

Global Employee Headlines /

# The Secret Behind Cisco's \$20 Billion Innovation

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By Mark Ivey, with Jerry Soverinsky

## What's in it for you?

- The new Cat9k switch provides a glimpse into our tech strategy and teams.
- The innovations will power Cisco's digital network and hybrid work for years.
- Teams systematically work through challenges, never losing focus on the goal.



Years ago, when Ravi Chandrasekaran headed up engineering teams, he faced a key decision: Spend extra time and resources to design a new backwards compatible product or just keep moving to meet deadlines?

He chose to keep moving.

He has regretted it ever since.

Customers weren't happy to be forced to upgrade to a new solution that didn't work with their existing investments.

After that experience, Ravi doubled down on getting both the long-term vision right and maximizing long-term value and quality.

No more shortcuts.

This guiding philosophy was tested again recently with the launch of the Catalyst 9000X switch — the latest version of the technological marvel that's already generated more than \$20 billion in revenue. It's poised to power (and transform) the network and the next decade of hybrid work.

That launch highlights how Cisco pulls off these extraordinarily complex projects, offering a glimpse into how the engineers and global teams make it happen.

We caught up with Cisco's SVP, Enterprise Networking, to discuss our tech strategy, our global teams, and more.

## **Q: There's excitement around the Cat9K and many other networking products being announced this year. Why is this such a big deal for our customers?**

**Ravi:** Two things: Security and intent.

With our network, we incorporate the most robust and advanced security features designed for the hybrid work that is proliferating worldwide. And we are keenly focused on delivering outcomes, too.

You can use our solutions in a self-service manner now: IT users tell the network what to do to achieve the business outcomes they need.



The Catalyst 9000X launch team in Bangalore.

This proactive approach to problem solving is integral to the digital transformation of the network.

## **Q: How do we deliver cutting-edge innovation to our customers?**

**Ravi:** First, we are pioneering a single, end-to-end architecture offered through a subscription model.

Second, we changed how customers work with our products. We provided them with a rich set of software that runs on those switches. The results are profound. You can achieve precise outcomes on demand and at scale.

We moved away from being hardware-centric to a license model comprised of both hardware and software.

Customers now get the latest technology and our continual innovation by subscriptions.

And for every dollar that our customers spent previously, it's tripled today. We earn recurring revenue.

It's all a win-win.

**Q: Our big projects can now involve thousands of software and hardware engineers across multiple organizations, and you're increasingly working with other groups like Meraki and IoT. Is that scale unique for our industry?**

**Ravi:** It's unique for any industry. The competition would struggle to do even a part of what we've done.

The combination of innovation that we've achieved at the [Application Specific Integrated Circuit] level, the hardware level, and the software level combined — you only get that with a well synchronized, highly skilled talent pool.

Truly, magic has happened.

The Catalyst 9000X team launch in San Jose.

## **Q: What goes into making great teams who can pull off complex projects?**

**Ravi:** You first need to have an overarching vision of where you want to go, and then a solid compass to stay on course.

The second thing is a determination to deliver quality — on time — irrespective of what happens.

You need to have teammates committed to not missing on the deliverable, continually focusing on quality, scale, and timing.

After that, everything else is a byproduct.

With the global challenges we've faced these past few years, our teams remained on track. They never had excuses. Whether budgets contracted, teams were remote, or people left, their commitment to quality, scale, and timing persisted.

## Q. What's next for Networking Experiences engineers?

*We are always innovating. We — Engineering, Meraki, and IoT — have been working together to unify the development process to create products that simplify, integrate, and innovate the networking experience.*

*Where else can you directly influence the transformation of the network?*

—Ravi Chandrasekaran

## Q: Are you hinting at pride?

**Ravi:** Yes. This has been about building a product that is ubiquitous.

When you land at an airport, you look around and realize that every building has that product. Maybe two or three companies in the world can say something like that. I constantly remind my teams of that. Our networking products are everywhere.

That's the reason you are at Cisco. You are leading an industry transformation. You are making positive change happen.

## Related links

- [Chris Stori blog on powering hybrid work with the network](#)
- [Ravi's blog on continuous learning at Cisco](#)
- [Cat9K at a glance page](#)
- [February tech launch announcement supporting hybrid work \(CEC\)](#)

## Here's what senior engineering leaders had to say when asked, "What makes a great engineer and great team?"

"One of the strengths of Cisco engineering is its culture of robust collaboration. This allows teams to leverage the power of the Cisco technology platform while maintaining focus on where their team provides differentiated value. Meraki's collaboration over the last several years with Enterprise Networking has been a case study in this." – Bret Hull, CTO, Head of Meraki SW

"Cisco engineers are risk takers and also adept at analyzing the cost-benefit tradeoffs of those risks. They're willing to lead, leverage the unique skills of each team member, and push the envelope to always deliver superior solutions." – David Stallings, VP Switching Engineering

"Cisco's greatest engineers are curious about new technologies, have high integrity, and exceptional work ethic. Cisco's best teams are committed to continuous improvement and offer a safe and inclusive space to team members." – Chris O'Rourke, Senior Director, Security Policy and Access

"Our success results from a customer-first mindset to deliver best-in-class products with our architecture, capabilities, and hardware/software quality, and defining our North Star and then executing towards it no matter what challenges we encounter." – Shyam Maniyar, VP Switching Engineering

"Key pillars of a great team include aligned goals, shared success, mutual respect, and open communications. A great engineer is focused on outcomes for the customer and identifies the best way to achieve the goals, balancing the product's short term and long-term aspects." – Prasad Chebrolu, VP Engineering Wireless

"Great teams share a sense of accountability, aligned goals, mutual respect, transparent communication, humility, and the ability to embrace reality. Elevating our strengths and supporting our differences is the foundation of every effective team." – Mary Beth Wells, Senior Community Partner Enterprise Networking

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Priyanka Prasad

I am truly amazed to be a part of this team who is continuously re-inventing and evolving. Our products are everywhere and we have a huge impact with the great work we do at Cisco!

April 15, 2022 1:49 PM

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Shyamsundar Maniyar

Congratulations to all team members building Cat9K reach these heights and thanks to Ravi for his guidance, support and encouragement!

April 15, 2022 0:59 AM

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