

The Canadian entrepreneur's guide to modern technology

Tips and best practices to choose the right technology for your small business





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You are the heartbeat of the Canadian economy.

Small and medium-sized businesses account for 99.7 percent of all Canadian businesses.¹ But only 19 percent have an advanced digital profile, while more than 57 percent have a conservative profile.²

No matter the size of your business, you have big plans for what you can do. And none of that includes managing complex, multivendor IT solutions.

But if you're like most business owners and executives, you want to deliver value to customers, reduce operating costs, and increase employee productivity. Implementing newer technologies like VPNs for remote workers, Wi-Fi access for customers, and online meeting solutions can help you accomplish this.

Use this buyer's guide as your one-stop source to help you better understand how IT, cloud, networking, collaboration, and security can help you achieve more, grow market share, and focus on what you do best within your business.



A modern office interior with large windows and three people in a meeting. The scene is brightly lit by natural light from the windows. Three people are seated around a white table. On the left, a woman with short blonde hair and glasses is looking towards the center. In the middle, a man with dark hair is seen from the back, gesturing with his hands while talking. On the right, a woman with curly hair is looking at the man. There are laptops on the table, and a large window in the background shows a view of trees and a building outside. A green vertical bar is visible in the top left corner.

01 Technology

The competitive
differentiator

89%

According to 89 percent
of leaders at consumer-
facing companies,
customer experience
is their primary
differentiator.³

Technology creates opportunities for success.

Across Canada, too many businesses don't believe, or understand, how technology can impact their bottom line. The common belief is that any technology is sufficient, because businesses only need an Internet connection, antivirus protection, and phones.

Consequently, technology is often viewed as an extra expense you can't afford, rather than a critical part of your business. Moreover, scaremongering from vendors has created a culture of fear when it comes to IT and security, causing business owners and executives to believe that technology is too hard to implement. This results in businesses like yours believing they need significant staff or financial resources to implement new technologies.

Additionally, when the budget is tight, there's no room for mistakes. And without professional IT staff, it's easy to feel you're going to make a costly mistake and invest in technology you don't need or that will quickly become obsolete. Since smaller businesses are unlikely to have dedicated IT staff or large budgets, this ultimately pushes them away from technology purchases.

However, businesses that invest in cloud-based technologies that are easy to use, manage, and install see big returns on their investment and better prepare their business for growth. Additionally, businesses of any size spend fewer hours troubleshooting problems, devote less time to learning new solutions, eliminate processes, and keep their business secure.



A poll commissioned by the Insurance Bureau of Canada found that 50 percent of small business owners believe their business may be vulnerable to a cybersecurity attack, 56 percent are concerned about how a breach could affect their business, and 44 percent do not have any defenses against possible cyber attacks.⁴

02 Demystifying technology myths



Don't buy into technology myths.

There are many myths about technology that prevent business owners and executives from adopting and benefiting from its use. Don't be fooled.

Myth #1: Technology is too expensive

Many common technologies like cloud-based networking, voice, meeting, video, and cloud-based security solutions are affordable. Because these products are hosted in the cloud, you pay less up front for the technology and then incur a low monthly subscription cost that is manageable for most small and midsize businesses to maintain. These products drive competitive differentiators like an enhanced customer experience and less employee downtime.

Myth #2: Technology is too complicated

Most cloud-based technology solutions are incredibly simple to manage, making it easier for businesses with few or zero IT resources to have a reliable, secure network. Always prioritize what is right for your business, but as a general rule, if you're using the right technology, your IT environment should be simple, secure, reliable, and affordable.

Myth #3: Smaller businesses don't need cybersecurity solutions

Smaller businesses experience about 4,000 cybersecurity attacks every day, at an average cost of half a million dollars lost in brand equity, productivity, and trust.⁵ The reliance on antivirus software and firewalls actually makes smaller businesses an easy target for hackers. Whether you realize it or not, security threats may be the biggest IT challenge facing growing businesses today.



“The market for cloud services and solutions has shifted in recent years, creating new opportunities for growing businesses seeking digital transformation.”⁶

03 Technology evaluation checklist



Focus on the features that matter.

Technologies that are easy to manage, simple to use and install, and cloud based will bring the biggest return on investment and better prepare your business for growth. When you look to implement various solutions, be sure they:

Are easy to set up and manage

- Spend fewer hours installing programs.
- Troubleshoot complex solutions less frequently.

Have an intuitive user experience

- Quickly learn how to use new voice, meetings, or video solutions.
- Eliminate manual processes and keep products secure with cloud-based automatic updates.

Are built for security and compliance

- Customized to protect your unique business.
- Deliver advanced security techniques.

Fit your budget

- Include low monthly subscription costs.
- Are priced affordably for most small and medium-sized businesses.

Come with support

- Give you access to technology support and product developers quickly and easily.
- Connect you with community forums where you can discuss key topics and share ideas.





04 The cloud

Reduce IT costs and scale
your business

Your technology future is up in the cloud.

Your customers, business, and financial data are on the line—don't risk them. In the past, most—if not all—apps and infrastructure we used at work sat behind a firewall. Employees came into a physical office and logged into the network to start working. Today, the office can be anywhere from a coffee shop or train to a remote destination. That's why more and more businesses are transitioning to cloud solutions.

Perimeters are expanding and blurring. Users are bypassing the VPN. Data is bypassing perimeter security and flowing directly from mobile devices and apps to the cloud. These modern practices make it so traditional security just can't keep up.

Worldwide spending on public cloud services and infrastructure will more than double over the 2019 to 2023 forecast period.⁷



Look for solutions that are easy to manage and that meet the needs of today's mobile, cloud-connected workforce.

Complete threat protection

Block requests to malicious destinations before a connection is even established. Protect proactively—without adding any latency.

Visibility anywhere and everywhere

Get the visibility you need to protect Internet access across devices, office locations, and roaming users—even off the VPN.

Intelligence to see attacks before they happen

Automatically identify where attacker infrastructure is being staged by using the power of security research and statistical models to learn from internet activity patterns.

Integrations to amplify your existing investments

Extend protection for devices and locations beyond your perimeter, reduce security alerts, and enrich your incident response data to remediate threats faster, before damage occurs.

Enterprisewide deployment in minutes

Find a solution that can have you up and running in minutes with no hardware to install or no software to manually update.



A man with a beard and glasses is looking at a screen, with a blurred woman in the background. The man is wearing a blue denim shirt and has a beard. The woman is wearing a patterned top. The background is dark and out of focus.

05 Networking

Keep your businesses and users
connected online

Unleash the power of your network.

Just like larger enterprises, you're actively seeking ways to improve efficiency, drive revenue, and increase customer satisfaction by embracing digitization trends. Networking and security solutions are especially critical for businesses looking to keep employees connected, productive, and secure as you continue on a path of steady growth.

But unlike the case with most large companies, when it comes to building and maintaining IT systems, you're most likely wrestling with slim budgets and resource constraints. As digital transformation puts a premium on agility and security—and makes the network a key enabler of change—you need to transform your IT infrastructure from a vulnerability to a proactive, layered defense, without busting budgets.



Identify and deploy networking products that protect against the threats targeting small business IT environments.

The right IT infrastructure matters

It is particularly important to build and optimize an IT network that brings you closer to your digital goals without straining budget resources or overloading IT staff. Additionally, you need to be prepared for how many users will be added to the IT environment over the next few years.

Future-proof your network

While deploying the right IT solutions can be a time-consuming and expensive undertaking, the cost of running critical business processes on outdated software might be even higher. When you rely on poorly configured systems or end-of-life assets that are no longer supported by vendors, it creates vulnerabilities in your network.

Keep pace with growth

It is important to invest in a network that can grow over time so you can add features and functionality. Outgrowing an office space is a good problem to have. But at the same time, it can put added pressures on your IT team to scale the network quickly while ensuring that your infrastructure can handle computing demands.

Secure your cloud environment

While there are some poorly secured cloud environments that can provide hackers with a broader attack surface and corresponding cybersecurity vulnerabilities, the vast majority of cloud services offer a higher level of data security, with features like advanced firewalls.



The hardware to get you there



Router

Routers perform the traffic-directing functions on the Internet and forward data packets between computer networks.



Modular switches

Modular network switches give network operators more flexibility as network requirements change. They also allow the switches to be serviced on the operator site.



Access points

Access points are devices that connect to a router and allow other Wi-Fi devices to connect to a wired network.

[Learn the difference between a switch and a router >](#)

A woman with dark hair, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is seated at a wooden table. She is wearing a black headset with a large circular microphone. She is smiling and looking at a laptop screen. The laptop screen shows a video call with a woman. In the background, there is a wooden chair with a colorful striped pillow and a small potted plant on the table. The setting appears to be a modern office or a cafe.

06 Collaboration

Enable productivity while
working from anywhere

The modern workplace is anywhere and everywhere.

Even when the state of the world has forced us apart, coworkers thrive on exchanging creative energy. That's why teams need the space to meet up and encourage the cross-pollination of ideas. Social distancing and remote work shouldn't get in the way of disruptive new concepts where the next big growth opportunities are. The modern workplace is one where ongoing innovation is valued above all else, and flexibility extends well beyond four walls.

Think about the way you work today and how it has evolved. Chances are it's no longer 9 to 5. Mobile employees, contract workers, freelancers, working parents, and the growing army of crowdsourced employees in coworking spaces are often spread across the entire planet.

For them and for more and more younger workers, connecting digitally to the workplace is the new normal. They now expect a flexible work-from-whenever experience. They expect to not let things like hemispheres and time zones get in the way of good ideas, because collaboration in real time and in virtual workspaces is more important than ever.⁸

Sophisticated video conferencing tools allow teams to collaborate from anywhere.

With clear, crisp video meetings, everyone on your team can feel like they're sitting at the same table. Your team can contribute to creating and shaping ideas on a digital whiteboard in the room, on their devices, or on their own time. You can also stay connected and keep working together as easily as if you could stop by your teams' desks, even if they're oceans apart.

Today's video conferencing solutions can keep your team engaged with technology that adapts to your specific environment—automatically detecting background noise to help remove distractions and zooming in on speakers so everyone with something to say is seen and heard—no matter their location or device. These tools even allow you to share ideas and get things done before, during, and after meetings in one continuous work stream.

76 percent of employees would take a pay cut of at least 3 percent to work for a company that offers flexible office hours.⁹

92 percent of employees place flexibility as a top priority while selecting workplaces.¹⁰

53 percent of employees would rather work from home two to three days per week than receive a 10-percent higher salary.¹¹



07 Security

Protect your business and users
against today's threat landscape

62%

Small businesses
are hit with 62
percent of all
cyber attacks.¹³

Proper cybersecurity has never been more important.

The volume, scope, and cost of cybercrimes continues to escalate, with studies predicting a cost of US\$6 trillion annually by 2021.¹²

The number of attacks, including phishing, advanced malware, zero-day, and ransomware attacks, is escalating rapidly. A recent study indicated that 67 percent of small businesses experienced a cyber attack, and another 58 percent experienced a data breach in 2018. This is staggering when you consider that the average cost of a data breach globally is \$3.86 million, a 6.4-percent increase from a 2017 report.¹⁴ The simple truth is that no organization of any size can afford to be unprepared.

Businesses like yours need security solutions that don't bust budgets or stretch IT staff to the point of being ineffective. You need security solutions that can be customized to protect your specific IT environment against attacks on the network, in the cloud, and at every connected endpoint.

Be sure to incorporate cloud-based security solutions that deliver advanced security techniques. This means ensuring that the security of every user, application, and piece of data in the cloud is empowered with solutions that provide:

Visibility

See everything with complete visibility of users, devices, networks, applications, workloads, and processes.

Segmentation

Prevent attackers from moving laterally across networks with microsegmentation and application whitelisting.

Threat protection

Identify breaches faster with multilayered threat sensors to quickly detect, block, and respond to prevent data theft and disruptions of operations.

“Cybersecurity is a constant challenge.

There’s always somebody with more time on their hands that wants to try and poke holes in your network. Or they want to try and earn an easy buck off of somebody that’s not paying attention.

Cybersecurity vigilance needs to be a never-ending process.”¹⁵

— Jonathan, IT pro, small healthcare company

08 Success metrics

A checklist



Ensure that your business gets everything it needs.

As part of the buying process, it's essential that you define your success metrics for the technology you implement. That's because these metrics will help you determine the functionality you will need in order to deliver positive results. Below are some examples of what your success metrics may be.

Overall metrics

Your technology should help deliver value to customers, ensure uptime, spark usage, reduce operating costs, and increase employee productivity and satisfaction. Any technology that can help you achieve more with the same or less investment of time or money should be considered.

Cloud metrics

- Be up and running in minutes with no hardware to install or software to update.
- Extend protection to devices and locations beyond your perimeter.
- Offer the visibility you need to protect Internet access across devices and locations—even off VPN.
- Block requests to malicious destinations before a connection is even established.

Networking metrics

- Build a network that's easy to deploy, operate, manage, and scale when it's time to expand.
- Improve productivity and the customer experience by allowing employees to work securely at home or on the road.
- Protect valuable information with built-in firewalls and an intrusion prevention system (IPS).
- Lower operating costs by making it easier to share equipment like printers and servers.

Collaboration metrics

- Improve agility by allowing work to happen anywhere and anytime.
- Keep teams effective and more organized around shared goals.
- Ensure flexibility, allowing a greater work-life balance.
- Enhance the ability to attract and retain talent. A significant portion of millennials expect to work from home and teleconference regularly. This is important to keep in mind, considering they are now the majority of the workforce.

Security metrics

- Create a secure perimeter around your entire IT environment, allowing you and your data to move freely and quickly.
- Scan traffic and actively correlate huge volumes of intelligence to block malicious activity.
- Block noncompliant endpoint devices or provide them with only limited access.
- Use effective antimalware programs to not only scan for malware, but also track files to find anomalies, remove threats, and fix damages.



09 Technology's ideal state



Cultures of innovation
only happen when you
make them happen.

Move to a more mature state of technology.

Technology's role in the marketplace is to support and inspire big ideas and cultures of innovation. Digital transformation will continue to drive new ways of working. These are some of the key steps toward technology maturity in your business.

The cloud and networking

- Go from manual and costly on-premises updates to automatic version updates in the cloud.
- Go from low visibility to total visibility into your network with real-time business information.

Collaboration

- Go from 9 to 5 employee productivity to efficient work from anywhere at any time.
- Go from passive employee engagement to teams dynamically aligned on specific deliverables.

Security

- Go from unsecured data to a secure perimeter that keeps data safe.
- Go from reactionary attack solutions to proactively identifying and defending against attacks.





10 Getting started

Make your final considerations.

Now that you're getting close to purchase, it's important to remember a few things. Above all, don't choose the technology you want and then decide what to do with it. Figure out what you need to accomplish, and then put the technology to work that will allow you to achieve your goals.

In-house vs. outsourced

The in-house team is the group of IT employees you hire one by one to your office. This is a great option if you want to control all the processes in the company. But you need to prepare for the costs of managing people on-premises. The talent pool is often highly competitive, and retaining employee satisfaction is a must. If you want to remain flexible and efficient, an outsourced solution might better suit your needs.

Managed service providers

Oftentimes, today's business owners need an expert to help them create added value from the technologies they use to run their business. Managed service providers (MSPs) can help bridge gaps to create that value and generate more success. Their broad expertise and proactive approach can help reduce costs, create peace of mind, and provide you with more time to focus on your business. And with 100-percent cloud-based service deployment, MSPs can help you experience faster networking deployment.

Financing options

It is critical for your businesses to keep up with technology in order for it to grow, innovate, and protect against threats. When paying for technology, you can always make up-front payments. However, financing can help alleviate the pressure on your small IT team by providing access to technology solutions that work simply, securely, reliably, and affordably.



Don't let your budget hold you back. Look for a solution that offers flexible payments for hardware, software, services, and licenses and creates one predictable payment, at as low as zero-percent interest. You can secure traditional financing through a bank loan, but many technology companies, including Cisco, provide vendor financing, which offers extremely favorable terms that make the purchase process seamless and affordable.



Conclusion

In your business, you wear a lot of hats and field a lot of demands. Let technology be one less thing you have to worry about with Cisco® Designed.

Cisco Designed is made up of the same technology used by all Fortune 500 companies but packaged into affordable solutions that are just right for businesses like yours. They're simple, flexible, and secure, and they cover all of your cloud, networking, collaboration, and security needs.

Give your customers and your employees the flawless digital experience they expect. Achieve more, grow market share, and focus on what your business does best with the confidence that comes from Cisco Designed.

[Learn more about Cisco Designed >](#)

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