BIZCOMMUNITY

# The future of business connectivity

The rise of SD-WAN is changing the way organisations manage their network infrastructure, as it offers a more agile, cost-effective and resilient approach.

Imagine a reality where you had bought and paid for a brand new car, but the dealership still had complete control of the vehicle. In short, every time you wanted to take the car out for a drive, check the engine, or even put your bags in the boot, you would have to call the dealership and get their permission first. In the real world, that's exactly what it is like for companies who currently use an MPLS network provider.

On the other hand, having a software-defined wide area networking (SD-WAN) solution in place is like having complete ownership of your vehicle. You can drive it until it is worn out, not to mention that you, as the driver/owner are in ultimate control.

There is no doubt that SD-WAN is increasingly being viewed as a key next-generation networking technology, offering application performance and agility, cost savings and network security, among numerous other benefits.

Brendan McAravey, country manager for Citrix

It is certainly something more IT managers should be getting excited about, according to Brendan McAravey, country manager for Citrix, who explains that it allows administrators to shape traffic and provision network services instantaneously. This means there is no need to change the physical infrastructure of the network. Instead, a software-driven device that combines functionality such as routing, security (firewall) and WAN acceleration is implemented.

“This is a far cry from the recent past, where the de facto way to put together a WAN was by using multi-protocol label switching (MPLS). This is far more expensive and ties the user into a long-term contract, where they are dependent on a single service provider,” states McAravey.

“With SD-WAN, on the other hand, it is an overlay technology, so it can run on top of the existing MPLS network, or any other network that is available. This means that companies no longer need to be locked into using their MPLS provider alone. They can now link to multiple providers and leave it up to the software to decide which is the fastest and most efficient link.”

## Cost and time savings

Schalk Burger, group IT manager at Intelligent Gaming, points out the importance of having the multiple redundancies that SD-WAN enables.

“Because we can use whatever service is available, we are no longer reliant on a single MPLS provider. This means there is a far lower risk of our network being down for any length of time. Obviously, as a betting organisation, this is critical to us – to be offline could cost us millions of rands a day,” he says.

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Jacques du Rand 4 Sep 2018

Richard Vivian, IT manager at Kolok adds that the fear of downtime is particularly real when one is using only an MPLS network for connectivity purposes.

“In the end, you have no visibility of your own with regard to whether the service provider has a proper backup option available for you. You are entirely reliant on them and will only find out whether redundancy is available when something goes wrong.”

Burger agrees, adding that one usually gets shunted from agent to agent, with the result that you end up chasing your own tail for hours to solve a problem.

“This tends to happen because these providers are so big, they no longer offer the kind of personal service required to attend to your specific problem. This ends up costing you money and time to solve, regardless of what your SLAs may state – chiefly because you have signed the contract with the MPLS provider and thus really have nowhere else to go.”

## Additional options

This is one of the key advantages SD-WAN offers, states McAravey. It immediately enables an organisation that is having such difficulties to utilise a different provider while solving the problem, thereby ensuring that there is no impact on the end user during this period.

“With SD-WAN connectivity, instead of deciding who you are getting, you are able to decide what you are getting. You can pick and choose the providers you use and mix and match as required to get exactly the kind of service you require because SD-WAN is essentially service provider-agnostic technology.”

Source: pixabay.com

Vivian points out that when contracted with an MPLS provider, in a scenario where there is a failure, even enforcing the SLA will likely only provide some financial compensation. “And it doesn't matter which service provider you choose, in the end, every one of them has a failure at some point, so essentially, your only real decision is to choose which MPLS provider you are going to have the occasional failure with,” he says.

On the other hand, suggests McAravey, not only does SD-WAN offer alternatives to MPLS, but it can also be used by those companies in the middle of long-term agreements with MPLS providers, to provide additional redundancy while waiting for the MPLS contract to expire.

“So whether you are in the middle of an MPLS contract or are simply looking for a better way of providing WAN connectivity, there is no longer any reason to remain tied to a single carrier-grade service. SD-WAN means you have access to quality services from multiple providers complete with not only redundancy but also much lower costs in the long term,” he concludes.