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Meet the Man Reinventing Cisco's Network

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What's in it for you?

- SVP of Network Engineering Ravi Chandrasekaran talks our strategic advantage and tech
- How the massive shift to hybrid work transforms our customers' adoption and demands
- Hear his prediction for the network, automation, and security in the next 3 to 5 years



Ask Ravi Chandrasekaran, SVP of Network Engineering, about launching Cisco's new network four years ago and he gets excited. His eyes brighten.

No wonder. Transforming the network into a software-driven model was a bold bet. The new "Intent-Based Network" would be automated, scalable, adaptable — and able to learn over time. This would position Cisco for the Cloud explosion and dramatically

accelerate our customers' digital transformation journeys.

"Industry analysts thought it was brilliant," he says. "But they asked, 'Can you really do it?'"

We could, and we did.

Take the Catalyst 9K switching portfolio, launched in 2017.

"It's the foundation of our first digital offerings with all of its advanced programmable features," says Ravi. "Today, it's the most widely used switching product with total sales of \$16 billion. It's the fastest-growing switching product in the industry."



Read on for more with Ravi on Cisco's strategy, technology, and the road ahead.

(Answers were edited for clarity and flow)

Q: Can you break down the overarching approach that drives growth and adoption of our software-driven model?

Ravi: We're not creating features or boxes but foundational constructs, which are comprised of four pillars: wired, wireless, security, and controller architecture.

We excel in all four, whereas most of our competition has maybe two or at most three. That gives us a strategic advantage. Our customers love what we do because we bring their entire network together. When you do that, the wallet share that we gain and the overall role we play in our customers' networks broadens.

We're the main player in Enterprise Networking across wireless, switching, routing, and policy. We have competitors in each — and every startup is taking a shot at us. We must continue to innovate and keep creating moats that competitors can't bridge.

Q: Can you explain why our new lifecycle selling process is key to that growth?

Ravi: Traditionally, people made buying decisions just based on their immediate needs. They said, "I'm going to need switching or wireless." They never looked at their total network. They just wanted a certain siloed outcome.

As we moved to lifecycle selling, our organization's focus changed. It's not a product sale or a box sale. It's a whole network commitment.

Our focus is now on the set of outcomes our customers are trying to achieve across their enterprise. That's a big deal. We're partnering, becoming strategic to our customers and their success.

Q: It sounds like a major shift for everyone involved.

Ravi: It's a massive mindset shift. We're used to delivering platforms, and customers using whatever features they chose. We didn't even know what they were using. Then we'd go back in a few years to refresh the hardware.

Now we must work with them closely to deliver value and desired outcomes, helping guide them in using the various tools we provide. We have to deliver business value.

Q: How does DNA Center play a major role in us becoming better partners?

Ravi: DNA Center is the foundation for automation and analytics, to enable AIOps (artificial intelligence operations)-powered infrastructure.

DNA Center allows the customers to hide the complexity and operate massive networks at scale, securely with agility. For Cisco, it enables us to apply artificial intelligence and machine learning to



the massive data set and deliver unprecedented outcomes. It allows us to see what capabilities they can use and adopt.

With this information, we've worked across Sales, CX, Partner, and other organizations to assist our customers' lifecycle journey.

Q: How are you dealing with the surge in remote workers and the evolving hybrid work experience?



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Ravi: In terms of return to work, our enterprise customers are focused on a hybrid model where employees will divide their work between the home and office.

A flexible, wireless-first workspace drives the adoption of Cisco's Wi-Fi 6 as an access technology. It also pushes our customers to upgrade to our much faster switching infrastructure. Meanwhile, they increasingly want consistent policy and visibility across the home and office, wired and wireless. That's a

big change for us.

It no longer matters whether they're coming from home or a remote campus via any connection technologies. Thanks to our leadership in Wi-Fi 6 and Identity Service Engine, the policy follows them with complete visibility.

Also, the huge shift toward cloud-based consumed services has fueled more customer demand for SD-WAN, our routing portfolio, and new security capabilities.

Overall, our strategy across wired, wireless, routing, security, and controllers addressed all of these new emerging dynamics.

Q: Where do you see things going in the next three to five years?

The network is getting more important, complex, and dynamic. There are more devices attached to the network, which means more changes. The security threat vector is more dynamic than ever before. As a result, we need to up the game on automation and security.

— Ravi Chandrasekaran



Previously, we were automating devices, but now we need to automate outcomes by making the network even more proactive. We need to build a closed-loop system — a self-healing network.

For instance, to make the network more secure, we'll use all the data we've collected to proactively automate processes to secure the network. That's where AIOps comes in. It will help spot anomalies in the network and heal them instantly and quicker than humans can spot them.

Q: What are your thoughts as you reflect on the pandemic and what we've been through the last year?

Ravi: This has been an incredibly painful year for many people, and it's helped me see Cisco in a different light.

We're not a product organization. We're a people organization.

It's been magical to see how people have picked up each other and took care of one another. We have examples all throughout Cisco that we have all heard on the Cisco Check-Ins.

Despite all the challenges, the teams have continued to excel in execution. I want to thank them all. It just makes you feel good about being a part of this company.

Additional resources:

- We Are Cisco (WAC) profile on Ravi
- Cisco DNA Center
- Catalyst 9000 wireless and switching family

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Shyamsundar Maniyar

Ravi - thanks for your leadership, bold vision and persistence to realize the vision into execution, delivery and deployment! As you mentioned, Cat9K, DNAC/SDA/Assurance, Wifi6 and SDWAN are changing the way enterprise networks are being architected and deployed. No wonder Cat9K became fastest ramping product in Cisco's history! Hats off to you!

Thu Jul 15 2021 16:55:43 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)

Sachin Modi

Inspiring !!

Thu Jul 15 2021 14:35:17 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)

Khai Trinh

Comment was removed by the author on Thu Jul 15 2021 11:01:32 GMT-0700 (Pacific Daylight Time)

Thu Jul 15 2021 13:22:57 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)

Pablo Romo Flores

A very well summarized article, and sounds like it was an Enlightening interview.

Thank you for sharing. 👍

Thu Jul 15 2021 13:02:14 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)



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