FOCUS

SD-WAN

Retail and Hospitality

We've all heard about SD-WAN for a long time, and many retail and hospitality providers have already adopted it. So, what advantages have they got that business' with MPLS haven't got?

This paper cuts through the marketing 'blurb' and discusses what we've experienced and learnt deploying SD-WAN into the retail and hospitality sector before and during COVID-19, and what trends we're seeing as we start to move into 'the new normal'.

Let's look at some of things retailers are saying and how those with SD-WAN will be better geared for survival.

1 Bricks and mortar locations are likely to become more fluid. As landlords struggle, rents fluctuate and consumers demand more local services, retailers may turn to new strategies, like pop ups, temporary events, showcases and all manner of other flexible locations inside and outside buildings that are not their own. These will not lend themselves to long term, fixed connectivity and will have to be delivered in very short time frames (potentially days).

2 The drive to survive (and perhaps even thrive) will be greater than ever, so circuit and site outages will be tolerated less than ever, downtime will be intolerable as customers are harder to come by and retaining customers, processing their purchases and incentivising incremental spend become ever more critical.

3 There will be new ways of working for staff. Adapting to the new processes will likely include infrastructure changes. For instance, PoS systems evolving and becoming cashless, contactless and cashierless, and app driven behaviours perhaps becoming the norm, as customers seek out experiences that they love, whilst maintaining their sense of acceptable distancing.

4 Business that haven't adapted to the digital era have already failed, delivering new in store experience is as important as it's ever been. Without good reason to visit physical locations, customers are likely not to now more than ever. Our customers are delivering augmented reality mirrors, tablet based product selectors, 3D printing and even virtual reality experiences to entice new customers into their locations. These all need fast, secure reliable connectivity, as poor experience actually drives custom away.

5 A post COVID era will lead to the proliferation of things on the network. Retail IT teams will undoubtedly be asked to deliver services over the WAN that directly relate to the mitigation of COVD risk. For instance, devices that monitor customer and staff proximity, their temperatures, their PPE etc. These devices will connect to the network, and will need to be near real time in their communication / alerting.

6 Customer services may be moved to a central location, with less in-store staff and more remote staff, good quality audio and video interaction will become paramount. Remote concierges and experts, accessible via video will enrich the in store experience while minimising human to human physical contact.

7 Back office staff are likely to be adopting more SaaS tools, and working from more flexible locations, home, co-works, temporary locations and regular offices. They need to be enabled to work from wherever they need to, accessing applications that reside in both their private and public clouds. The DC based data silo is long gone, with data and apps all over the world.

8 The communications equipment in store staff use, physical phones / slack / video calling / email / messaging etc are evolving quickly, and in all likelihood moving to SaaS cloud-based services. These tools are becoming business critical and they don't sit in the Data Centre. Accessing them through central Internet breakout circuits is latent, low bandwidth and a single point of failure.

9 The hours that physical locations are open may become more fluid. As staff and customers are encouraged to avoid peaks of contact, they may require longer working and opening hours. The network will have to deliver more, over a longer period of time, with greater availability.

10 Most importantly of ALL, retailers will need to deliver more, and reduce current spend at the same time.

SD-WAN was born in the cloud-era, and businesses that have deployed it are already better equipped to deal with these new challenges. Retail and hospitality faces more challenges than most, and SD-WAN tools are immensely well suited to the unique set of challenges. The vast array of tools these companies can immediately bring to bear include:

1 Application performance, device and user visibility through portal based administration means resolving user issues goes from days to minutes. Port numbers, protocols and IP addresses are no longer useful tools in troubleshooting user issues.

2 SD-WAN circuits can be sized right, from the most suitable / cost effective supplier. This allows us to help our customers save money, SD-WAN solutions with refreshed circuits are almost always lower in cost than your incumbent MPLS. Put simply, monthly SD-WAN bills are lower than MPLS bills, instant win.

3 Changing your PoS and payment systems has implications for PCI. SD-WAN appliances are also firewalls, with an in store firewall at every location you are now much freer to make speedy decisions on platforms safe in the knowledge that your cardholder data is sitting behind a next gen firewall with intrusion prevention, anti-malware protection and URL filtering enabled.

4 Most retail and hospitality networks comprise a myriad of vendors, with managed and unmanaged devices in the mix, making change and troubleshooting a nightmare. SD-WAN solutions include as much of the network as you desire, the WAN, the LAN and the WLAN, whatever. A single pane of glass can manage it all.

5 Could you identify, remotely, exactly what's connected to which network port today? With SD-WAN, its all real time. That new thermal camera, or Sonos system, or wireless PoS system can all be identified simply, by low level service desk staff with no training.

6 Application policies mean we can control which applications use which links, which are business critical and which are not, and take automated action when acceptable thresholds are exceeded, keeping your transactions and phone calls online. Circuit goes down, latency increases, packet loss on the broadband, whatever, they can all be automatically mitigated with simple policies and traffic re-routed.

7 SD-WAN includes multiple 'underlay' circuits. We can use leased lines, broadband, wireless, cellular etc, in any combination. Resilience (and uptime) comes from using multiple types of network in the most sensible and cost effective ways.

8 Underlay networks with a range of circuit technologies mean you can be far more flexible with contract terms and delivery times. Broadband can be delivered in just 10 days, leased lines can be used for business critical apps and can follow behind broadband. 3G, 4G & 5G can get you on-line today.

9 3G, 4G (and going forward 5G) means you can get building on-line in hours and days, not weeks and months, but can also be long term resilience tools. Contracts can be as low as a few weeks, and speeds can be as good if not better than most broadband technologies. You can get your pop-up store on-line today, and then it can literally be moved and take it's connectivity with it, all in a single box.

10 Co-Management means you can take back control and visibility of what you want, and hand over day to day running to Focus, lightening the burden on your stretched resources.

11 You can spin up a new app, product, service etc in AWS or Azure and can add your new Virtual Data Centre onto your secure network in a matter of hours.

12 All our SD-WAN solutions can be 100% OPEX. You can roll this out today with zero up front costs. What's more, Cisco financing means the overlay OPEX can be deferred until 2021. Roll it out today, on your current underlay, start getting the benefits, start your pivot to the new world, and defer all payments until business starts to recover.

The list is vast, and yet so are the challenges many sectors are facing now, and into the future. Focus are 1 of 10 Cisco partners, globally, working with Cisco to provide SD-WAN solutions that help mitigate these challenges.

See how different your WAN could be, and start the journey back to thriving.

Call us today on
+44 (0) 1273 964 440
to arrange a demonstration
or live in-line Proof of Concept.

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