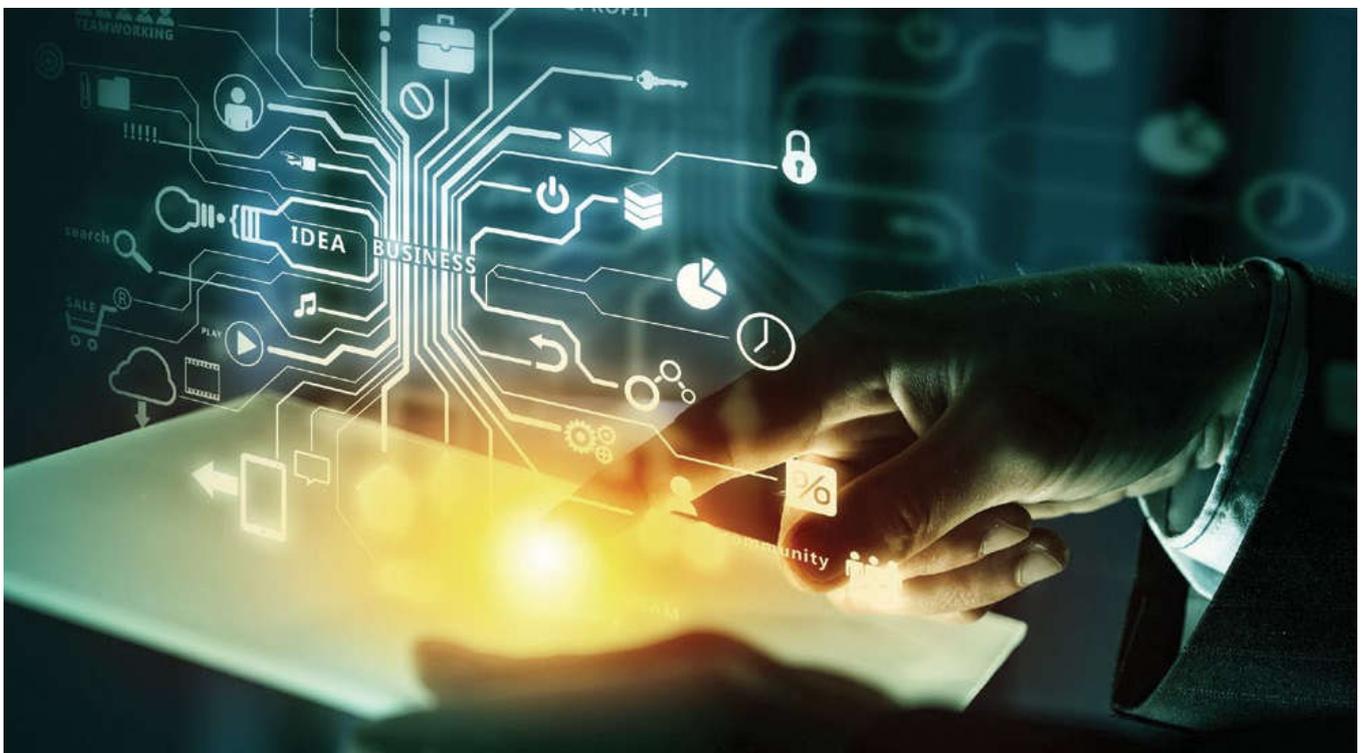


CASE STUDY

# Riding a tension-free, resilient, flexible network

For the joint-venture insurance company, establishing centralized and secure connectivity for branches was a challenge. The solution it adopted was software-defined wide area network



BY SHUBHENDU PARTH

Set up in 2008 as a joint venture by Canara Bank, HSBC Insurance (Asia Pacific) Holdings Limited and Oriental Bank of Commerce (now merged with Punjab National Bank), the Gurugram-based Canara HSBC Oriental Bank of Commerce Life Insurance has over 40 branch offices across India.

While planning for expansion—new, smaller branches—it became evident that the traditional setup

could prove a challenge in terms of management and control, particularly since the organization intended to establish central and secure connectivity using the available low-cost public network with an enterprise-level security component.

“This was also well-timed for us as we were also planning to do away with the old network infrastructure and wanted to leapfrog to adopt the latest in networking technology,”



“The company started its journey of redefining and incorporating network architecture redesign to bring in agility and support business growth.”

**Sachin Dutta**, COO, Canara HSBC Oriental Bank of Commerce Life Insurance

Sachin Dutta, Chief Operating Officer of Canara HSBC Oriental Bank of Commerce Life Insurance said.

With their rigor to drive quicker delivery of secure, scalable, stable network environment at new locations, the company planned to migrate to the next-generation network by implementing SD-WAN and SD-LAN in the working environment.

“As we embarked on our journey to refresh the old network devices, we evaluated the market, measured business growth plans and consulted various partners in this space. We reviewed the challenges of setting these branches in a traditional way and found that the cost incurred and time required on setting up these branches was very high,” he explained.

According to Dutta, while traditional MPLS setups guaranteed uptime and limited packet drop, it required more time for setup and there was a clear disadvantage in terms of cost and flexibility. Maintenance and change management also acted as a roadblock at times.

“We had the option of continuing and refreshing the traditional network with the set of new devices, but we dropped the idea and decided to actively pursue SD-WAN because of its flexibility, scalability and activation,” he stated.

HSBC Oriental Bank of Commerce Life Insurance initiated the project in November 2019 and completed it in over five months, by March 2020.

### Rolling it out

The process began with the partner selection process—review of solution design, implementation timelines, and post-production management of the environment. This also included a review of industry-leading solution with a strong implementation experience. The team

also consulted partners and industry counterparts who had already adopted SD-WAN and had been reaping the benefits.

“We initiated the deployment with the network design and planning phase, under which we reviewed the existing WAN and LAN setup and deployment of the central environment. This was followed by the deployment at the branches,” Dutta stated.

“The deployment of our SD-LAN built on Software-Defined Access provided automated end-to-end segmentation for separate users, devices and application traffic without the need to redesign the network,” he added.

The setup automates user access policy so that organizations can make sure the right policies are established for users and device for all application across the network and this was accomplished with a single network fabric across LAN and WLAN. “This has helped create a consistent user experience anywhere without compromising on security.”

Interestingly, the company has a hybrid structure at present as it continues to retain MPLS for certain applications. However, it has chalked out a phase-wise plan to do away with the old network system and components one by one.

“Clearly, the objective is to build the experience, gain more confidence, and then expand. An SD-WAN edge router provides this capability to route the traffic dynamically over various channels and data services which include MPLS, broadband, and LTE,” Dutta said, adding that while moving away completely from MPLS will take time. “We will continue to apply the security architecture to both. We are also evaluating its capability to integrate over the cloud solutions.”

One of the key reasons for the smooth rollout was the company's clear focus on the business ask. It also evaluated how technology can enable business growth while making it resilient, keeping it flexible, and secure.

## Key learning

- Be clear on the business ask
- Evaluate how technology can enable the growth of business while making it resilient, flexible and secure
- Do proper sizing, review cloud readiness, and dependency on existing architecture
- Explain the requirements and business objectives to the vendor and solution partner in clear terms
- Conduct an internal assessment to bridge the gap between the current and the "go-to" state
- Do not follow what others are doing

One of the key reasons for the smooth rollout was the company's clear focus on the business ask. The implementation team also evaluated how technology can enable the growth of the business while making it resilient, keeping it flexible and secure. The team also focused on proper sizing of requirements and conducted an audit of its cloud readiness and dependency on existing architecture.

Another factor that made a difference was its ability to clearly explain the requirements and business objectives to the vendor and solution partner. "The deployment partner with its prior experience ensured that we don't face any challenges. The transition has been quite smooth with no disruptions, thanks to a comprehensive environment and design review that we initiated for the deployment," he said.

### How did it change the network?

The company started its journey of redefining and incorporating network architecture redesign to bring in agility and support business growth. It also strongly believes that backend infrastructure provides necessary resilience, flexibility, cost optimization, agility, and user experience required for the businesses with aggressive growth plans.

"Resilient, flexible, agile, and secure network design is critical to the success of any enterprise," the COO said. He further added: "The setup is relatively new and we are also adjusting to this internally. The solution will be adopted in any new branch that we open up in the future and we will measure the agility and security. At the same time, the existing solution for the current set of branches has also been upgraded where we see better resilience and uptime."

He also explained that the maintenance of the new setup is easy, while another big advantage is the ability it provides for real-time monitoring since the solution is powered by software-defined capabilities as compared to hard and rigid routing found in the older setup.

However, with the COVID-19 and the lockdown that has forced its employees to operate from home, the company has not been able to evaluate the real benefit of the deployment. "It will be seen once we start to operate out of these branches in full force," Dutta said 🙌

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