REPORT

AI Readiness: Shaping the Future of Enterprise IT

Unlocking the full potential of AI with modern networks

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Executive summary

As enterprises race towards an AI-driven future, the pressing need to modernize network infrastructure is transforming the IT landscape in unprecedented ways. Most organizations are already using AI for at least one function, illustrating that AI is becoming a crucial part of business strategy.[1] This report examines how AI is reshaping enterprise IT and network infrastructure, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities that come with AI adoption.

AI systems demand massive amounts of data, robust computational power and real-time processing, all of which can strain legacy network infrastructure. Building a strong, low-latency network with ample data center and multi-cloud connectivity is essential for maximizing the benefits of AI applications. Enterprises are scaling AI, migrating workloads to the cloud and distributing applications across multiple locations, all while relying on networks that weren't designed for this level of demand. As enterprises continue to integrate AI, modernizing network infrastructure becomes essential for business leaders aiming to fully leverage AI for better business outcomes in today's digital landscape.

Impact of AI on enterprise IT and network infrastructure

The state of enterprise IT is rapidly evolving, driven by the explosive growth and adoption of AI and cloud workloads. AI's swift evolution has the potential to shape the future of business as we know it. In fact, a recent survey shows that 72% of organizations have embraced AI for at least one function, marking a substantial increase from previous years, and 64% of businesses believe that AI will help increase their overall productivity.[1] This widespread adoption of AI is helping us work smarter as enterprises look for new ways to innovate for greater efficiency and competitive differentiation. As many as 85% of surveyed businesses have expressed concern over losing competitive ground without rapid AI integration.[2]

While only 1% of business leaders consider their companies "mature" in AI deployment, the commitment to AI investment remains strong, with **92% of companies planning to increase their AI investment** over the next three years.[3] This is in line with global AI spending which is projected to more than double by 2028, reaching **$632 billion**.[4]

72% of organizations have embraced AI for at least one function.

Organizations are expanding their use of AI, moving workloads to the cloud and deploying applications across various locations, all while depending on networks that were not designed to handle such high demand. Challenges are compounded with aging infrastructure that often includes disconnected cloud, edge and on-premises systems.

While AI is a transformative force for today's modern enterprise, it also presents unique networking and infrastructure challenges because of the vast amounts of data required for training AI models and the need for low-latency, fast processing and real-time computing. This means that older network infrastructures must evolve to handle AI's unique requirements.

92% of companies plan to increase their AI investments over the next three years.

Building a strong low-latency network with plenty of data center and cloud connectivity is the key to making the most of AI applications. Data is expected to continue to grow exponentially as AI requires substantial amounts to train AI agents which will in turn require unprecedented amounts of bandwidth to transfer that data to applications and into the hands of users. A robust network infrastructure is essential for AI systems to function effectively, as it supports efficient data handling, scalability, real-time processing and security.

Generative AI revolutionizes connectivity strategies

Generative AI (GenAI) is a subset of artificial intelligence that uses generative models to produce text, images, videos and other forms of data. GenAI is now widely accessible and has become a creative phenomenon that has significantly impacted our personal and professional lives. Applications such as ChatGPT, CoPilot, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity and Mistral are some of the most well-known tools.

It's being used in connectivity strategy as reported by IDC Research. By 2026, 90% of enterprises will integrate GenAI into their connectivity strategy to bolster network integrity.[5] As organizations adopt GenAI, many are also redesigning workflows and customer experiences which can further challenge legacy networks.

The future of AI is incredibly promising and transformative. AI has become a fixture in many aspects of our personal and business lives, driving innovation across industries. With advancements in generative AI, multimodal models and smaller, more efficient AI systems, we can expect AI to enhance automation, improve decision-making and create new opportunities for growth and efficiency. As enterprises keep evolving with AI, updating network infrastructure isn't just a nice-to-have—it's a must-have if business leaders want to fully tap into AI's potential in today's digital world.

Challenges of implementing AI with legacy networks

The rapidly evolving AI phenomenon is shifting business requirements and impacting enterprise IT systems, presenting significant challenges for organizations. As businesses strive to innovate for enhanced business results, as well as improved customer and employee experiences, IT staff often encounter technological challenges that can potentially hinder advancement and efficiency. Research shows that mid-sized companies and larger enterprises share the same top two IT challenges for 2025: strengthening their cybersecurity IT posture and integrating and optimizing AI solutions.[6]

> 90% of enterprises will integrate GenAI into their connectivity strategy to bolster network integrity.

Laggy connectivity performance

Slow connectivity response times and delayed processing can hamper the real-time decision-making capabilities of AI applications, leading to inefficiencies and reduced productivity. For example, in financial services, delayed transactions due to poor network performance can have an impact on the overall reliability and efficiency of the business. And some interaction simply must be real-time with no delay, like retail, medical intervention and even some customer experiences. Additionally, slow connectivity can result in frustrated users, loss of revenue and diminished brand reputation.

AI systems require substantial amounts of data to render results. They also need low-latency connectivity for real-time processing where microseconds count. All of this becomes paramount to efficient AI implementation. According to IDC's *Enterprise Horizons* report, 86% of CIOs don't think their enterprise networks are prepared for the AI ecosystem[7], but updating network architectures to support multi-cloud and AI environments can help ensure bandwidth availability to manage AI workloads and data spikes. Improving security around data transport and rethinking fiber network infrastructure can also help power data loads moving across a multi-cloud environment securely and with speed.

Lack of scalability

One of the primary challenges of implementing AI with legacy networks is the inability to flexibly scale to match the fluctuating data requirements and real-time demand of AI engines. This lack of agility can result in insufficient network capacity and poor application performance, frustrating users and customers, as well as decreasing productivity and efficiency, negatively impacting revenue and diminishing brand reputation.

For example, slow applications can result in delayed transactions, directly impacting revenue, operational efficiency, productivity and even the reliability of the business. If AI is implemented to improve customer experience, client interactions with the company could suffer, which in turn could result in reduced customer loyalty, trust and overall satisfaction with a company, product or service. Outdated and disparate legacy systems with limited integration can further exacerbate poor app performance. Having the ability to scale as data volumes increase becomes paramount to responsive application performance and efficient AI system implementations.

Data accessibility and flexibility

Fragmented IT infrastructure with data dispersed across multiple environments, especially if those systems don't interoperate with each other, can hinder real-time decision-making due to data inaccessibility. This inflexibility makes it difficult for businesses to fully become digital-forward and can stall innovation in response to changing market conditions and customer needs. A more modern approach to data accessibility helps ensure that data is available on a real-time basis regardless of where that data is housed. One of the cornerstones of AI implementations is the accessibility of data within milliseconds so that AI-driven operations can be performed swiftly.

Resiliency and security vulnerabilities

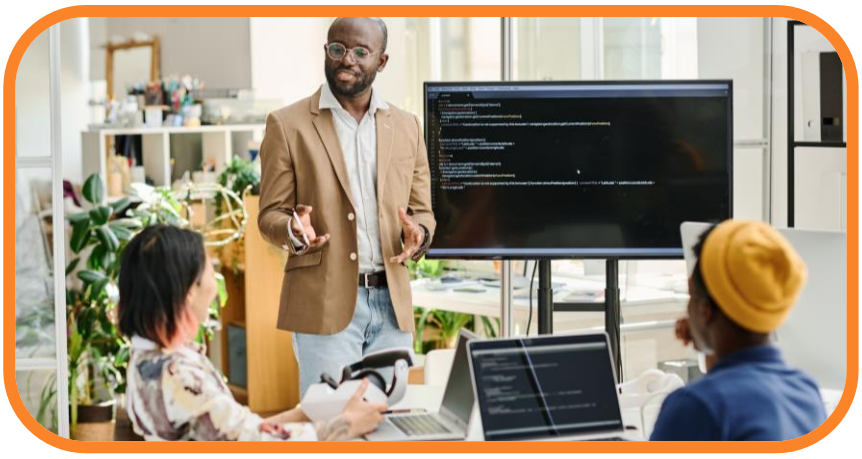
Businesses also face resiliency and business continuity concerns that can disrupt operations and impact customer satisfaction. AI systems present unique security vulnerabilities that may pose significant risks to businesses. One major concern is the susceptibility of AI models to adversarial attacks, where malicious actors manipulate input data to deceive the AI system into making incorrect decisions. This can lead to compromised data integrity and operational disruptions. Because AI systems often require vast amounts of data, there can be vulnerabilities related to data privacy and security that affect an enterprise's ability to comply with regulations.

Ensuring that sensitive data is protected through encryption, access controls and data anonymization is crucial, as is protecting the network and internet connections from intrusion and bad actors. The lack of a trusted networking partner and internal security experts can further complicate these challenges.

> 86% of CIOs don't think their enterprise networks are prepared for the AI ecosystem.

Understanding AI readiness

AI readiness is the state of an organization being fully equipped to strategically plan, adopt, integrate and harness the power of AI technologies. Embarking on the AI readiness journey is unique for every organization, with varying lengths, complexities and goals.



To be "AI-ready," an enterprise must lay the right foundation to fully leverage AI capabilities, spanning technology, compliance, DevOps, culture, data management and other crucial processes and systems. AI readiness enables organizations to embed ethical and accurate AI into the nucleus of their operations. AI ready also means being network and infrastructure-ready to reap the benefits of AI, such as enterprise optimization, cost savings, performance improvements and enhanced customer experiences. Whether you are modernizing the network to move to a hybrid cloud or multi-cloud environment or managing new AI workloads, you'll need the backbone of a trusted network to support AI applications.

The network journey to AI readiness is a continuum, and companies are in separate phases on this path. Lumen has found that organizations can be typically categorized according to their AI readiness—Pre-AI, AI Consumer or AI Builder—depending on their degree of AI implementation and approach to using AI. Each profile represents a different stage in the journey towards digital and AI readiness.

Pre-AI organizations

Pre-AI describes the phase before organizations take any steps to integrate AI into their operations. While they may have made progress towards enhancing their IT infrastructure to be digital ready, they have not implemented AI in their systems and processes. They typically rely on manual processes for data analysis and rely on conventional data management and legacy systems not designed for AI. Due to legacy systems and manual processes, this stage can be characterized by higher operational costs, slower market responsiveness and potential data inefficiencies or security risks due to the absence of AI-driven automation and insights.

> Companies realize 3.7x ROI for every dollar invested into GenAI.[8]

	Drivers of AI investment	Challenges
Pre-AI Organizations	Need for competitive differentiation, often triggered by observing competitor success via automated, data-driven strategies Productivity and efficiency improvements Improvements to customer experience Market saturation and increased competition may push enterprise to adopt personalized, AI-driven marketing	Lack of AI knowledge Fragmented legacy systems may block IT modernization efforts Data silos may delay adoption Hesitancy because of complexity and perceived costs No formal AI governance strategy Internal resistance and lack of employee training can slow down AI progress

AI Consumer organizations

Organizations that use third-party AI applications to enhance their operations, improve decision-making and drive innovation are classified as AI Consumer. These enterprises rely on AI applications developed by others for modernizing their companies, rather than developing AI technologies themselves. To be considered an AI Consumer organization, an enterprise needs to be using AI in at least one instance. Businesses in this category have varying degrees of AI readiness.

	Drivers of AI investment	Challenges
AI Consumer Organizations	Need for competitive differentiation, often triggered by observing competitor success via automated, data-driven strategies Productivity and efficiency improvements Improvements to customer experience Market saturation and increased competition may push enterprise to adopt personalized, AI-driven marketing Workflow automation	Lack of AI-ready partners and applications Outdated and fragmented legacy infrastructure may block IT modernization efforts Inability to scale networks Undeveloped data strategy and data silos may delay adoption Out of date cybersecurity strategies Internal resistance and lack of employee training can slow down AI progress

AI Builder organizations

An enterprise that builds AI systems and models to solve complex problems and drive innovation within their company or to resell to their customers are considered to be an AI Builder. These businesses are typically further along in their AI readiness and digital transformation journey and may require the most robust IT infrastructure to support their own AI demands and those of their customers.

	Drivers of AI investment	Challenges
AI Consumer Organizations	Need for competitive differentiation, often triggered by observing competitor success via automated, data-driven strategies Productivity and efficiency improvements Improvements to customer experience Market saturation and increased competition may push enterprise to adopt personalized, AI-driven marketing Workflow automation Market opportunity to help their customers conduct their own AI transformation and innovation efforts.	Lack of technology partner Outdated and fragmented legacy infrastructure may block IT modernization efforts Inability to scale networks Data silos may delay adoption Lack of data strategy Out of date cybersecurity strategies

Lumen solutions: Solving AI challenges for better business outcomes

The Lumen Network is designed to be AI-ready, enabling it to support the advanced capabilities and demands of AI-ready enterprises and their IT infrastructure, data and applications requirements. Our high-performance backbone, an agile and scalable networking portfolio and AI-ready infrastructure that helps to eliminate vendor complexity while providing seamless, secure, and scalable connectivity across cloud, edge and data centers.

By leveraging the Lumen ultra-low loss intercity fiber network, private and secure connectivity, direct interconnects to major cloud providers and our extensive expertise, your organization can drive improved ROI on your innovation efforts, minimize operational costs, avoid risk with heightened cybersecurity and support evolving business needs with greater efficiency. Empowering your business with Lumen starts with:

- **Robust backbone**
  Lumen provides the infrastructure, reach and reliability organizations need to power their most critical operations of today and allows them to continue evolving as business needs change. Our 340,000 route miles of fiber network deliver secure, high-capacity connectivity across cloud, data centers and edge environments. With 2,200+ on-net third-party data centers and peering in 90 metro areas, businesses can stay connected, competitive and prepared for the future.

- **Scalability and agility**
  Enterprises need a network that adapts as they grow, supporting expansion, new applications and evolving security needs without complexity. Lumen delivers 100G and 400G transport across 78,000+ route miles and connects businesses to 200+ data centers with direct, high-speed access to AWS, Azure and Google Cloud.

- **Trusted partner**
  Lumen is more than a network provider. We work alongside businesses to design, optimize and advance their connectivity strategy to support AI, cloud and next-generation applications. With expert guidance, deep industry knowledge and hands-on support, we help to simplify multi-cloud integration, private and public networking and AI-driven transformation. Our 100+ cloud on-ramps and operation of the #1 peered network with actionable threat intelligence via Black Lotus Labs enable businesses to scale with confidence.

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Lumen networking infrastructure and connectivity services

The secure and flexible Lumen Network is a game-changer for organizations looking to transform in the AI economy. With low latency and high bandwidth for ultra-fast data transfer and efficient application response, our extensive network and connectivity solutions provide the robust, scalable and secure IT capabilities needed to support your cloud and data center strategies, AI workloads and critical business applications within a unified ecosystem.

Businesses can also protect their data and AI workloads with encrypted network services for an additional layer of network security. This foundation enables businesses to build, expand and modernize their networks with the flexibility to adapt to evolving demands.

Lumen award-winning networking solutions provide the flexibility and scalability needed to match fluctuating data demands in real-time with on-demand turn-up, turn-down and scalability. This helps ensure that you have the connectivity you need, exactly when you need it, so that your applications perform with high efficiency and your business stays agile.

You can also build a custom network to securely transmit large amounts of data at low latency between multiple data centers and cloud environments. It's backed by our vast fiber network, which is built to power AI initiatives. Lumen expects to increase our intercity fiber miles to 47 million miles by the end of 2028. This capacity will support massive amounts of data in-motion and near-zero-delay edge fabric for delivery virtually anywhere, anytime.

Aviation company soars with modern network infrastructure

C3Aero, founded in 2014, is the cornerstone at the crossroads of aviation and technology. The company has evolved into a tech powerhouse, propelling the aerospace industry into the future with expertise in AI, enterprise consulting and security.

C3Aero needed a dynamic solution to meet their changing bandwidth needs during peak times, including a quick and reliable digital infrastructure to streamline operations and improve service delivery.

The solution: Scalable bandwidth that deploys in minutes

C3Aero leveraged Lumen Network-as-a-Service (NaaS) for a seamless, cost-effective solution to their bandwidth and internet needs. The user-friendly platform activated in minutes and integrated smoothly with their existing infrastructure and data centers, particularly Equinix data centers.

The partnership between C3Aero and Lumen has significantly improved C3Aero's operational efficiency. They can now deploy network assets quickly, scale bandwidth during high-demand periods and make informed decisions using a user-friendly portal with real-time insights. This has freed up time and resources, eliminated the need for multiple meetings and ensured uninterrupted service, enhancing their ability to meet clients' needs efficiently.

"Our relationship with Lumen is valuable because we're able to get our customers from point A to point B as quickly as possible," said John Speranza, founder and CEO of C3Aero.

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BLACK LOTUS LABS

Lumen has been named "Threat Intelligence Company of the Year" in 8th Annual **CyberSecurity Breakthrough Awards Program**

The Lumen award-winning threat intelligence with continuous monitoring and mitigation, powered by Black Lotus Labs®, helps to secure the entire network, which serves as the backbone for our networking solutions. This elite team of threat intelligence experts integrates proactive cybersecurity solutions to automatically detect and block threats, helping to ensure your data is protected and giving you peace of mind as you embark on your AI journey.

We can also design an extensive public-to-private network architecture for you to help you enable strict security and regulatory compliance for sensitive data. With our experience in this area, adding extra integrated security layers is simple, yet can provide robust and broad threat visibility to your team. The high-quality Lumen Network helps ensure fast, reliable connectivity with AI-enabled, compliance-grade security across all the networking portfolios. As infrastructure transforms to incorporate public and private clouds, data centers and more, it becomes increasingly important to analyze and manage network performance and security. With Lumen as your networking partner, you can achieve speed, scale, security and reliability for your AI workloads, empowering your organization to lead in the AI era.

Lumen security solutions

As organizations implement AI strategies to drive innovation and efficiency, robust cybersecurity becomes essential to protect sensitive data and provide operational integrity. Lumen Security Solutions provide comprehensive protection against evolving cyberthreats by securing applications and valuable data quickly and effortlessly. Backed by advanced threat intelligence, blocking, actionable insights and trusted expertise, our security solutions help keep your AI data and applications secure and reliable. Advanced threat detection, real-time monitoring and automated incident response not only safeguard your AI infrastructure from potential breaches and disruptions but help businesses avoid negative brand perception by preventing unauthorized access, misuse or theft of sensitive information. Lumen Security Solutions can also help enterprises address compliance. By leveraging Security Solutions and our extensive expertise to enhance your security posture, you can confidently navigate the complexities of a safe AI deployment.

Micro Center boosts customer experience with robust connectivity and security

A leading technology retailer founded in 1979, Micro Center faced increasing cyberthreats as their digital presence expanded. By partnering with Lumen, they significantly enhanced their connectivity network and cybersecurity measures while improving network performance and customer satisfaction.

The solution

Micro Center leverages Lumen ® Dedicated Internet Access (DIA) for high-speed internet, MPLS IP VPN for network efficiency and reliability, Voice Complete® for better communication and DDoS/ThreatX Bot Mitigation for cybersecurity. These enhancements securely connect physical stores with online demand, helping to facilitate consistent customer service whether in-store or online.

Results also included a 30% improvement in network performance, helping to enable an exceptional customer experience, as well as a 97% reduction in cyberattacks and over 39 million blocked malicious requests for improved security compliance.

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Lumen cloud and edge cloud solutions

In the era of the AI economy, implementing a powerful cloud strategy is essential for driving innovation and efficiency. Lumen offers a comprehensive suite of cloud services, including private, public and edge cloud solutions. These services are designed to help businesses modernize their IT infrastructure and improve performance.

Private cloud

Lumen® Edge Private Cloud combines the security of private cloud with the flexibility of public cloud. It provides fully managed, pre-built infrastructure for high-performance private cloud computing. With its enhanced performance and security, organizations can deploy workloads with pre-built hardware and managed infrastructure designed to deliver less than 5 milliseconds of latency to optimize latency-sensitive applications with scalable private cloud computing and storage.

Cloud connectivity services

Lumen® Cloud Connectivity Services offer scalable and flexible connections to the leading public cloud providers that can be tailored to meet various business needs. These services are designed to provide on-demand connectivity to a global network of cloud and data center infrastructure, allowing businesses to rapidly deploy and scale resources as needed. Pay-as-you-go pricing models help to optimize costs.

Edge Cloud

Lumen® Edge Cloud Solutions bring computing power closer to the data source, minimizing latency to help improve performance. Key components include an integrated Infrastructure with compute, cloud, storage, networking, cybersecurity and orchestration that's designed to deliver less than 5 milliseconds of latency– ideal for real-time applications that demand low-latency connectivity. Edge cloud supports a wide range of use cases, from IoT devices to machine learning and data processing.

Lumen® Managed Services

In today's dynamic digital era, implementing an AI strategy is crucial for staying competitive. However, the complexity and scale of AI deployments require robust support and expertise. One of the biggest challenges hindering successful AI adoption at enterprises is limited AI expertise with 33% saying they lack the necessary skills for AI implementation. Companies lacking the necessary internal AI expertise face difficulties in understanding the full scope of the technology and its potential impact on existing processes and systems.[9]

Lumen Managed Services offer the comprehensive solutions your organization needs to seamlessly integrate AI into your operations. Optimize resources and minimize costs with flexible, on-demand services tailored to your specific needs. With Lumen Managed Services, you'll be able to drive and optimize your modernization journey using digital expertise that provides reliable, secure and flexible managed solutions for networking, security and edge cloud workloads.

We can deliver services on an advisory or project basis, as well as provide ongoing management:

- **Advisory:** We will do a deep dive into your requirements and IT architecture using discovery and analysis tactics to design a comprehensive solution to support your AI initiatives.
- **Project Based:** We build and implement solutions for modern, scalable apps based on your AI environment.
- **Ongoing Management:** Continuous monitoring and management of your end-to-end project services, as well as application, infrastructure and security management optimization.

Lumen: Your trusted partner on the AI journey

In today's fast-paced digital world, enterprises are increasingly turning to AI to drive innovation and stay competitive. However, preparing networks for AI can be a daunting task. That's where Lumen comes in. As a trusted partner, Lumen helps businesses navigate the complexities of AI adoption and helps ensure they have the robust, scalable and secure infrastructure needed to succeed.

By partnering with Lumen, you gain access to a wealth of expertise and resources that can help you overcome the challenges of AI adoption. Whether you're modernizing your network, migrating to a hybrid cloud environment or managing new AI workloads, Lumen has the solutions you need to help you achieve your business goals.

Crowley Maritime's journey to a secure global network

Founded in 1892, Crowley Maritime Corporation is a logistics, marine and energy solutions company. Operating a global fleet, Crowley required a fast, reliable and secure networking solution to span the globe, as well as a technology partner that could help them innovate their network infrastructure and transform their technology enterprise.

Network services tailored for digital inclusiveness and AI

"Lumen has supported us by being an extension of our business by creating an environment that is reliable 24/7 and that is also secure. Lumen is investing significantly in the digital inclusiveness of their network to make sure that their network is available everywhere at a very high speed. We rely on this very much to change the way we work.

"The next solution we are looking to solve is AI—while it is very powerful—it is unfortunately still a machine. We are working with Lumen on how we use AI and data intelligence to prevent cyberattacks... Lumen is coming across as a company that is investing a significant amount of energy in this cultural transformation."

– Erika Graziuso, CIO, Crowley

Current Lumen customer compensated for their endorsement.

Embracing the future: A path to digital resilience

In the era of the AI economy, implementing a powerful cloud strategy is essential for driving innovation and efficiency. Lumen offers a comprehensive suite of cloud services, including private, public and edge cloud solutions. These services are designed to help businesses modernize their IT infrastructure and improve performance.

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Just keeping pace with change is not adequate for business success. It's crucial to adapt and embrace industry changes as opportunities for growth and advancement. Business development and transformation should not be seen as fixed objectives, but as ongoing journeys that evolve in line with changing circumstances and enterprise goals. By evolving towards AI readiness, businesses can be empowered to innovate, drive business growth and turn change into progress with real business benefits. By doing so, they rise above any predictable—or unpredictable—events that come their way.

> Lumen has helped us by being a true partner, not just a transactional relationship. It's a relationship based on what our needs are, as well as challenging our team on expertise we do not have. It is keeping us stable and secure but also creating what we need through innovation."
> – Erika Graziuso, CIO, Crowley
>
> *Current Lumen customer compensated for their endorsement.*

> AI readiness empowers businesses to innovate, drive business growth and turn change into progress with real business benefits.

As we look ahead and prepare for an AI future, it's clear that digital resilience and AI readiness can be the foundation of successful innovation and transformation. In this white paper, we've explored the transformative impact of AI on enterprise IT and network infrastructure. We've discussed the challenges and opportunities that come with AI adoption, and how businesses can navigate these changes to stay competitive. From enhancing customer experiences to driving operational efficiency, AI is reshaping the way we do business. The observations and statistics from industry experts prove that IT modernization matters for successful AI innovation.

The journey to AI readiness can take many forms, and every organization is at a different stage. Whether you're just beginning to explore AI or you're already leveraging its capabilities, the key is to stay flexible and open to change. By updating your IT infrastructure and embracing new technologies, you can fully tap into AI's potential and thrive in today's digital world.

Ready to transform your business with AI? Discover why Lumen is the trusted network for AI at Lumen AI Solutions.

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Footnote(s)/Disclaimer(s)

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Why Lumen?

Lumen is unleashing the world's digital potential. We ignite business growth by connecting people, data, and applications – quickly, securely, and effortlessly. As the trusted network for AI, Lumen uses the scale of our network to help companies realize AI's full potential. From metro connectivity to long-haul data transport to our edge cloud, security, managed service and digital platform capabilities, we meet our customers' needs today and as they build for tomorrow.

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