

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- ✓ How to overcome problems in the market
- ✓ Security features that should be built in
- ✓ SLAs for cloud-first strategies

Intro to SD-WAN: the market and how services differ

While the choice between a DIY and managed SD-WAN service might be easy, the next decisions can be far more challenging. Do you go with a seemingly safe big-name brand? Or do you bet your global network on a startup that promises you an “MPLS alternative?” Let’s take a look at the market, the different types of network services, and which solutions and partners are best suited to deliver on digital transformation initiatives.

The market: polarity positions technology against service

Extra efforts during the initial search phase will likely pay off for those seeking agile partners and balanced offerings. There are two different types of providers: SD-WAN equipment manufacturers/resellers and managed SD-WAN service providers. In the managed services industry, there is a distinct polarity problem. Large providers and small startups, saturate the market. Very few agile, mid-sized players exist. So, there’s a shortage when it comes to

balanced solutions best suited for mid-to-large sized enterprises that may not have the brand clout or size to earn the full attention of “gorilla-sized” legacy providers. With agile players obscured, many CIOs feel they must choose between the two extremes--getting the service they deserve or the technology they need (see chart on the next page). Otherwise they’re stuck seeking out rare mid-tier providers.

Large Providers	Startups	Agile, Mid-Sized Providers (rare)	Characteristics
X	✓	✓	Known for customer service and responsiveness
✓	X	✓	Enterprise-level solutions and experience
X	X	✓	Global network availability and industry-leading SLAs

Managed SD-WAN: the difference is in security and what lies beneath

SD-WAN service providers typically take standardized hardware and add services on top. As a result, a lot of solutions look alike and decision makers find that the difference lies less in the SD-WAN technology itself and more in what supports and surrounds the edge device. Want to maximize results? Take a close look at add-on security features, the network architecture and dashboard, as well as the depth, breadth, and quality of the surrounding services. Here's how to evaluate what lies beneath.

Security features: built-in capabilities simplify protection and management

Not all solutions have security features built in. Look for solutions with a secure edge architecture where the SD-WAN edge device has integrated security features including next-generation firewalls with unified threat management. With seamless capabilities, security tasks are simplified and critical monitoring is easily outsourced to professionals.

Transport-agnostic solutions: flexibility better balances performance and cost

Many IT leaders want to use SD-WAN to create a hybrid network that mixes both private and public (broadband or wireless) connectivity. Transport-agnostic solutions make this possible. Also known as hybrid SD-WAN solutions, these flexible environments allow the customer to blend the appropriate combination of WAN links, so you can design the primary and backup connectivity in a way that works best for your applications, locations, users, and IT budget. The most flexible solutions also allow customers to deploy edge devices at select locations, rather than forcing them to deploy at all sites.

Network architecture: more agility when the entire solution is software defined

Network-based SD-WAN solutions pair the edge device with the provider's own private connectivity, delivered via their network service platform or "core backbone." With this approach, customers can tap into the provider's global service and direct connections to Amazon Web Services and also get the benefits of their performance guarantees (SLAs).

If you're considering a network-based solution, the design principles used to create the network will largely dictate your customer experience and ultimately your success. When the provider's entire "backbone" is software-defined, all of the elements of the underlying infrastructure are adjustable. This is an important decision-making factor, because both the SD-WAN edge device and its supporting services can easily adapt to changes. With the entire solution software defined, virtually every network function and configuration is programmable, paving the way for responsiveness and more automation.

SLAs for cloud service interconnections: key for global, cloud-first strategies

Many IT professionals are familiar with performance SLAs like jitter, packet loss, and network uptime guarantees, but most aren't aware that those promises can also be applied to cloud service interconnections to Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure, and others. While the majority of providers offer this direct connectivity, not all of them offer SLAs with that service. This is a key differentiator for enterprises taking a cloud-first strategy on a global scale. These SLAs ensure high-quality data transport to the cloud provider, creating a consistent cloud application experience across the globe.

Real-time application analytics and controls: heavy evaluation ensures top performance and ease of management

Visibility and control are critical capabilities in an SD-WAN deployment, and success requires application performance metrics, bandwidth management tools, and security insights all in real-time--and most importantly in one integrated dashboard. Most legacy carriers and SD-WAN service providers are unable to deliver real-time visibility and control due to multiple acquisitions and rigid underlying network architectures. If you're looking to optimize your network performance and simplify WAN management, these elements should be top requirements that are heavily evaluated. Buyers typically want both full service and self-service--meaning that they want their provider to proactively monitor their network performance but also want access to self-service controls in an online dashboard.

Managed services: wide variations expose the leaders

The end goal is about designing an SD-WAN solution that can hit on all your needs--meeting the demands of your budget, your applications/users, and your reliability risk tolerance. But a truly justified solution will do it all without overburdening your internal IT team. As such, decision makers are asking potential partners to clearly define what "managed SD-WAN" is and how it will help keep the workload off their teams. This is where buyers uncover the most wiggle room. It pays to inquire about all aspects of the service:

- Configuration: Who will be responsible for initial configuration (before the zero-config devices are shipped)?
- Implementation: Will the provider dedicate a team of resources?
- Service quality and monitoring: Do they provide industry-leading SLAs across the globe? Will they provide network and security monitoring 24/7?
- Maintenance and security: Who will manage the equipment after deployment and ensure devices/firewalls are updated/monitored from a security standpoint?
- Customer experience: Do they use a third party to measure service quality?
- History: Is the provider traditionally a technology manufacturer or a services company? (Understand the provider's history--as many are simply trying to expand core competencies to jump on the SD-WAN bandwagon.)

Additional resources

- [SD-WAN Security Guide: Broadband, Bundled Features, and Buyer Tips](#)
- [SD-WAN and Network Connectivity Design: A Three-Step Process to Balance Price, Performance, and Risk](#)
- [5 Criteria for Evaluating Managed SD-WAN Solutions](#)

About Masergy

Masergy is the software-defined network and cloud platform for the digital enterprise. Recognized as the pioneer in software-defined networking, Masergy enables unrivaled application performance across the network and the cloud with Managed SD-WAN, UCaaS, CCaaS, and Managed Security solutions. Industry-leading SLAs coupled with an unparalleled customer experience enable global enterprises to achieve business outcomes with certainty.