



How to Prepare for an End-to-End Cisco Network

Chances are, you already have some type of data network, but it may not support your business needs. Your network may be stitched together with products from multiple vendors—one vendor's firewall, another's wireless access point/router, and so on. The downside: A network built piecemeal can create security gaps. It's more difficult and expensive to upgrade and manage—you may have to get rid of appliances and buy new ones.

Adding new technologies and applications, such as a small business phone system, to a piecemeal network can create even more costly confusion. A piecemeal network often doesn't provide the powerful bandwidth or reliable support you need. In fact, when something goes wrong, you're inevitably caught between multiple vendors, pointing fingers at each other.

An end-to-end Cisco network foundation provides the security, bandwidth, upgrade flexibility and support your business needs. Here are some key things to keep in mind if you are considering a secure Cisco foundation for your data network today, and if you'd like to add voice, wireless and other technologies and applications tomorrow:

1. **You don't have to go it alone.** Certified Cisco partners that specialize in working with small business can help you throughout the entire process. Even before providing you with a bid, your partner will thoroughly inspect your current network (and phone system if desired) to determine what equipment is needed. Your partner will suggest applications and solutions based on your short- and long-term business goals. You invest only in the equipment your business needs, when it's needed.
2. **Ask your partner for an estimate of how long the upgrade process will take.** The time required to upgrade your network depends on such factors as your company's number of employees and locations. Ask your partner for a real-world estimate of how long it might take to upgrade or install your network. Also, ask what can be done to minimize any potential down time.
3. **Avoid potential pitfalls by being prepared.** Once you're committed to a network upgrade, your partner will need information to facilitate the installation. For example, if you're adding a phone system to your network, your partner will need to know your company's telephone numbers, extensions, and fax numbers. Ask your partner early on exactly what information he or she will need and have it ready as early as possible. This will help the transition go smoothly.
4. **Determine what training you'll need.** Your partner will review the network features with the network administrator or whoever will be managing network operations in your office. You can request additional training to help your workforce transition to the many features that will be available to them with your



new voice and data network. Be sure to ask your partner what training he or she recommends.

5. **Decide how you want to handle ongoing support and maintenance.** Discuss with your partner a service-level agreement (SLA) that guarantees specific levels of support at different fee structures. Depending on the size of your business and your needs, you might want to hire one or more people to provide ongoing support and maintenance. Whichever direction you take, carefully consider the pros and cons of each as early in the process as possible.
6. **Map out the future.** Will you be adding software or solutions to your network down the road, such as customer-relationship management (CRM) software integrated with your phone system? If so, your partner will meet separately with your network administrator and others as necessary to add the desired solution to your network with as little disruption as possible.

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