

# Will SD-WAN Really Transform Your Network?

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It's hard to have a conversation about networking these days without talking about SD-WAN. In nearly two decades of analysing telecoms and networking markets, I've seen very few technologies that have made such an impact so quickly. SD-WAN emerged at the right time to address the growing disconnect between traditional WANs and the changing connectivity needs brought about by the shift to cloud. It seems like only yesterday that we were talking about SD-WAN as a concept. Now, it's a focal point, and adoption is accelerating.

In essence, SD-WAN separates the application from the underlying network transport, enabling an organisation to run any application over any combination of networks. Software-based intelligence can pick the most appropriate path based on traffic and link quality, and optimise the use of the available bandwidth. This enables organisations to route less-critical traffic, such as generic browsing or guest WiFi access, via more cost-effective broadband internet connections, while more sensitive or mission-critical applications, like SAP or Oracle, are delivered via private IP networks.

## The Range of Benefits Goes Way Beyond Cost Savings

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Much of the debate around SD-WAN has focused on the cost benefits that it can bring by replacing private connectivity with public internet access. But the appeal of SD-WAN goes beyond a single benefit or use case, as it unlocks a range of new benefits for organisations. This is underlined by the results of IDC's *European Enterprise Communications Survey 2019*, which shows that UK organisations are looking to deploy SD-WAN for a number of reasons — with improving security, reducing complexity and increasing resilience at the top of that list. The capabilities of SD-WAN in terms of automation and intelligence will increase over time and play a critical role in delivering on these expectations.

## Protecting Your Network Is a Priority

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Security is not just the number 1 reason for deploying SD-WAN. Conversely, it is also the number 1 inhibitor of adoption. This underlines the critical role that security plays in network-related decisions. If architected and deployed properly, SD-WAN solutions can improve security through inherent features such as encryption and segmentation. However, you will need to scrutinise both these inherent security aspects and optional capabilities as they explore potential solutions.

## SD-WAN Is Only as Good as the Network it Runs On

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SD-WAN enables you to balance the use of private and public connectivity to get the right level of performance for every location and application. However, it must still deal with the limitations of the underlying connectivity. This means that a migration to SD-WAN does not automatically mean that you can simply replace all private connectivity with low-cost internet. While the share of public internet in the overall connectivity mix will clearly grow, there's still an important role for private connectivity solutions as they provide predictable performance for key sites and mission-critical applications.

## Carefully Plan Ahead

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Transforming your WAN and adopting SD-WAN are by no means trivial tasks. Once you have assessed your current network estate and decided where you want to get to in the future, you will need to develop a step-by-step plan to implement change across your footprint. IDC's *European Enterprise Communications Survey* identifies lack of skills as one of the key inhibitors of SD-WAN adoption among UK enterprises. You will need to assess whether you have the required expertise in-house to do this yourself or whether you will be better off letting a partner manage all or some of this complexity for you.

## A Holistic Outlook Is Key

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The WAN will need to evolve to be ready for the digital future. SD-WAN will be a cornerstone of that transformation, but it is important to consider it holistically. That includes the underlying connectivity, the security implications, and the in-house skills and capabilities to design, implement and run the network. This will help you to determine whether your WAN is future proof and explore what benefits SD-WAN can bring to your organisation.

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