notch service, and enhance employee collaboration — all while managing costs.

Technology is how businesses can keep up, but the volume of data, devices, and demand for consistent connectivity can strain a company's network. That's why small and midsize businesses (SMBs) are turning networking technology into a business advantage by:

- Improving customer experience
- Increasing employee productivity
- Enhancing operations
- Complying with new standards and regulations
- Minimizing business risk

A survey[1] from Aruba, a Hewlett Packard Enterprise company, of U.S. SMB business and tech leaders bears this out: ninety-eight percent of respondents report that technology is important or extremely important to reaching their company's objectives. And, more than nine in 10 business leaders and IT decision-makers say that upgrading their company network is extremely or very important to their IT objectives.

[1] Online survey of 150 business decision-makers and 150 IT decision-makers at U.S. companies with 100 to 999 full-time employees. The survey was fielded September 23- October 4, 2021.

A GROWING SMB'S NETWORK CHALLENGES

The importance of upgrading the network is apparent when considering the business impact of the challenges SMBs currently face. A data security breach can lead to a loss of customers; a strain on IT staff puts customer service and employee productivity at risk; and an outdated network can imperil company efficiency and viability.

The Aruba survey revealed the top SMB networking pain points:

Security. Lacking adequate data security makes company and customer data vulnerable. A data breach can cost company sales, a drop in productivity, and damage to business reputation. Fifty-six percent of survey respondents cite enhanced security as an expected benefit of a better network.

Ongoing IT support. Routine monitoring, troubleshooting, site deployment, and upgrades to an outdated or inadequate network can strain IT staff and prevent them from focusing on company priorities. Four in 10 survey respondents say IT support is a challenge.

Finding/keeping qualified IT/network staff. Attracting and retaining IT staff with the training and expertise needed to maintain your network is challenging in the current hiring environment. Forty-two percent of respondents said this was one of their biggest pain points.

Speed/bandwidth. Network bottlenecks, lags, or disruptions for your team, customers, or vendors can hit productivity hard. Close to half of the leaders surveyed said a network upgrade would boost Wi-Fi speed. Network improvements increase bandwidth and uptime via tools that let you view all network activity, automate routine adjustments, and make quick fixes.

Keeping current on network technology. There is tremendous pressure to keep up with the latest technology and stay compatible and compliant. Almost 40% of leaders in the survey say a better networking solution would help their organization deploy new features.

SMBs in every industry are feeling the pressure to do more despite these challenges. For example, retailers need to provide a consistently great customer experience in-store and online. Health care clinics must protect patient data and preserve standards for patient care. Restaurants need online ordering, contactless solutions, and digital communications to remain relevant in a competitive market.

To bring all these customer experiences to life, SMBs are employing agile and adaptable IT network tools. By investing in upgraded networks, SMBs are overcoming the critical technology challenges outlined above, allowing them to expand their size, scope, and services.

HOW SMBS PLAN TO SUCCEED WITH IMPROVED NETWORKS

Increase revenue

Half of all survey respondents expect an improved network to support company growth. Around 40% of respondents said that their biggest pain point was speed/bandwidth, and there are other factors involved when considering network experience for remote employees. While your existing network might face challenges, as remote employees seek new ways to connect, an upgraded network delivers the speed, reliability, and functionality you need. Likewise, an older network might slow down as your team grows or works with more applications or larger files such as video, large data files, or code. A cloud-based network lets you add new devices, workstations, sites, data, and applications to support your growth by expanding capacity based on your needs. With network "intelligence" stored in the cloud, additions and expanded use of your network can be done with even a lean IT team.

During the pandemic, Children's of Alabama launched a telehealth solution on an Aruba cloud-based network in just four days, enabling it to serve more than 500 patients remotely every day, and allowing employees to connect from home offices.

Improve customer experience

Nine in 10 leaders in the survey say that they invest in technology to better serve and retain customers. Specifically, half of all respondents plan to upgrade their business network to improve speed. A speedy network enables smooth transactions and improves customer experience. Also, when employees can easily and quickly access data and applications from all locations and devices, they can provide the best possible customer service. Onsite customer experience will also be enhanced when your network supports widely available, fast Wi-Fi from all locations, both inside and outdoors. Forty-two percent of respondents anticipate increased coverage for indoor and outdoor spaces.

An Aruba-built network has given travel trailer dealer Blue Dog RV a fast, easy, and reliable way to connect over 1,000 devices and 400 users across its 12 U.S. dealer locations.

Boost employee productivity

Forty-five percent of survey respondents say they anticipate an improvement in employee productivity with a better network, and 41% report that they expect it to enhance access to applications. Employees in hybrid work arrangements

need to access data and applications, to share information with others, and to build on each other's ideas. For this, they need video conferencing, email, chat, and other ways to stay connected. At your on-site locations, reliable and speedy network access keeps your staff at peak productivity whether they're working alone, helping a customer, or partnering with a co-worker.

An enterprise-grade wireless network built on Aruba helps senior living facility Lorien Health Services deliver exceptional and secure wireless support for caregivers' and patients' devices.

Enhance company efficiency

A network that is reliable and secure will support efficiency across your entire business. First, a better network can increase uptime and prevent traffic bottlenecks. Second, it can mitigate the risk of a security breach, which can cause downtime and lost productivity while the system is restored. Upgraded networks also have built-in security functions that allow you to restrict who can access what data and which applications, monitor for suspicious activity, and keep you in compliance with industry or government requirements.

With the explosion of network-connected devices — from employee personal devices to office technology to process control devices and much more — ensuring your network provides secure, reliable, and high-speed access to any device that connects to it is essential. Fifty-six percent of business and IT leaders expect that security will be enhanced with an upgraded network.

Las Vegas's Circa Hotel and Resort worked with Aruba to implement a wireless networking solution that cost-effectively delivered video-centric digital entertainment and gaming experiences, while reducing the tasks needed to set up networks by 75%.

Uncover insights and analytics

Fifty-one percent of business and IT leaders in the survey are aiming to improve insight and analytics with an improved network. A new network can provide important access to users, devices, and apps on a network to ensure it runs smoothly. This intelligence takes the guesswork out of troubleshooting and provides guidance on where to focus remediation efforts.

THE FUTURE OF NETWORKS AS A COMPETITIVE TOOL FOR SMBS

Companies that improve their network capabilities can seize opportunities effectively and keep up with business growth. If challenges occur, a company with strong network tools can bounce back quickly, relying on the systems already in place to restore efficiency with minimal impact. Business and IT leaders know that technology is vital to reach company objectives, and an easy-to-use, resilient, and scalable network provides the foundation for fast-moving, competitive businesses. Browse our web page to find out how to make your network work for you.

95%
of IT and business leaders said improving the company network is "extremely or very important" to IT plans.

98%
of business and IT leaders say technology is important or extremely important to reaching company objectives.

Over 50%
of SMB business and tech leaders are focused on increasing revenue, improving customer experience, and boosting employee productivity.

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