Straight Talk from the Corner Office

CORANET
WE PUT A FACE TO TECHNOLOGY®

Fall 2016

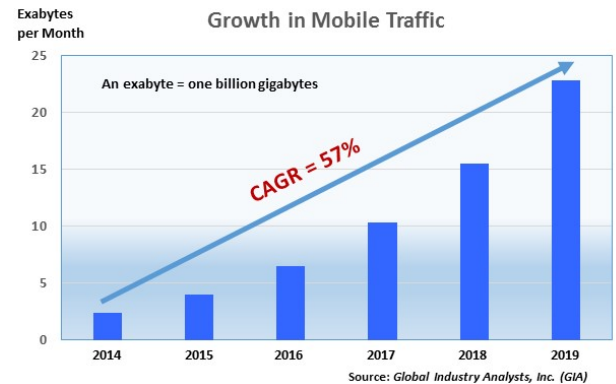## Is *Cloud-Managed Mobility* the Right Approach for your Business?

Welcome again to *Straight Talk*, one of the ways Coranet shares perspectives on important issues and opportunities in business communications.

If we look back over the past decade on the technologies that have had the most significant business impacts, *Mobility* and the *Cloud* would certainly be among the top contenders. In previous Straight Talks, we've discussed the upside as well as the challenges of BYOD in the workplace, and have also examined the pros and cons of Cloud Services like SaaS and IaaS. For this issue of Straight Talk, we'll take a closer look at a place where Mobility and Cloud actually come together – *Cloud-Managed Mobility*.

It's Rapidly Becoming a Mobile-first World

There's little doubt that Mobility has had a profound impact on the way businesses operate, both from a customer-facing as well as an internal IT perspective. According to technology tracking firm *comScore*, there are nearly 375 <u>million</u> smartphones and tablets in use in the U.S. alone. Device count aside, if you look at the amount of voice-data-video traffic being carried on mobile networks, it's expected to peg an eye-popping 57% growth rate through 2019.

Growth in Mobile Traffic
Exabytes per Month
An exabyte = one billion gigabytes
CAGR = 57%
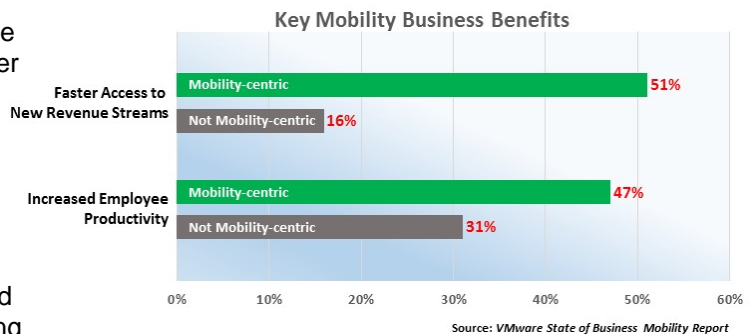Source: *Global Industry Analysts, Inc. (GIA)*

This shift to a 'mobile-first' world has significant implications to business strategy and operations. Recently, a study from research provider *Telemetrics* showed that up to 60% of customers are now handling business transactions and purchases exclusively through mobile devices. In response to this trend, market segments like retail, hospitality, healthcare and education have become particularly active in deploying mobile-friendly applications to support their outward-facing interactions.

From an internal perspective, mobility-enabled workflows have become the norm for many companies. Wireless communication is increasingly the preferred approach for executives and staff, even when wired Ethernet ports are readily available in the office. With employees routinely using wireless LANs (WLANs) for bandwidth-intensive video communication as well as for accessing core business apps and Cloud-stored data, the need for always-available wireless networks has never been higher.

The IT Challenge

The business benefits driven by 'untethered' employees have been well-documented. Recently, market virtualization leader *VMware* published a definitive independent study – *The State of Business Mobility* – reflecting the views of over 1,100 business leaders worldwide. Among the key findings: companies with mobile business cultures are realizing measurable increases in speed-to-market and employee productivity.

Key Mobility Business Benefits
Faster Access to New Revenue Streams — Mobility-centric 51%, Not Mobility-centric 16%
Increased Employee Productivity — Mobility-centric 47%, Not Mobility-centric 31%
Source: *VMware State of Business Mobility Report*

Unfortunately, these business benefits often go hand-in-hand with greater headaches for IT leaders – particularly in meeting heightened user expectations around WLAN availability, security and wireless coverage.
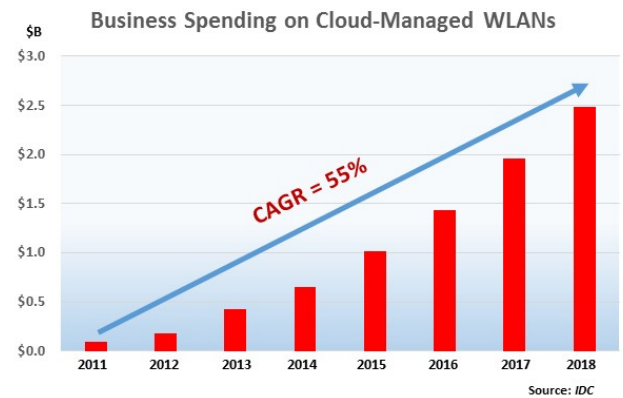
In our discussions with customers, we regularly hear the good news that wireless networking has become mission-critical to their business. Too often, though, they then admit that their WLANs don't receive the same care and attention as their wired network. There is usually a short list of reasons for this: either the IT group is lacking the necessary WLAN configuration and troubleshooting tools; there is a lack of expertise to effectively utilize what tools they do have; or they are operating under tight "do more with less" IT budgets and have insufficient resources to 'cover all the bases'. Multi-location companies without on-site IT personnel at remote locations face similar challenges in ensuring that all of their end users experience quality wireless coverage.

An Effective Solution: *Cloud to the Rescue*

Traditionally, wireless networks have been deployed using an on-premise architecture consisting of access points (APs) connected to a hardware controller that allows IT personnel to manage AP configuration, load balancing, security policy enforcement and Quality of Service (QoS) assurance.

Increasingly, this IT-intense approach is being replaced by Cloud-Managed Mobility solutions that retain premise-based APs, but shift the controller and management functions to the Cloud. Now, instead of having physical controllers that typically require local administration by on-site resources, the controllers are hosted and administered in the Cloud. The full set of management functions – WLAN provisioning, configuration, troubleshooting and software-firmware upgrades – are then handled through a web portal console for all sites, regardless of their geographic location.

One measure of the effectiveness and growing popularity of Cloud-Managed Mobility can be seen in the growth curve from research firm IDC which shows a steep increase in business spending on Cloud-Managed WLANs. Interestingly, this growth rate is nearly the same as the 57% CAGR in the earlier mobile network traffic study.

Business Spending on Cloud-Managed WLANs

CAGR = 55%

Source: *IDC*

The Business Benefits of Cloud-Managed Mobility

The purchase decisions for Cloud-Managed WLANs generally reflect three main drivers:

- **CAPEX AVOIDANCE**   Substantially reducing premises capital spending in favor of predictable OPEX outlay

- **BUSINESS AGILITY**   Leveraging the Cloud's inherent flexibility to easily scale wireless capacity up or down to quickly meet changing business needs

- **COST REDUCTION/ EFFICIENCY GAINS**   Shifting WLAN management to the Cloud trims in-house travel expense, improves user responsiveness, and allows skilled IT staff to focus on other technology mandates

Considerations

If you are considering a Cloud-Managed Mobility approach, there are several things to keep in mind. The first is selecting the best technology. The platform that underlies Cloud-based WLAN management is available from several providers, with *Cisco-Meraki* and *Aerohive* being among the most advanced and highly rated.

In addition to providing efficient WLAN management, the better solutions also can deliver other high-value functions like location-based analytics. With this capability, APs can be configured to detect individuals based on the wireless device they are using. This data can then be used to analyze retail foot traffic, for instance, by key variables like time of day, new or repeat visits, and visit length. Solutions like those from Cisco-Meraki can also extend beyond wireless controllers and provide cloud management for other network components like Ethernet switches and intrusion prevention security appliances.

If you are considering Cloud Management for a new location or a refresh of an existing location, be sure to use access points that are based on the most current 802.11ac wireless standard. These newer units can support a greater number of mobile devices per AP, and also deliver much higher performance than earlier 802.11n or 802.11g units.

A final consideration is whether you want to manage your wireless networks yourself or enlist a trusted partner to manage them on your behalf. It's good to keep in mind that the management of wireless networks is one key component in the overall WLAN lifecycle that extends into planning and design, implementation and integration, network monitoring and providing user help desk support. If you are leaning toward complementing the skills of your internal IT team with an outside partner, be sure to research them carefully since not all business communications providers have equivalent experience and competencies with wireless networking.

Closing Thought

It's pretty clear that for businesses of all sizes and in all vertical segments, robust wireless networks are no longer 'nice-to-haves' but have become strategic necessities. As you make decisions on your going-forward approach to network management, give serious consideration to Cloud-Managed Mobility as a proven technology that delivers simplicity, scalability and cost savings.

Thank you for joining me in our brief discussion on an innovative approach to help ensure that your wireless networks meet the evolving needs of your business. If this short overview has intrigued you or brings additional questions to mind, we would enjoy continuing the discussion. As always, I welcome your feedback. Please direct any questions or comments to questions@coranet.com.

Margaret