



From Reliable to Resilient: Network Connectivity and Business Continuity

Part of the Driving Digital Agility content series: Insights and strategies to pivot to digital business, navigate new work environments, and manage changing customer expectations.

COVID-19 quickly forced businesses to close locations and support a remote workforce, requiring advanced connectivity, seamless streaming, and increased bandwidth. IT leaders are now building contingency plans to enable enhanced network connectivity to ensure business continuity under any circumstance.

Disaster recovery and business continuity plans are nothing new for IT teams. Still, COVID-19 unexpectedly changed how businesses operate for the immediate future. IT leaders are now in a position where they must devise strategies to build more resilient networks that can handle the elevated capacity, connectivity, performance, and security challenges a predominantly remote workforce can present to a business.

“First and foremost, it’s important to keep the business network up and running. The first issue companies are grappling with is how they do that with absent IT staff,” says Bob Victor, Head of Product, Comcast Business. “Business is moving from the company location to the cloud. Most companies were not prepared to do that at a large scale and are scrambling to put the infrastructure in place to support wide scale video conferencing and collaboration tools.”

Prior to the crisis, about 30% of companies reportedly already had built out the appropriate infrastructure to handle these surges in capacity and connectivity demands, according to Comcast Business. Still a majority of businesses were not equipped to support a mostly remote workforce who were accessing corporate applications and resources housed behind a firewall. That reality has IT leaders reimagining how to deliver the network resources and support staff to maintain business operations with what will likely be a hybrid model of some employees working on premises, while others remain at home.

“Business continuity is nothing new, but this crisis has shifted the concept of business as usual.”

— Jeff Lewis, Vice President,
Product Management,
Comcast Business

The New Network Normal

With employees connecting from home, possibly from a house where others are also working from home, attending school, gaming, streaming, and binge watching media for hours at home, the new network normal looks very different for business and IT leaders. Previously, businesses have enabled employees to work remotely by using an internet connection from their home to log in to the corporate network via a secure VPN. A majority of businesses have not provided this capability at a scale to securely enable VPN access to their entire workforce. Corporate networks, as well as many home networks, must now be upgraded to securely deliver the network connectivity needed to keep employees productive and businesses not only operational but successful.

From [Unified Communications](#) that automatically route calls to the corporate office to another location and productivity tools like Microsoft Teams and Slack that allow peers to collaborate virtually, businesses are putting the tools in place to keep employees connected. But what’s needed now goes beyond software updates or application investments. For some businesses operating with a fully remote or hybrid workforce, [managed network services](#) could be the best option to gain the necessary visibility into network usage patterns to better plan for capacity during normal and exceptional times. IT leaders can gain visibility and control whether they are in a corporate location or working remotely.

“Business continuity is nothing new, but this crisis has shifted the concept of business as usual. Will more people be working from home? Will on-site IT staff be limited?” says Jeff Lewis, Vice President, Product Management, Comcast Business. “Coming out of this, there will be more curiosity and pull for our network-based or managed offerings. Service providers like ourselves can provide secure capabilities across a wide network that can scale.”

Enter the Micro-Branch

Going forward, businesses will want to consider the infrastructure, connectivity, and security to enable seamless operations regardless of external circumstances. Using SD-WAN, wireless, managed network services, and more—the technologies that underpin network resiliency—companies can create a robust network to handle the best and worst of times.

“SD-WAN may have been uniquely created to help respond to situations like this. It provides visibility and control that you don’t normally have with MPLS networks. Flexibility and scale are still key considerations that businesses must consider how to do these things when not in an office,” Lewis says.

IT leaders must also consider in this situation that corporate applications and video conferencing now compete with other bandwidth-consuming apps also seeing spikes in usage with entire families operating their lives mostly from home. For that reason, some businesses might consider which employees or locations warrant a separate data connection to ensure corporate-level failover and redundancy. That means more businesses will

be establishing a series of home offices that essentially act like micro branches using software-defined network technologies with wireless or DSL backup and broadband connectivity.

“Without prior planning, the response can only be as good as the home network. In a corporate environment, wireless is used for backup and failover. Coming out of this crisis, companies will want an always-on connection and multiple wireline connections to the home much like the business,” Comcast’s Victor says. “More and more businesses are seeking diversity in their connectivity solutions now. Our executive teams are using the residential broadband product with DSL as a backup just in case.”

Conclusion

The full impact of COVID-19 has yet to be determined, but for businesses looking to not only survive but also thrive as some return to normalcy happens, network connectivity is imperative. For now, businesses will respond to the current global conditions by building out infrastructure resources as needed and consider how a remote workforce—including IT personnel—can productively perform their duties from anywhere. Without predicting the future, even a brief look ahead suggests that corporate and IT leaders will never again be caught unawares when it comes to securely provide network connectivity and business continuity.

For more information on how businesses can use technology to navigate new work environments and expectations, explore the rest of our “Driving Digital Agility” blog series.

[READ MORE](#)