Unlocking the Promise of a Digital Workplace- 2020 and Beyond

The business landscape has evolved significantly over the past decade. Driven by the need to remain agile, competitive and productive, organisations are adopting more technologies than ever before as they continue their individual journeys towards digital transformation.

These disruptive technologies are not only revolutionising the ways that modern businesses operate, but also enhancing employee experiences, and – crucially – increasing their expectations at the same time. For employees, the digital workplace stands for an innovative and agile new way of working, a concept underpinned by greater convenience and better networking between devices and colleagues.

Faced with such a promise, the demand for a frictionless employee journey only looks set to surge. Not only will Generation Z, or Gen-Mobile, make up almost half of the business world by 2020, but they will also play an undeniable part in transforming the ecosystem as a whole. True digital natives, they will settle for no less than the best of the best technologies. They want to work and access information in a way that suits them. Put simply – they want IT to be transparent.

So, against this backdrop of employee expectations and an increasingly competitive business landscape, what can organisations do to truly unlock the promise of a digital workplace?

Automation

The first step is to ensure that the basic requirements, such as easier management and maintenance of the wireless network, rapid integration of new users and devices, and a resilient Wi-Fi connection, are met. For IT staff, this translates into removing barriers to mobile working and creating a mobile first digital environment where employees can work effectively.

Here, it is important to remember that a digital environment is not just defined by the tools a company provides – it's also about the working climate they create and how they enhance the employee experience by making it at seamless as possible. And that means considering everything from personalised lighting settings, how they pay for their coffee and workplace ergonomics, to fully automated conference rooms, preventive device maintenance and automated energy savings. This frictionless experience should be delivered both on and offsite – a remote employee must be able to work as if he were on-site, while registered visitors should be able to connect easily to the guest Wi-Fi as soon as they enter the building.

In order to facilitate this vast level of change, traditional approaches to networking are no longer enough. Instead, IT decision-makers need to deploy mobile first architecture that can support autonomous networking. Rather than relying on manual intervention, an autonomous approach gives IT staff the ability to stay ahead of performance issues, deliver insights into possible causes, and recommend configuration changes that optimize the network before they impact users of the business.

Visibility

While all these new devices and services sound brilliant in practice, in reality it can be difficult to keep track of them on the network – particularly when organisations find themselves reactively scrambling to get a handle on the situation. A common issue is that of Shadow IT, where well-intentioned employees bring their own IT to work, thus creating security issues.

Viessmann is one of the world's leading providers of holistic energy and climate solutions – you may even have one of its central heating boilers keeping you warm this winter! Viessmann came to us in search of a new network to support the digitisation of its internal processes in a way that was secure, efficient, and transparent. In order to facilitate a move to flexible desks and the introduction of IoT technologies into its manufacturing process, it wanted to provide Wi-Fi connectivity in every corner of the organisation. When you consider that it has over 12,000 employees, 23 production companies in 12 companies and sales companies and representatives in 74 countries worldwide – you can begin to imagine how things might quickly get out of control…

In order to support the surge of devices connecting to the network, Viessmann needed a flexible management system that would enable it to see and control network access for all devices, both now and in the future. Using our Aruba ClearPass solution, which has an integrated, context-based policy engine to help identify devices, and combining it with AirWave to manage network administrator rights, the organisation now has total control over the devices connecting to the network.

Before flooding the workplace with devices, network visibility must be a key consideration – and that means building network access controls and network management into your digital workplace plans from the earliest stage.

Education

Whilst all these technologies can help organisations shift towards a digital workplace, they are only part of the puzzle. To truly realise the benefits of a digital environment, organisations need to encourage employees to unlock its potential – and that means getting away from their desks and collaborating more.

While this might happen over time organically, this type of large-scale culture change will need help from the organisation. Businesses must ensure they are educating employees around how to connect, communicate and collaborate within these new environments – equipping them to use them correctly and to their fullest.

Aside from driving greater job satisfaction creating this technology-culture connection will also benefit employee creativity. The right technology builds a culture of innovation. When employees are tethered to a desk, or they lack the tools to collaborate and spark creativity, you end up with a maze of silos: a "culture of me." But when the technology starts to dissolve those boundaries and inspire people to be more open, imaginative and sharing, there's a fundamental culture shift towards new ways of thinking. In the long term, that boost to innovation will be reflected in corporate performance.