

Strategic Network Transformation in the AI Era: Unlocking Performance and Simplicity

How unified, AI-powered platforms with integrated security drive growth and operational efficiency for midsize organizations



Brandon Butler
 Senior Research Manager,
 Enterprise Networks, IDC

AI adoption drives network change

Organizations face pressure to modernize network infrastructure for AI enablement.

AI and networking impact:

Networking must evolve to support a flood of new AI applications and agents; AI-driven network management improves efficiency and operations.

Complicated management:

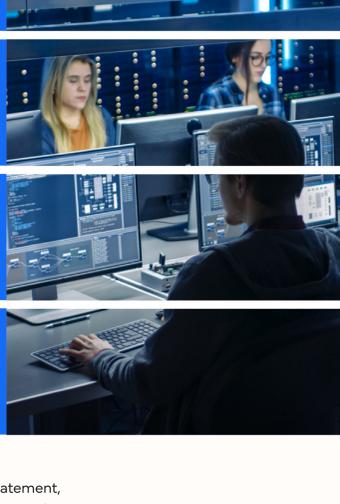
Hybrid work models; expanding SaaS adoption; and disparate technologies, systems, and processes often lead to inefficient operations and an inability for IT to scale to meet business needs.

Expanding cyberthreats:

AI-powered and post-quantum attacks require distributed security, access controls, and continuous monitoring to be embedded in the network fabric through zero trust and secure access services edge (SASE) methods.

Overburdened IT teams:

Organizations with lean IT teams are challenged by fragmented tools and manual processes.



79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, **"My efforts in network automation must be fueled by AI capabilities."**

Source: IDC's 2024 Worldwide AI in Networking Special Report

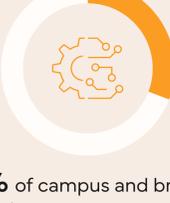
Lean IT teams, big demands

Unified platforms and AI-powered automation help IT teams manage complexity and scale.



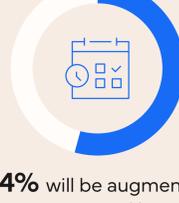
Unified platforms that include hardware, software, and policy with native AI and security are a fundamental shift from disparate management of networking and security.

Now



31% of campus and branch network management tasks are currently augmented or automated by AI-powered capabilities.

In two years



54% will be augmented or automated by AI.

Source: IDC's AI in Networking Special Report, 2025

Integrated platforms, enhanced security

Platform-based approaches unify management and embed security for improved performance and compliance.

Converging networking and security through zero trust approaches is a top strategic connectivity priority for organizations.

78% of organizations are moving to an AI-powered platform approach to networking.

Centralized control and cloud-based systems enable visibility, analytics, and advanced management across the network.

Standardized, platform-based approaches enhance security posture through consistent policy architecture and enforcement.

Source: IDC's AI in Networking Special Report, 2024

Benefits of network platforms

Unified platforms deliver operational simplicity, technical performance, and future-proof infrastructure.

Operational simplicity

Network platforms ease operational management by centralizing control and eliminating disparate tools across domains.

Technical performance

AI-powered platforms built on large data sets and real-world telemetry can enable smarter insights, faster problem solving, and agentic actions.

Future-proof infrastructure

Deep visibility and analytics speed identification and remediation of problems and assure high-quality user experiences.



Blueprint for transformation in the AI Era

To optimize networks and drive business growth, midsize organizations should:



Assess current network architecture for platformization and automation opportunities.



Prioritize solutions that integrate management and embed security directly into the network fabric.



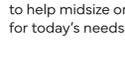
Leverage AI-powered network management capabilities to ease operational burdens and optimize network performance era.



Support scalable, future-proof infrastructure to meet evolving business needs.



Message from the sponsor



Scalable hardware and cloud-managed solutions from Cisco are designed to meet the demands of modern, AI-enabled applications and fast-paced business growth.

As a trusted leader in networking and security, Cisco delivers a strong foundation to help midsize organizations confidently manage, secure, and scale their networks for today's needs and tomorrow's opportunities.

[Learn more](#)

For more information, download the IDC spotlight titled, "Accelerate Business Growth and Drive Simplicity in the AI Era: A Strategic Blueprint for Network Transformation," sponsored by Cisco.