CBTS

Demystifying Networks with One Foot in the Cloud

Many of today's businesses are beginning to hit a wall with their legacy network solutions and architecture. While enterprise network architects are already struggling to keep pace with the accelerating demand for improved communication, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is making it even more challenging. Thus, taking full advantage of the latest technologies to streamline the network performance is all the more critical now. What businesses need is a complete rethinking of how network solutions are designed and deployed to mitigate the complexity.

THE DAWN OF NETWORK AS A SERVICE (NAAS)

As a transformative business technology approach, NaaS is redefining how firms create, consume, and adapt to connectivity and network capabilities. The key value proposition fuelling the growth of NaaS is the programmability of the cloud. With NaaS, networking has turned into a cloud-based service instead of simply being a foundational service delivery artifact.

While these benefits are making waves across the traditional networking landscape, a company that is propelling this approach and building success on top of it is CBTS (cbts.com). The company's deep experience in keeping a business well-connected using modern technologies, combined with its NaaS, SD-WAN, and hosted UC offerings, is helping clients reach the highest potential for growth and collaboration, even during the pandemic.

The NaaS offering by CBTS is powered by Cisco Meraki, which provides a scalable method of expanding, maintaining, and securing a network with provisions, such as cloud integration, Wi-Fi, auto VPN, and more. It offers robust networking options for enterprise-level organizations with large site locations. "We enable your infrastructure to be smarter and simpler, and allow you to consume technology on a monthly per site basis," says Joe Putnick, the chief innovation officer at CBTS.

Notably, the NaaS approach has also helped CBTS grow from having only a couple of clients when they launched the solution, back in 2016, to more than 600 clients now in well over 5,000 locations. Reflecting on this tremendous growth in a rather short span of time, Putnick says, "The OpEx model really resonates with our customers. So, instead of just selling a product, we offer multiple layered solutions, and on top of that, solve customer problems versus just going with a prearranged menu."

For its SD-WAN offering, CBTS leverages solutions from market leaders, such as Viptela (a Cisco subsidiary) and VeloCloud (VMWare subsidiary), which can be deployed over any type of connection from MPLS, internet, or 4G LTE. This flexibility makes CBTS SD-WAN offering the preferred networking solution for small- and medium-size (SMB) organizations as well as an experienced partner for enterprise-level organizations. Whether the NaaS and SD-WAN offerings are designed, implemented, and managed separately or together, CBTS can help an organization increase productivity, cut costs, and respond to their evolving business needs.

'A NEW TECHNOLOGY, AN OLD PROBLEM, AND A BIG IDEA'—RECIPE FOR INNOVATION

In 2016, as Putnick recalls, CBTS was performing research on NaaS to settle on the company's unique offerings. "We found that there was a bunch of companies working on Wi-Fi and another set of firms doing firewalls, but there wasn't a holistic approach to fully-manage customers."

While this gap in the network solutions market did not affect the big sharks much, it greatly impacted the SMBs, who found it very difficult to scale beyond a single location with their limited resources. "What we typically saw for SMBs is, if they had multiple locations, every site operated using different hardware, software, manufacturers, and sometimes dissimilar cabling plants. These variations made the networks of smaller businesses with multiple locations a nightmare to manage," explains Putnick.

The vision of CBTS NaaS offering originated here. In order to solve the conundrum, CBTS' persistent probes were: "How can we make the lives of our clients simpler? How do we ensure that when they start their work in the morning, everything is up and running, and stays up and running? How do we integrate or upgrade their system without snags or delays?"

ENTER CBTS' INNOVATIVE RECIPE.

• The preparation

"What we figured out was, there's between five and eight different network designs that fit more than 90 percent of our customer base. We often refer to these templates as our 'recipes' or 'cook books.' And, if we spent time predefining the configurations, we can have a baseline ready to get customers up and running faster," underscores Putnick.

• Cooking up the perfect solution

Once the CBTS team and the client have defined the template, the process moves to orchestrating the network design document. A pod leader, project manager, and a team of engineers are then assigned for implementing and maintaining it. "We have teams that go to the site and help the customer install. Although it sounds like a really complicated process, it can be done quickly. We complete installations within 20-28 days of contract signature," notes Putnick. "Our benchmark has been as many as 800 installs a month, and running on an average of 500 installs a month," he adds.

And, to ensure sure-fire success, CBTS takes a route off the beaten track. The company creates a hybrid monitoring environment by integrating with ServiceNow. This integration enables CBTS to create automated processes that can monitor and manage the sites from day one and proactively help clients in every step of the project implementation. "Even before our technicians leave the site, the client's network architecture is on our map, so to speak," states Putnick.

• An à la carte of features and functionalities

What's more? At any point, the clients can upgrade their existing infrastructure and pay for the incremental monthly. And, in certain cases, if there's a downturn and customers need to retract a little bit, CBTS provides that flexibility too. Driven by such advantages, today, several SMBs spanning retailers, quick-serve restaurants, and a myriad of heavy manufacturing companies are riding on the coattails of CBTS' network services to shore up their businesses.

TAPPING THE AUTOMOTIVE-RETAIL MARKET

Recalling one of CBTS' success stories, Putnick shares the instance of Tire Discounters, a renowned Midwest-based corporation providing tires, wheels, and auto services. The company operates in 137 locations, each having 10 employees, where at least one employee is responsible for handling phone inquiries, scheduling appointments, and managing transactions with consumers.

The company needed a point of sale application to complete transactions, and an application to manage its huge inventory of tires. They were also looking for a more robust Wi-Fi solution to serve consumers, generate valuable analytics, and create revenue potential. They contacted CBTS after experiencing repeated outages with their previous technology provider. The CBTS team discovered that the tire services company ran its legacy equipment and technology on a copper network, and needed a solution that would stabilize and enhance its network. On implementing CBTS NaaS offering, the company experienced seamless failover between multiple, diverse connections. At the same time, with the improved Wi-Fi network, they could gather insights to optimize revenue opportunities at different branch locations. As a result, the client reduced downtime at all the branches and witnessed significant cost savings.

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CUSTOMERS ABOVE ALL: A CULTURE THAT BREEDS SUCCESS

One of the aspects that truly distinguishes CBTS from others is its commitment toward fulfilling end-user expectations with the utmost flexibility. CBTS tries to stay ahead of both client needs as well as leading-edge technology. In terms of innovation, the company is soon rolling out four additional solutions in the areas of multifactor authentication, managed detection and response, vulnerability management, and patch management. "We want to simplify things. We want to standardize networks across all of your locations and make sure that the firewall rules that are in Kalamazoo, MI are the same in Reno, NV. And we'll manage that for you. We are very bullish about it," expresses Putnick. He strongly believes this customer-driven approach is one of the key reasons CBTS has been able to establish and maintain a long-running relationship with numerous reputed companies worldwide, and it wants to continue doing the same now and in the future. **CR**

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