

THE FUTURE OF RETAIL

Transform your network and future proof your business for the digital retail of tomorrow



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The customer's desire for valuable and unique experiences is seen as the new 'gold' to attract and retain market share. This industry, as is the trend with many others, is changing and evolving at a rapid pace, with innovation being one of the key success factors to survival. The retail environment in South Africa remains predominately brick and mortar, however the pace of digitalisation and rising consumer demand for Amazon-like shopping experiences is forcing traditional brands to transform their entire organisation almost overnight in order to keep up with the pace of on-demand consumerism. In addition, the ability of smaller retailers to leverage off e-commerce and other cloud

services has resulted in greater flexibility, responsiveness to changing consumer needs and an overall increase in market share. The knock-on effect for incumbents is the need to find new competitive advantages through the effective management of customer databases combined with strategic re-organisation of key business units that spans supply chain, operations, finance and even marketing as the battle to win the consumer intensifies.

A key element of a successful transformation relies on the ability to communicate effectively across all areas of the business. In response to the proliferation of communication and connectivity technologies over the past two decades, most large organisations have made substantial investments in their Wide-Area-Network (WAN) infrastructure to ensure that information can be transmitted reliably and quickly from almost anywhere in the world. Over time, this has resulted in complex network infrastructures overladen with legacy architectures, which requires a number of resources and constant equipment upgrades to maintain, manage and secure the network. The cost implications of new technologies, coupled with the risk of low return on investment, are the biggest challenges that many C-suite executives face for balancing the need to save costs and remain competitive by digitally transforming processes and having the capital outlay of the required infrastructure.

One way in which organisations can begin the journey of streamlining their network infrastructure in a cost-effective manner is by centralising network management and replacing physical routers with virtual appliances. A technology like Software-Defined WAN (SD-WAN) allows organisations to do that, with

the added benefit of simultaneously working across multiple stores and easily adding new stores quickly and seamlessly to a corporate network, thus reducing resources, equipment requirements and the time allocated for deployment. SD-WAN also improves the control of hybrid WAN and multi-cloud environments and enables business-critical traffic to be prioritised. The major benefit of SD-WAN in the retail environment is that it supports the introduction and management of WiFi, Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), data collection and management, and advanced security requirements such as biometrics. In practical terms, this ensures that retailers can take advantage of today's technologies while future-proofing their network for the retail of tomorrow. In an age where hyper-personalisation, hyper-automation, human augmentation, transparency and traceability are becoming the norm, SD-WAN is the crucial foundation for any organisation wishing to maintain a competitive advantage in the 4IR.

As a total communications provider, Vodacom Business can offer your business a cost-effective end-to-end SD-WAN solution that combines this new technology with our business grade connectivity, security and network management services. Our solution is differentiated by our highly rated, customisable service level agreements, enablement through our partners of choice, who are cloud-based and well-established in the ICT industry (VMware's VeloCloud, Cisco Viptella and Cisco Meraki). This, combined with our ability to honour existing network investments, enables Vodacom to provide an end-to-end offering, unprecedented in our market. ■