

A photograph of three business professionals in a meeting. A woman with blonde hair is in the foreground on the left, looking towards the right. Two men are seated behind her; one with glasses and a light blue shirt, and another in a dark suit. They are gathered around a table with a laptop and some papers. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office space.

Six questions you should ask a prospective SD-WAN partner



Almost every business and technology leader today is focused on creating a more agile organization, one with the ability to adapt to rapid changes in the business environment.

Companies have invested billions of dollars with this purpose in mind, implementing technologies such as virtualization to raise agility at the compute level, flash storage to speed the flow of data, and network virtualization to make the data center more agile.

One facet of IT evolving slowly and lacking the flexibility organizations need to stay competitive is the wide-area network (WAN). With the tremendous increase of applications and workloads moving to the cloud, along with the unified communications (UC) required for today's mobile and virtual employees, traditional WANs aren't able to keep up. Organizations connecting their branch locations via traditional WAN architecture often suffer from challenges like network congestion, delays, service outages, and data loss. Also, these WAN environments do not have the bandwidth for HD videos and the low-latency required to run real-time applications smoothly, like VoIP calling, streaming, and video conferencing. These issues prevent branch locations from running effectively, and significant time and budget are invested in managing and maintaining these legacy systems on-premises.

SD-WAN (software-defined WAN) is a wide-area network technology defined by business and IT policies through software. These policies are used to automate changes in configuration and traffic flows to ensure the network consistently meets the needs of the organization. Because

SD-WAN is available over multiple network services including MPLS, broadband internet, and 4G/5G wireless, among others, thus the fastest and highest-quality path is always available and dynamically chosen to deliver critical business applications from the cloud. Additionally, SD-WAN solves bandwidth and latency issues of a traditional WAN, allowing for better performance of real-time collaboration tools like VoIP and video conferencing.

Given these advantages, many IT leaders plan to shift their organization's traditional wide-area network to SD-WAN technology. In fact, according to estimates released by prominent global research firm, Gartner, between 5,000 to 10,000 companies have already implemented SD-WAN solutions.

Since many organizations either don't have the expertise internally or the ability to redeploy highly-paid engineers to implement SD-WAN architecture, they will often partner with a third-party vendor to deliver the precise solution for their needs. It is essential to partner with an SD-WAN provider with the experience and expertise to ensure a successful deployment.

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So once you've determined your organization is ready to adopt SD-WAN technology, how can you find the right partner to help? Here is a list of six questions OnX engineers would ask prospective SD-WAN partners:



Does your company have experience across all current network technologies and proven ability to migrate networks to SD-WAN?

Despite all of the attention currently paid to SD-WAN, introduction of the technology was just four years ago, and only a small percentage of enterprise networks have been migrated to SD-WAN to date. The market is expected to increase dramatically because of the significant costs savings over traditional WAN architecture, and other SD-WAN advantages including its centralized management and ease of deployment. With all of the positive projections, the market is crowded with several types of providers, from traditional routing and switching vendors to WAN optimization companies, pure-play SD-WAN startups, and vendors offering managed SD-WAN solutions. While all of these vendors bring excellent technology solutions to the table, which ones have the context to architect a clear migration path, maximize current equipment, and optimize the network to match business needs?

A proven SD-WAN provider will be able to show several successful migrations and explain the challenges they had to overcome, continually adding to their knowledge base and making them more efficient.

Does your company have significant experience in delivering and managing cloud-based solutions?

SD-WAN technology takes advantage of the cloud, something traditional routing and switching technology wasn't designed to do. SD-WAN uses policy-based rules to orchestrate the routing of all of your applications in the cloud. The right SD-WAN partner will understand the intricacies of configuring the network, optimizing it for maximum performance in the cloud, and managing and supporting the SD-WAN for users across all branch locations. The cloud is vital for SD-WAN's centralized management, and an ideal partner will have experience with the different types of implementations: SD-WAN software running on commodity hardware, an SD-WAN hardware/software combination like VeloCloud, or SD-WAN as a managed service.

Does your company have use cases representative of our business model?

While interviewing potential SD-WAN partners, it's likely you will find technology providers with a proven track record for implementing SD-WAN for organizations with a similar number of branch locations. The challenge is finding a provider with extensive experience in your industry and with comparable use cases. Ideally, the SD-WAN partner you choose will have both. Companies in industries among the early SD-WAN adopters, like retail and consumer enterprises and manufacturing, are more likely to find partners with parallel use cases than organizations in highly regulated industries such as financial services and healthcare.

Industry experience is highly relevant to know an SD-WAN provider understands the nuances and can handle the challenges unique to your business sector.



Does your company have an SD-WAN implementation roadmap for organizations like ours?

The advantage of working with a partner serving similar types of organizations in your industry is they can provide details about the process, resources, and timeline for SD-WAN implementation. The provider you choose will take into account all industry-specific requirements, your company's current initiatives and business goals, budgetary considerations, available resources, and any timing issues.

An ideal roadmap is realistic and attainable, aligns with business goals, timing, and budget, and makes the best use of available personnel from both companies.

When implementing SD-WAN, does your company offer incremental migration with low upfront capital costs?

The significant boost in performance of SD-WAN would not be attractive to organizations if upfront costs are prohibitive. An ideal SD-WAN partner understands this and will work with you to build an implementation model that minimizes upfront investment, lowers your total cost of network operation, and provides a "pay-as-you-grow" ability to scale investment only as your business needs it.

Can your company demonstrate how you have helped other organizations decrease the complexity of running their enterprise network with SD-WAN?

Ideally, the provider's SD-WAN portal will give your IT staff a centralized, cloud-based view of network and application performance at all locations. The portal should enable network admins to deliver increased capacity as needed, automate updates, provide the ability to classify applications and prioritize traffic automatically for optimum performance based on business policies.

The right partner will not only show how they have set up the SD-WAN portal and automated functionality for similar organizations but will provide examples of how they've addressed performance issues and made adjustments as business priorities change.



Conclusion

As business leaders in today's organizations deal with the complexity of supporting a more distributed, mobile workforce and the bandwidth-intensive cloud apps they use, network transformation has become an imperative. When evaluating options for shifting to a more flexible, dynamic, and secure network architecture, IT professionals will often consult with experienced providers to help them align their network strategies with the priorities of the business.

OnX Canada has a proven track record helping organizations move beyond MPLS-connected enterprise WAN to reap the benefits of a fully managed SD-WAN. We have decades of experience configuring networks and designing systems around each client's unique business needs. Our focus is on providing organizations with the ability to deliver the best user experience to make their employees more productive, enable better customer service, and ultimately give them a competitive edge.

Our SD-WAN implementation experience includes:

Migration of a healthcare provider to SD-WAN environment to facilitate secure, seamless transmission of patient data to its 25+ medical and imaging centers. The network is built to flex as the amount of patient data it handles increases over time.

Building a custom SD-WAN solution for a fast-growing recruiting agency with multiple locations, adding two or more branches every 6-12 months. The network manages the delivery of applications to all devices to their department personnel and mobile employees while improving VoIP and video conference call quality, and frees up their IT staff to focus on core business technology.

Implementing stable, secure SD-WAN solutions for several financial institutions, including Fortune 500 companies, to extend their digital capabilities and achieve diverse business objectives. SD-WAN provides their customers with better mobile banking experiences and helps these organizations compete with startups.

Increasing network security and scalability to allow a Fortune 500 retailer with over 600 locations to transition from a traditional retail environment to an experiential model, encouraging customers to stay longer and connect devices to their Wi-Fi network. The fully managed SD-WAN solution transitions their location-based networking and licenses onto a unified, enterprise-class environment monitored by OnX engineers proactively addressing ever-evolving threats.



About OnX Canada

OnX Canada is a leading technology solution provider that serves businesses, healthcare organizations, and government agencies across Canada. From unified communications to cloud services and beyond, OnX combines deep technical expertise with a full suite of flexible technology solutions that drive business outcomes, improve operational efficiency, mitigate risk, and reduce costs for its clients. OnX simplifies IT and Communications strategies with local knowledge and support for Canadian organizations. For more information, please visit www.onx.ca.



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