

The importance of customer success for enterprise networking



Your organisation's network is more critical to your current and future success than it ever has been. It is the foundation that shapes virtually every aspect of corporate life, but also controls your future capabilities. Your network is what empowers workplace productivity, regardless of where the 'workplace' may be. It ensures that security and compliance standards are maintained in the face of evolving cyber threats. And it enables the simultaneous interaction with customers, partners, and employees across multiple media channels and locations.

Your network can do more now than was thought possible only a decade ago. And it's likely that it will be able to do more for you in the future than you can even conceive today. This has been driven by a fundamental shift in deployment and consumption models.

Until relatively recently, network upgrades or refreshes tended to be hardware centric. But this generated several challenges. Firstly, IT refresh cycles did not coincide with innovation cycles. This often meant that an investment that was made 'the wrong side' of a pivotal change in technology, would have to remain in operation for a long time (often 5-7 years), with others able to leverage a competitive advantage (because they invested 'the right side' of the change). Secondly, upgrades were often forced because existing equipment was going to become (or already was) unsupported by the IT vendor. Technology providers needed a commercial

model that would continue to generate revenue, so were encouraged to release new solutions, whilst retiring legacy ones. And finally, IT resellers, who were often responsible for the implementation and support of these solutions, struggled to create 'differentiated value' for their customers. All of which often led to a 'race to the bottom', where the lowest price reveals a lack of value and little ROI.

Traditional IT support was a predominantly break/fix relationship, including manufacturers warranties, and support level agreements that stipulated uptime and response times. Extracting value from the solution that had been purchased was typically the responsibility of the purchasing entity. Business cases were generated based on known features, and the expected returns that they would generate. An Invitation to Tender (ITT) or a Request for Proposal (RFP) was created to select technology that aligned with the specific needs of that organisation. Suppliers would then make their selection according to their compliance requirements, experience, and ability to fit within budget constraints. An up-front investment would typically ensure 'ownership' of the solution by the Customer, with incremental support charged on an annual basis. The whole process would then be repeated according to whatever refresh cycle was deemed necessary by the customer or that was forced by the vendor.

Significance of the software defined network

A new era of the software-defined, as-a-service enterprise network has changed the IT landscape forever. And in doing so, it has created an unparalleled opportunity to make technology investments a game-changer for virtually every aspect of an organisation's life. By de-coupling the hardware and software layers, new features can be seamlessly and incrementally applied without dropping a beat. By switching to as-a-service commercial models, vendors are no longer fixated on hardware refresh cycles. Now, once the supporting infrastructure is in place - which may be cloud, on-prem, or a hybrid solution - then new software and new features can be applied with ease, and new value outcomes can be realised. In this new operating model, network agility will become the standout feature as swathes of new capabilities start to generate value, whilst hardware components can be replaced as and when needed, included within the commercial model, to ensure

that any organisation can keep up with the speed of change. But despite all the opportunity that software defined networking has created, it's far from a given that an organisation will be able to realise the benefits available. The speed of change is accelerating which makes it increasingly difficult to keep pace. Aligning business objectives with an evolving technology capability isn't straightforward. Strategic partnerships have become a necessity for bridging the gap between technology vendor innovation, deployment, and the practical realisation of the benefits that the innovation enables. But this is only possible with a detailed understanding of the aspirations of an organisation, and the knowledge of the role that technology can play in helping to realise these goals.



The emergence of ‘Customer Success’ initiatives

The Customer Success movement has evolved to bridge the gap between the opportunities that technology promotes and the reality that it enables. It's not overstating the significance of this by stating that all technology providers benefit from a customer-success-led approach. Understanding how technology can (or will) enable value outcomes is a necessary step for the industry if the traditional IT procurement and support models of the past are to be broken.

But what is ‘customer success’ and how should it influence your future IT purchasing decisions? Put simply, if an IT services provider understands what you are trying to achieve as an organisation (the ‘success outcomes’ you are seeking), they are better placed to advise how you should use the technology to realise your goals and if they keep track with your evolving needs, they should be able to align technology innovation, as it happens, to expedite the outcomes that you're seeking.

It's important to note, however, that this approach isn't easy to retrospectively introduce. Rather, it should form part of your first engagement, all the way through to your last. Any proficient IT services provider should understand what ‘success looks like’ for you throughout the lifecycle of your engagement with them; the assumption being that your goals may change over time. Equally, they should be able to introduce new opportunities for you to extract

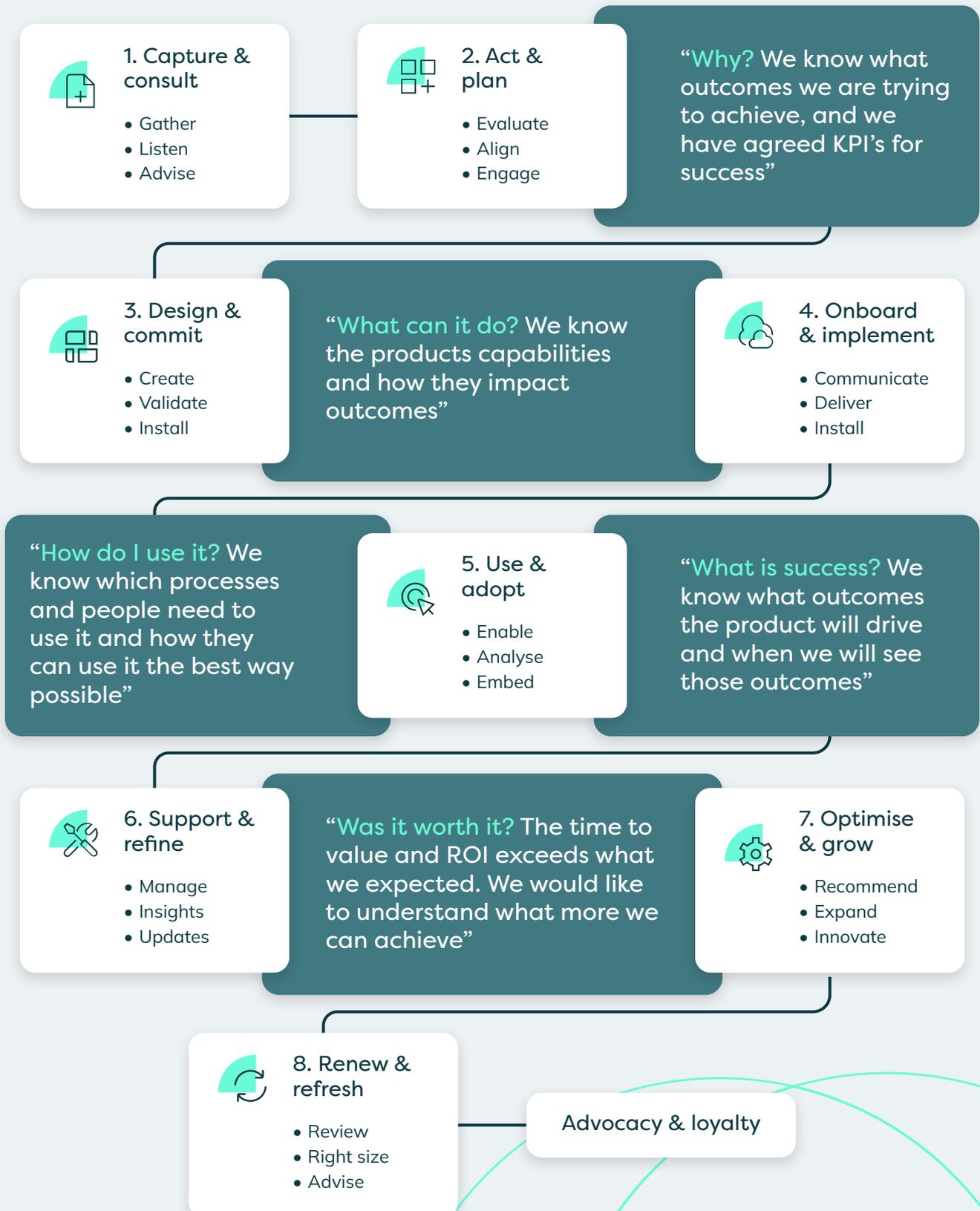
value from your investment, as new features are released. This also applies to existing technology investments, where you may not be realising the full potential. In all instances, an IT services provider that is customer success-led should proactively drive potential improvements.

What's more, there has to be alignment between IT goals and your organisational goals. The relationship with IT services providers should ideally also extend beyond IT functions. The consequences of your IT strategy and business strategies being mismatched is too significant to risk. The move away from traditional IT ownership towards as-a-service models, the evolution of software defined network, and the accelerated speed of networking innovation and change, has altered IT procurement and support landscape forever.

IT services providers must adapt to a new world where they must provide value throughout the lifecycle of their engagement. IT purchasers must shift away from cost optimisation to the value outcomes that they expect (need) to realise from their investment. Partnerships must evolve, where the marriage between organisational knowledge and technical knowledge combine to optimise the outcomes for all parties.



Listening across the customer lifecycle



Conclusion

Your enterprise network will continue to enable your current and future success. Your choice of IT services provider will determine how quickly, and affectively, you can realise your goals. Those Service Providers that develop Customer Success as a capability for realising value outcomes throughout the lifecycle are most likely to help you realise your potential. Where multiple IT services providers claim to 'do' customer success, it's important to remember that applying the principles of customer success will vary wildly. You must therefore be able to validate assertions between competing providers because 'all customer success isn't created equal'. The major vendors have created programs that specifically address this, but you should also seek independent reviews from like-minded organisations. Your network represents the biggest opportunity to positively differentiate how your organisation operates from all others. Partnering with the right customer-success-led IT services provider will give you the best possible chance of defining an enterprise networking strategy that will expedite the realisation of your most important goals. Trustmarque's Customer Experience Practice has developed a customer success framework that enables value throughout the lifecycle of the engagement.

About Trustmarque

Trustmarque embeds Customer Success from the outset of a project where adoption services and outcomes metrics lead the sales, design and delivery of a project, however we also identify some organisations need support mid-term or as part of new business capabilities as a phased transformation and require a partner to inject adoption services retrospectively.

These CX Services can be to accelerate initial requirements where economical or operational barriers have stalled transformation or as a retrospective approach to support net new business capabilities that may not have been fully understood at the beginning of the engagement, but have been captured throughout the service lifecycle.

We realise that adoption services and capabilities need to be deployed securely and gradually setting the best foundation for future advanced software features and capabilities as they become applicable within any customers organisation.

Develop your lifecycle management plan

As part of an introduction to Trustmarque's Customer Success Team, we would like to help customers identify the value-gap within their Cisco Enterprise Connectivity solutions. Our in-house technology adoption experts will leverage Cisco's Success Program Insights (SPI) to help you map against the available and adopted technology use cases.

To start creating your lifecycle management plan, contact Natalie, CX Programme Manager:

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