Planning a Global Network Refresh?

Five MUST-HAVE Questions for your RFP

CIOs and IT leaders are recognizing the importance of their global network infrastructure as a foundation for digital transformation. Investments in network platforms that are both instantly configurable and dynamically optimizable are required in order to innovate at today's accelerated velocity of change. And as cloud migration and the internet of things (IoT) gain popularity, security also becomes a primary factor in selecting a network services partner.

This paper looks at the way organizations create RFPs for global networking (WAN) solutions and offers some timely advice in ways the procurement process must change to support today's demands while also preparing for tomorrow.

Network Evolution

More and more these days, network upgrade conversations become security conversations. The two have become inherently linked. This pairing has been powered by a growing number of segmented networks, as well as an increase in cloud applications and users with multiple devices both inside and outside of the security domain. But as complexity increases and worlds collide, challenges arise.

Organizations are often at a loss when it comes to understanding what is happening on their network, especially as application workloads have gained portability and can move from on-premises to the cloud and back. Businesses want the agility that new approaches powered by advanced analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) promise, but IT and security teams struggle to meet demands while keeping data secure.

All of these factors contribute to today's increasing need for network modernization.

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The RFP Dilemma

Most organizations contemplating an IT infrastructure modernization project will start by creating a request for proposal (RFP) and sending it out to a number of vendors. However, as networks have become more complex, so have the RFPs, which often read like the Federal Register of governmental regulations—thick, dense, and incomprehensible.

The problem is that too many RFP questions can often lead to inadequate responses, as vendor representatives are paralyzed by the sheer volume of information they are asked to provide. Of course, enterprise IT teams need to make sure their needs are being met. A network upgrade RFP can include a myriad of subject areas including multiprotocol label switching (MPLS), local network access, software-defined WAN (SD-WAN), monitoring, ticketing, management, implementation, application user experience, and more—but often lack the critical context that lets buyers and sellers truly communicate and prioritize the importance of each piece of the global networking puzzle.

The question becomes this: Is the RFP process itself broken beyond repair?

Rethinking RFP: Invert the Process

Savvy organizations are turning the RFP process on its head, by engaging possible vendors in conversation first, and using those discussions to determine which vendors receive the RFP once written. These conversational sessions help ensure that the vendor community truly understands enterprise needs and helps create a short list of vendors before the RFP is created.

During these sessions, enterprises can share their pain points, long-term application strategy, and plans for growth and expansion that might impact network demand. A best practice is to try to limit the scope and present specific challenges that have led to a need for modernization. Here, discovery is the key—gaining joint visibility into each other's future is critical. A good first step is to whiteboard the enterprise, so potential vendors can discover what workloads are critical, how they are virtualized, who uses them, and from where. Holding a whiteboarding session brings intelligence to the process and demonstrates vendor agility and customization capabilities on the spot. It's also useful to share an understanding of how far the enterprise has moved along its journey to the cloud. During this session, enterprises should consider key vendor attributes, especially:

Time to Write: What's in the RFP?

Once a short list of potential vendors have been identified, start the RFP by encapsulating the business drivers that are behind the need for change.

With the RFP process inverted, enterprises can distill evaluations and accelerate decision-making with these five key questions that every network services RFP should consider:

1. Is your network built to deliver a globally consistent and secure experience for enterprise cloud applications? Explain.

2. Does your WAN have a software-defined, programmatic architecture enabling the best user experience by minimizing packet losses and latency? Explain.

3. Does your solution allow limitless virtualized environments and direct connections to cloud providers with 24/7 security monitoring capabilities? Explain.

4. Can you provide deep visibility and control from a single, online management portal, giving our IT team analytics that enable instant performance optimization? Explain.

5. Do you utilize a third party to validate customer satisfaction in support of the solution design, migration strategies, and service experience? Explain.

These questions pinpoint agility, security, reliability, customization, performance optimization, and the quality of the customer experience. By rethinking the RFP process, enterprises can enjoy a shorter time-to-selection and ensure their global networking solutions will support their needs today and into the future.

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- Futureproofing ability—delivering solutions that are agile and flexible
- Applications, security, and custom design capability to deliver the right solution for the enterprise
- Vendor's overall customer experience and Net Promoter Score (NPS), an indicator of whether a past customer would recommend the vendor to others

How Masergy Can Help

Masergy is a Gartner Magic Quadrant Visionary, expert in network, security, communications and their interrelationship. Masergy's global, software-defined network platform enables it to provide the exact same solution anywhere on the planet, and their embedded analytics and service controls offer unmatched IT intelligence across the enterprise. Customizable by design, Masergy's solutions meet the needs of each enterprise and continually evolve as those needs change.

Ready to get started? Get more RFP guidance in Masergy's Hybrid Network Buyer Checklist **and** get a free whiteboarding session **with Masergy solution engineers.**

About Masergy

Masergy owns and operates the largest independent Software-Defined Platform in the world, delivering hybrid networking, managed security, and cloud communication solutions to global enterprises. Its patented technology, customizable solutions, and unmatched customer experience are why a growing number of leading organizations rely on Masergy. To learn more visit www.masergy.com