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# A Networking Launch That Couldn't Be Stopped

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By Mark Ivey, with Jerry Soverinsky

## What's in it for you?

- Our new secure access products are designed to help drive the hybrid work experience from the enterprise branch to campus.
- Engineering teams battled through major COVID-19 challenges to deliver the products on schedule.
- The network will continue to be the foundation, no matter what new demands and technologies emerge.



It was a project conceived before the pandemic exploded, and then shaped by it.

Along the way, more than 1,000 Cisco engineers persevered through two years of challenges: COVID-19 outbreaks, shifting schedules, employee turnover, and sleepless nights.

“At times I wondered if we were ever going to finish the development because of the disruptions caused by the pandemic,” said VP of Product Management for the Secure Access Business Group Greg Dorai.

Greg, now on crutches from a December accident, looks back with relief and awe at the power of hybrid work technology and how our engineering teams came together to make it happen.

**Q:** How do our new secure access products work together to drive hybrid work and help our customers?

**Greg:** The pandemic showed us that remote workers and in-office workers alike will require rich video to connect and enable new types of collaboration.

It starts with a connectivity experience. It needs to be superb and offer a similar experience for people wherever they are. Wi-Fi 6E and Catalyst 9K-X give you the capacity and feeds that you need.

It's like taking a six-lane highway and turning it into 20 lanes. Do you need 20 lanes now? Perhaps not today, but in the next 10 years, you will. These products get you ready for that.

Together, the new products work to help connect a company's people, maximize safety in the workplace, and secure the organization.

**Q:** What challenges did you face during the pandemic?

**Greg:** We were right in the middle of development when the pandemic hit.

About 40 percent of the wireless engineering team and 50 percent of the Cat 9 engineering team is based in India. In the spring of 2021, the delta variant of the coronavirus was creating untold chaos in India.

Nearly every person on our teams had someone in their immediate family impacted by COVID-19. Not just sick, mind you, but sick and couldn't even get a hospital bed.

There was a profound humanitarian crisis there that lasted about six weeks.

**Q:** How did the strategies shift during this time for networking?

**Greg:** Cisco DNA Spaces — which supports all of the new wireless and switching technology and devices to deliver the best outcomes and experiences — is a good example of how we adapted. Originally, it was focused on retail and hospitality verticals.

But within a month or two from the onset of COVID-19, we transformed the use case to be about proximity reporting — how to return to work in the campus enterprise setting while focused on safety.

The Spaces team completely reinvented and rebuilt everything.

And for all our solutions people just helped each other out, collaborating across teams and geographies. When one geography was impacted, another would pick up their workload.

Individual engineers rose to become leaders. Junior members took on senior roles. It was completely organic, a bottoms-up collaboration.

## Q: What were major aha moments?

Greg: The products were not originally conceptualized together or meant to be launched at the same time.

But as things evolved, we recognized the tremendous synergies. If we launched the Wi-Fi 6E access points with the Cat 9000X switches, DNA Solution Suite, and DNA Spaces, the solutions become far more compelling.

We also discovered we don't all need to be in buildings in person to succeed with the design, engineering, testing and go-to-market planning of new products. Luckily, our engineers were able to meet in person before the pandemic for the conceptualizing. That led to some good bonding.

After that it was about execution, and we could do that smoothly while remote.

For instance, most of the testing and monitoring had to be done virtually. We tested using the same access bandwidths and demanding 8K video-rich applications we knew our customers would need. It was a challenge but it's great that we did it.

## Q: How will our tech help with the return to the office?

**Greg:** For those returning to the workplace, it will be about transparency, access to data and automation, bringing IoT devices onto the network safely, and providing employees with a safe environment, rich mapping and navigation tools, and social distancing.

Nobody else is doing this for the enterprise.

## Q: How will these announcements impact the future of networking? What will things look like in a year or two?

**Greg:** I think the focus will be about collaboration. The era of the smartphone is going to wane — as unbelievable as that might seem — and some futuristic collaboration device is going to take its place.

The network will continue to be that product's foundation. The virtual reality world and its immersive experience will demand it. Cisco is going to be the cornerstone of that new era and this new hybrid world whether workers are on campus or working remotely.

## Q: Any final parting thoughts?

**Greg:** I'm a prime example of the benefits of a rich experience in a hybrid work environment. I fell and had to have surgery on my leg in December. It was a slow recovery process.

It would have been a major struggle if I would have had to go into an office. But because of remote work, it was easy for me to continue working and contributing through the product launch. I literally could have surgery and peace of mind because I knew I could be 100 percent productive. I'm eager to get back on-site to the office, but I know that if I have to, I can be just as effective remotely.

That's incredible. That's Cisco.

### Special thanks from Greg

Kudos to Engineering and Senior VP Ravi Chandra, VP of Engineering Operations Venu Venugopal, VP of Engineering EN Switching Shyam Maniyar, VP of Engineering EN Wireless Rakesh Thaker, VP of Engineering Scott Scheeler, and all their teams who rallied together to support each other and keep the work on track.

## Related links

- [1 Big Thing](#): CEC story on the product launch
- [Greg Dorai blog](#): Reimagining Hybrid Work
- [At the heart of the new hybrid work](#): Greg Dorai on the Newsroom
- [Chris Stori blog](#): The Network. Powering Hybrid Work
- [Wireless and mobility solutions](#)
- [Official launch press release](#)

## What we announced

On February 3, [we announced](#) several new switching and wireless products designed to power hybrid work from the enterprise branch to campus.

[Wi-Fi 6E Catalyst 9136](#) and [Meraki MR57](#) wireless access points use a newly available clean spectrum that matches wireline speeds and exceeds gigabit performance.

Wi-Fi 6E will greatly expand capacity and performance for the latest devices using immersive collaborative applications designed for hybrid work.

The **Catalyst 9000X switch series** provides the speed, bandwidth, capacity, and scale needed by the ongoing transition to hybrid work. How? Through its high performance 100G access/400G core switching capabilities, powered with **Cisco Silicon One**.

Cisco Silicon One was originally deployed in web scale and service provider networks. It provides programmable flexibility in Catalyst 9500X and 9600X Series switches to support innovations across enterprise networks.

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## Average Customer Reviews

**(Average of 4 ratings)**

Padmanabha-Rao Melanahalli

Good Work team! Thanks Greg.

February 11, 2022 1:13 PM

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Justin Barney

Nice work Greg and team! We're going to sell a lot of this amazing tech.

February 10, 2022 2:06 AM

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Victor Nunes

Congratulations to the entire team on a great launch - lots of great buzz from my partners.

February 08, 2022 4:14 PM

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Khai Trinh

Congrats to the entire team, your perseverance and dedication paid off! Love the 'six-lane highway and turning it into 20 lanes' analogy

February 08, 2022 1:33 PM

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Ernest Stanton

This is a really powerful launch that is incredibly relevant to our customers today.

February 08, 2022 0:41 AM

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Anirudh Kasturi

Cool

February 07, 2022 6:08 PM

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Eric Calhoun

Great article and great leadership!

February 07, 2022 4:56 PM

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Prakash Sripathy

cool and inspiring.

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Waseem Siddiqi

Great work Wireless Team !

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