**FREEFORM DYNAMICS**

Inside Track for The Channel

In association with

**Barracuda**

# Stressed Networks Create a Channel Opportunity

Pushing against that open door

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# Introduction

No one needs telling that the pressure on their network infrastructure is growing. In fact those participating in a recent Freeform Dynamics research study[1] were all too aware of the escalating challenges. Whether it's mobile working, cloud adoption, digital customer engagement, more diverse branch networking requirements, or simply the hunger for more capacity, performance, reliability and security within the business, we are told that things are going to get messy if they continue on their current trajectory.

*Figure 1*

How confident are you that your current network and communications infrastructure can handle evolving requirements in relation to the following?
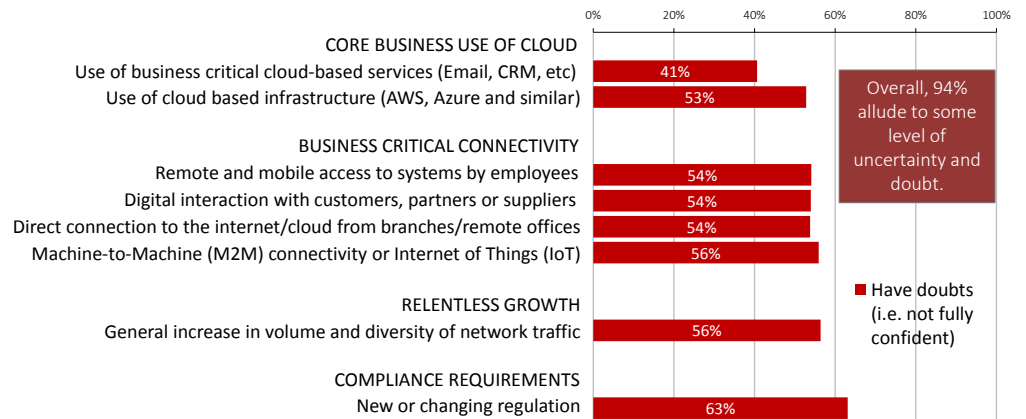


The fundamental problem is that investment in networks is too often not keeping pace with the growth in demand. But if IT professionals have such clear visibility of the problems that lie ahead, why don't they just put in a request for the funding and resource required to get themselves onto a firmer footing?

# Impediments to progress

A couple of issues exist that stand in the way of progress, and they are both linked.

Firstly, when faced with more complex and extreme problems to solve within the network, a frequent assumption is that these are best tackled with specialist equipment. In the research, for example, we picked up a strong preference for 'best of breed' over multi-function devices. When you start thinking like this, the prospect of taking on board the capital costs and additional integration and management overhead can easily become daunting.

This leads us to the second issue - lack of management air cover. A message that comes through loudly and clearly is that senior budget holders are frequently unaware of the gap that's opening up between evolving business needs and the ability of the network to meet them. While the risks are obvious to technical staff, business execs are often reported to just not get it. To be fair, when you are running a business, a discussion of the company's communications infrastructure is probably as interesting as talking about the plumbing – you just want people to take care of it.
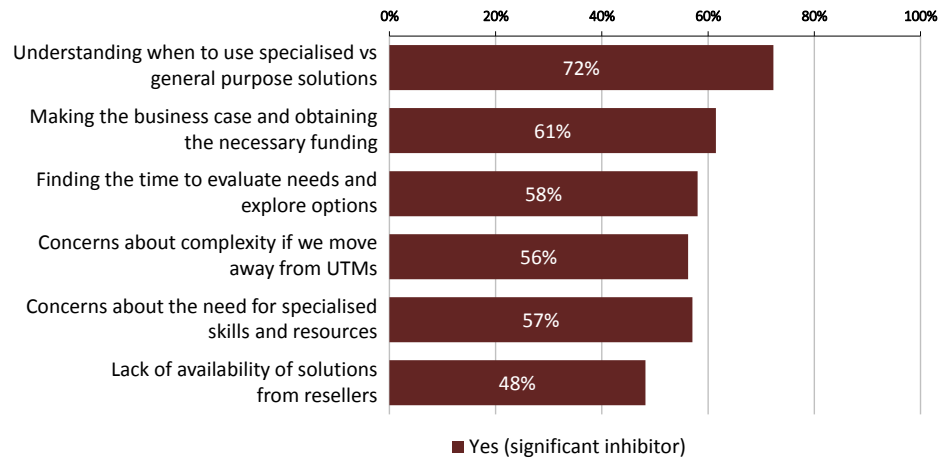
Sadly, when these two factors are put together, many IT pros end up lowering their sights. While they would love to acquire the latest specialist kit, along with the resources and skills to run and implement it, they just can't make the business case (Figure 2).

Figure 2

**Would you consider any of these factors a significant inhibitor to network modernisation?**



As a result of this, IT teams end up lurching from quick fix to quick fix, and over time the network and tooling used to run it becomes even more fragmented and disjointed.

# Technology advances can make things easier

The reality, of course, is that strengthening the infrastructure so it's better able to deal with what's likely to be thrown at it over the next few years need not be as complex or expensive as is frequently assumed. While we must be careful not to trivialise and over-generalise, the truth is that many of the functions hitherto only available in high end, specialist kit have become available as 'features' embedded in multi-function devices.

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Solutions such as application delivery controllers (ADCs) and unified threat management (UTM) boxes are now extremely capable, to the point where their core functionality is on a par with best of breed options. While you may not get all of the fine-grain tuning options, most customers never do much with these anyway, so to all intents and purposes ADCs, UTMs, and other general-purpose offerings don't represent the compromise they arguably did not so long ago. Whether its performance optimisation or better security, they get the job done just as well in most environments. The additional cost and hassle of best of breed solutions need only be incurred in exceptional circumstances.

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# The channel opportunity

The call to action here is for channel partners to bring IT staff in their customer and prospect bases up to speed on some of the advances that have taken place over the last few years. In fact, if you take some of the pain points highlighted in the research, these can easily be used as hooks for account development calls and new business campaigns, particularly if you align product/service packages to the specific concerns that are clearly front-of-mind.

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However, an important ingredient in outreach activity is assistance with the internal sell. This could be in the form of assessment and planning tools, business case templates and coaching, or simply material/arguments to help engage business execs in terms they will understand and appreciate. In many ways, this is about bridging the gap between business trends and objectives, and the practical realities of keeping the organisation properly and safely connected. One of the obvious points to make is that

money will be spent on additional network capacity, performance and security measures at some point anyway as most organisations will not have the luxury of doing nothing. Better to invest proactively rather than reactively, as the ROI will be greater, and the company's risk posture improved.

## Conclusion

*Driving campaigns around strengthening the network are worthwhile, even if the prospect doesn't respond immediately.*

We won't pretend acting on the above will be easy, as spend on infrastructure is always hard to justify because it's difficult to link it with specific business initiatives. But driving campaigns around strengthening the network are worthwhile, even if the prospect doesn't respond immediately. The one thing for sure is that something will break or get uncomfortably close to its limits at some point in the future, whether in the area of performance or security, and when this happens, there's a chance they'll remember that you told them so, and give you a call.

## References

The following research report is available for free download from the Freeform Dynamics website (www.freeformdynamics.com).

1.  Future Proofing your Network

# About Freeform Dynamics

Freeform Dynamics is an IT industry analyst firm. Through our research and insights, we aim to help busy IT and business professionals get up to speed on the latest technology developments, and make better informed investment decisions.

For more information, and access to our library of free research, please visit www.freeformdynamics.com.

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Barracuda provides cloud-connected security and storage solutions that simplify IT. These powerful, easy-to use and affordable solutions are trusted by more than 150,000 organizations worldwide and are delivered in appliance, virtual appliance, cloud and hybrid deployments. Barracuda's customer-centric business model focuses on delivering high-value, subscription-based IT solutions that provide end-to-end network and data security.

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