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Beyond bandwidth: What to look for in an enterprise connectivity partner



CIO

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For many enterprises, choosing a connectivity provider has traditionally come down to a few basic considerations: How much bandwidth do we need, where do we need it and what will it cost? But with businesses relying on their networks to support an ever-growing number of applications and services, those questions alone may no longer be enough.

A network outage today can disrupt everything from customer transactions and employee communications to cloud-based applications and critical business operations. And with companies beginning to introduce AI workloads that have their own connectivity requirements, IT leaders have even more to consider when evaluating providers.

While bandwidth, availability and price have traditionally been important considerations when evaluating connectivity providers, organizations are increasingly looking at other factors that can affect network performance and the overall service experience.

According to Rob Roache, group vice president of strategic markets at Spectrum Business®, enterprises are also recognizing the benefits of simplifying their network operations and working with providers that can help them manage changing requirements. For CIOs evaluating their connectivity strategy, there are several important considerations beyond the cost of the connection.

Reliability and performance

When network connectivity is disrupted, the consequences can extend across multiple business functions. An outage at a retail location, for example, can interfere with payment processing, inventory systems and other essential applications.

IT leaders should examine a provider's approach to resiliency, including network diversity, redundant connections and service-level agreements (SLAs). They should also understand what happens when problems occur and how quickly service can be restored.

Roache says Spectrum Business is moving from a four-hour to a three-hour mean time to repair SLA, including for locations served through another carrier's last-mile connection.



Scalability and geographic reach

As businesses add locations, adopt new technologies and expand their use of cloud services, their connectivity requirements can change considerably. AI is introducing additional demands, particularly as organizations move more data between business locations, data centers and cloud environments. CIOs should consider how easily a provider can add capacity, introduce new services or extend connectivity to additional facilities. Geographic reach is especially important for enterprises operating across multiple regions, where infrastructure options may vary by location.

Roache says many enterprises are reducing the number of carriers they work with to simplify network management. Rather than managing numerous smaller providers, organizations

are increasingly consolidating connectivity services with two or three providers capable of supporting a larger portion of their operations.

Security considerations

With employees accessing applications from offices, remote locations and mobile devices, connectivity and security are closely connected.

Organizations should evaluate how network services support secure access to cloud environments, data centers and other business resources. Managed networking and security capabilities may also help IT departments maintain consistent policies across different locations.

Roache points to the growing use of AI applications as another consideration. Employees may access unauthorized AI tools from both desktop and mobile devices, potentially exposing confidential business information. Consistent security policies across devices are therefore an important part of the broader connectivity strategy.

Service and support

While automation and self-service tools have made it easier to manage connectivity, Roache believes personal relationships remain important to enterprise customers. To that end, he says Spectrum Business has focused on combining digital capabilities with dedicated service management and clearly identified escalation contacts.

One customer example illustrates the value of this approach. A large retailer had used Spectrum Business alongside another major carrier for approximately 10 years, allowing the company to compare the service experience of both providers.

The retailer eventually asked Spectrum Business to manage both networks, including the services delivered by the competing carrier. According to Roache, the decision reflected the retailer's preference for having one organization coordinate network management and support.

Accountability and partnership

Enterprise connectivity projects can involve construction, service installation, network configuration and coordination across multiple providers. CIOs should understand who is responsible for managing these activities and how the provider handles problems that arise during deployment.

Roache describes a customer project involving fiber internet installation at 1,600 locations in 63 days, including construction at every site. The agreement included specific delivery commitments and financial penalties if those commitments weren't met. For organizations managing large or geographically distributed networks, this level of accountability can be an important consideration when evaluating potential providers.

Choosing the right partner

As enterprise networks become more critical to business operations, evaluating connectivity requires looking at more than technical specifications and pricing. Reliability, scalability, geographic coverage, security and service commitments all play a role in determining how effectively a provider can support an organization.

CIOs should also consider the experience of working with a provider, particularly when network problems arise or business requirements change. Understanding how a provider manages service delivery, communicates with customers and takes responsibility for resolving issues can help organizations make a more informed decision.

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