

Navigating the Complicated SD-WAN Landscape

A trusted third-party advisor can provide great value in guiding IT decision makers through the SD-WAN journey, from strategy to sourcing, migration and ongoing management. In making a selection, it is important to consider a firm that has a team of consultants who know the vendors, their pricing and differentiators, exactly what questions to ask, and be ready to provide a proven roadmap of the entire adoption process.

"We see all of the vendors and their offerings, which vary widely. We bring in-depth vendor knowledge, and are able to create an apples-to-apples comparison of pricing and products — exactly what each one delivers," adds Stan Burkin, Cannon Group Vice President of Strategic Sourcing. "We also have the capacity to share what we are observing across the entire industry. For example, **all IT executives are intrigued by SD-WAN and its potential benefit to their network environments, but most have not determined exactly how it will deliver cost savings.**" "We help bring the business case to light by showing what the savings could be and exactly how they will be realized."

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Reinforcing the complexity of evaluating the vendors and their offerings, Mike Champion, founder and chief executive officer of Xcelocloud, has observed that **the SD-WAN market has become "a crowded space.** There are literally 30-plus providers; some you've heard of and some you've not. They are all making similar claims: 'We can save you 50 percent plus on your network costs, deploy it 10 times faster than MPLS, and we can give you anywhere from two to 10 times the bandwidth at the same time.' Some of those claims are true, and some are not.

"We believe that, realistically, you can expect to realize 30 to 40 percent on the total cost of your network, while increasing your bandwidth (the amount varies), and it is deployed much faster than MPLS. And here's more good news: SD-WAN is a much better overall experience than what people have had with large carriers deploying MPLS networks over the last 10 years, which has been challenging to say the least."

From the smallest niche players with pure-play SD-WAN offerings to incumbent networking hardware vendors and the largest telecom providers, there is a great deal of information and business claims being communicated to the market. There are also significant differences in services provided, requiring decisions such as cost and licensing models (capex/opex); managed services; cloud gateways/points of presence; WAN optimization, and more.

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Evaluating it all requires a high level of industry expertise to sort through the many diverse providers and additional considerations such as:

- Some providers offer their own solutions; others (specifically the large carriers) partner, which may or may not be transparent
- Every offering includes different technology options
- Price points can have wide swings
- Implementation strategies can range from a small, trial MPLS augmentation to a full replacement; connecting one specific facility or adding a new application with a dedicated SD-WAN connection
- The decision of whether to manage the selection and implementation internally, select a third party, or opt for a complete managed services approach

Burkin further explains, “**Although the technology is still young, SD-WAN has great promise for the enterprise IT community.** At Cannon Group, we are seeing a high level of interest with just about every IT executive doing due diligence.”

Gartner also predicts, “By 2020, more than 50 percent of WAN edge infrastructure refresh initiatives will be based on SD-WAN versus traditional routers (up from less than two percent today).”²

As enterprises begin developing their own individual business cases to evaluate SD-WAN, many are turning to outside advisors for help.

² Gartner High-Tech Tuesday Webinar: SD-WAN Forecast and Opportunity - How SD-WAN Will Disrupt the Router Market. 5 December 2016.

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