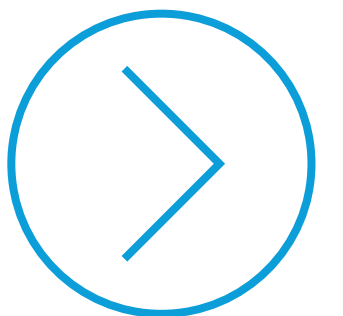




Competitive insights

November 2021

6 IT strategies to help give your business a competitive advantage



LUMEN®



Your IT network: A platform for business growth

Businesses can pursue a competitive advantage through one or more tried-and-true strategies: low cost; product or service differentiation; being first to market. Technological innovation is another major advantage, but what it looks like today—and which companies have access to it—is changing dramatically.

The IT networks and systems running quietly in the background can deliver impressive competitive advantages in brand new ways. They can help your business to lower costs, attract new customers, transform the customer experience and launch new initiatives that would not be possible otherwise.

Better yet: Many of these IT innovations are now affordable for your business no matter its size and budget, and without having to engage multiple vendors.

Embrace next-gen networks or get left behind

A powerful network is no longer a nice-to-have: It's your foundation for business growth and an essential component of the customer experience you deliver. Your customers now expect Amazon-like convenience and seamless digital and in-store experiences. If you can't provide them, customers will look elsewhere.



What's inside this report

This report analyzes recent research on business challenges and technology solutions and explores how companies can leverage their IT networks in new ways. Read on to learn six of the most significant IT strategies that can help your business achieve a competitive advantage.

Introduction

Challenges

6 strategies

1

2

3

4

5

6

Advantages

The business case for IT innovation

Businesses that quickly embrace new digital technologies and IT innovations can gain a significant advantage over slower and more conservative businesses.

Digitally advanced vs. traditional businesses:



2x more revenue per employee

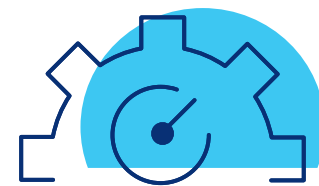
Deloitte, [Connecting Small Businesses in the US, 2018](#)



4x more revenue growth over the previous year

Deloitte, [Connecting Small Businesses in the US, 2018](#)

Growing businesses vs. stagnant businesses:



38%

more likely to say that technology “drives the growth of my customer base”

Salesforce Research, [Small and Medium Business Trends Report, Fourth Edition, 2020](#)



33%

more likely to say that technology “drives employee productivity” than stagnant or declining businesses

Salesforce Research, [Small and Medium Business Trends Report, Fourth Edition, 2020](#)



Introduction

Challenges

6 strategies



Advantages



2021 business challenges: Can IT help solve them?

As the pandemic recovery continues, many company leaders remain concerned about strengthening business continuity and increasing competitive advantage. IT decisionmakers must play a role in addressing these challenges.

Top seven post-pandemic business concerns

What are your organization's top-of-mind concerns since the pandemic?



TechValidate, Survey of 1,098 Cisco Meraki Users, April 23, 2021

6

IT strategies that can provide a competitive advantage



Consider these IT network strategies to help your business address key challenges, increase revenue and strengthen business resilience at the same time.

- 1 **Adopt a flexible cloud platform** that enables growth and agility.
- 2 **Prioritize business resilience** with 24/7 performance monitoring.
- 3 **Leverage data and networks** to win and retain customers.
- 4 **Blend digital and in-person customer experiences.**
- 5 **Expand the employee workspace.**
- 6 **Focus on business innovation**, not IT drudgery.



Introduction

Challenges

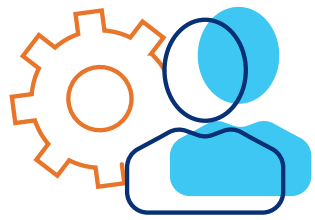
6 strategies



Advantages



Adopt a flexible cloud platform that enables growth and agility



What to do

Consolidate all [IT and networking solutions](#) into a single, flexible cloud platform that easily adapts to your business needs. Manage wireless, software-defined wide area network (SD-WAN), mobile devices, sensors, surveillance cameras, and software-as-a-service (SaaS) applications—from anywhere, on any device. Choose a platform with an open API, giving you access to an ecosystem of third-party apps and integrations.



Why it matters

Your competitors may already realize the advantages of cloud-first networking solutions. In the past two years, businesses of all sizes have shifted IT services to the cloud: In 2020, the global cloud services market grew an astounding 24.1 percent,* and is forecast to grow another 24 percent in 2021.**

• International Data Corporation (IDC), [Worldwide Semiannual Public Cloud Services Tracker](#), May 13, 2021

•• Gartner, [Gartner Forecasts Worldwide Public Cloud End-User Spending to Grow 23% in 2021](#), April 21, 2021



Competitive advantages

Scalability

Deploy new network services for your customers and employees in days, not months.

Flexibility

Easily add new business apps and network capabilities as your business grows.

Cost

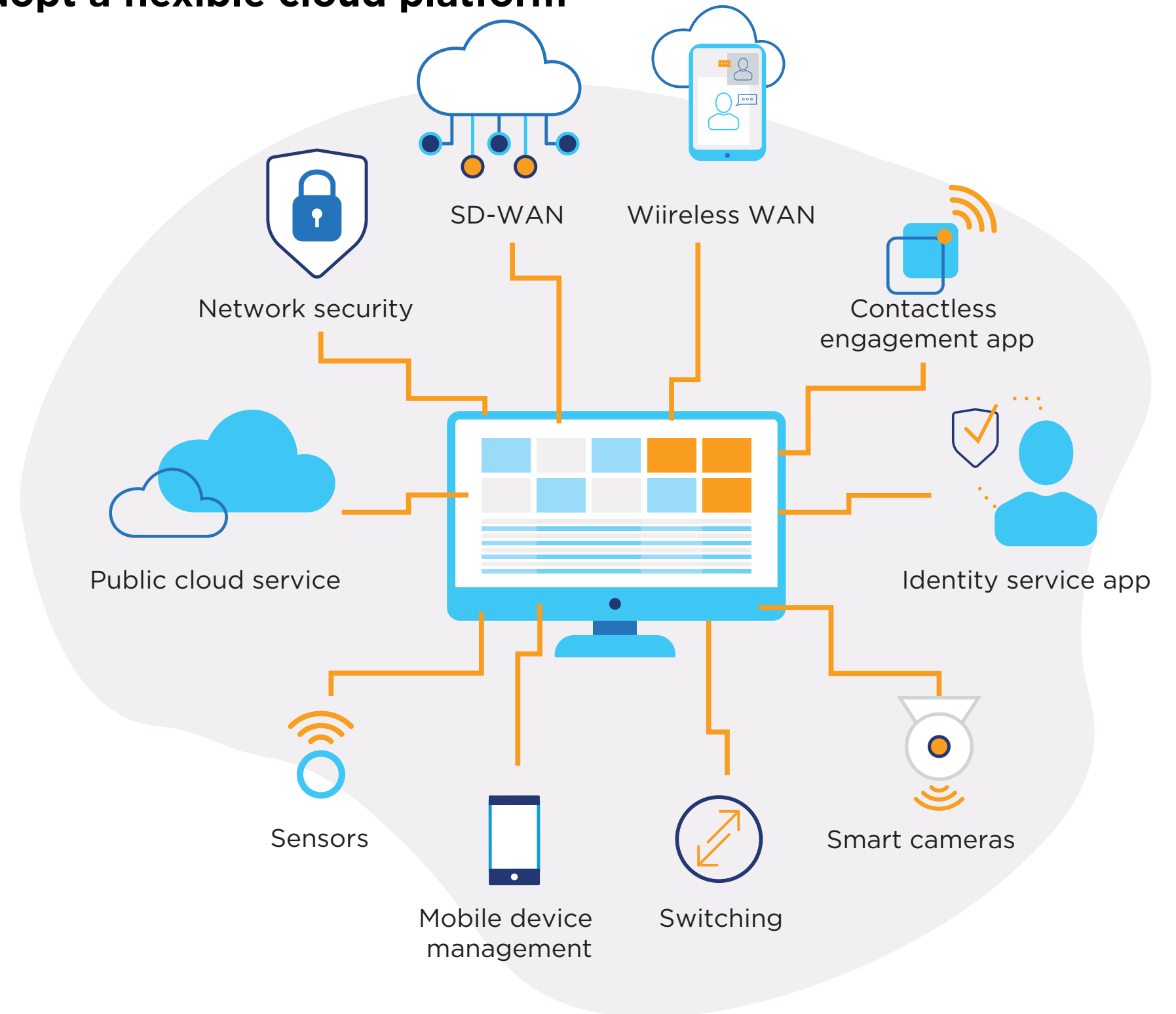
Reduce capital expenditures by moving away from expensive, difficult-to-manage hardware.

Strategy in action

An example of how businesses can adopt a flexible cloud platform

Cloud platform expansion

A rapidly growing financial services company with four physical locations builds its IT network on a cloud-managed platform. As the business evolves, so does the network: New third-party apps and physical devices can be easily set up and added to the platform.



Strategy in action

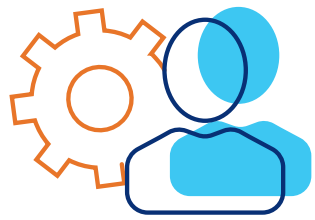
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Prioritize business resilience with 24/7 performance monitoring



What to do

Set up real-time visibility into all critical business functions. Minimize complexity with a single web-based dashboard that monitors everything: Wi-Fi and WAN networks, business applications, equipment and buildings. Leverage artificial intelligence to help respond to alerts.



Why it matters

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, business resilience has emerged as a key competitive advantage. You need the ability to quickly pinpoint network failures, security threats or even customer health risks, and resolve them remotely.



Competitive advantages

Customer satisfaction

Manage and prioritize network traffic to provide consistently reliable services.

Customer safety

Increase customer loyalty by showing them you care about their health, safety and security.

Employee productivity

Minimize network interruptions and ensure adequate bandwidth for cloud apps.

Strategy in action

Examples of how businesses can prioritize business resilience with 24/7 performance monitoring

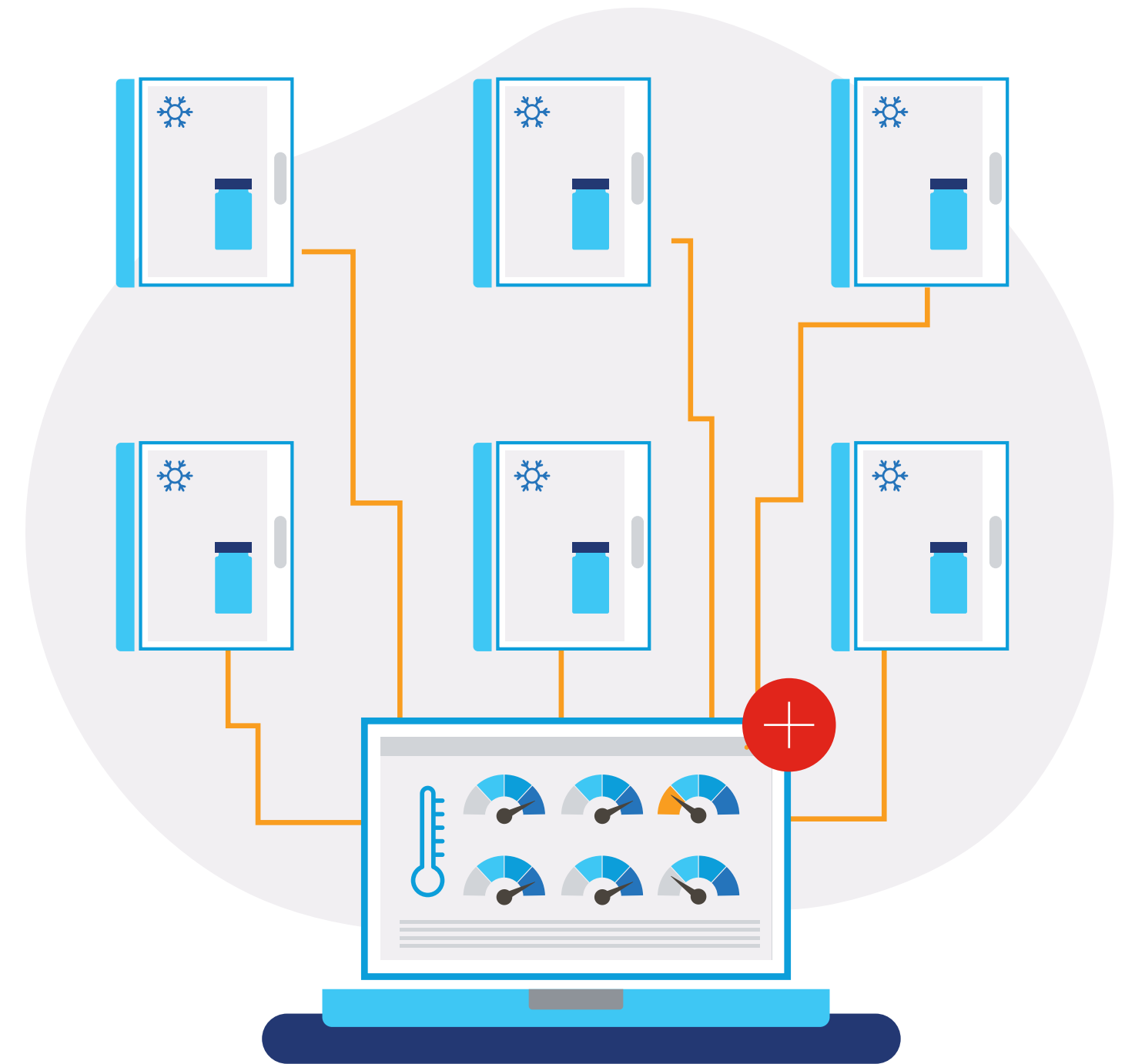
IoT sensors

A healthcare organization uses internet of things (IoT) sensors to detect irregular temperature changes in refrigeration units storing vaccines.

Smart cameras



SD-WAN



Strategy in action

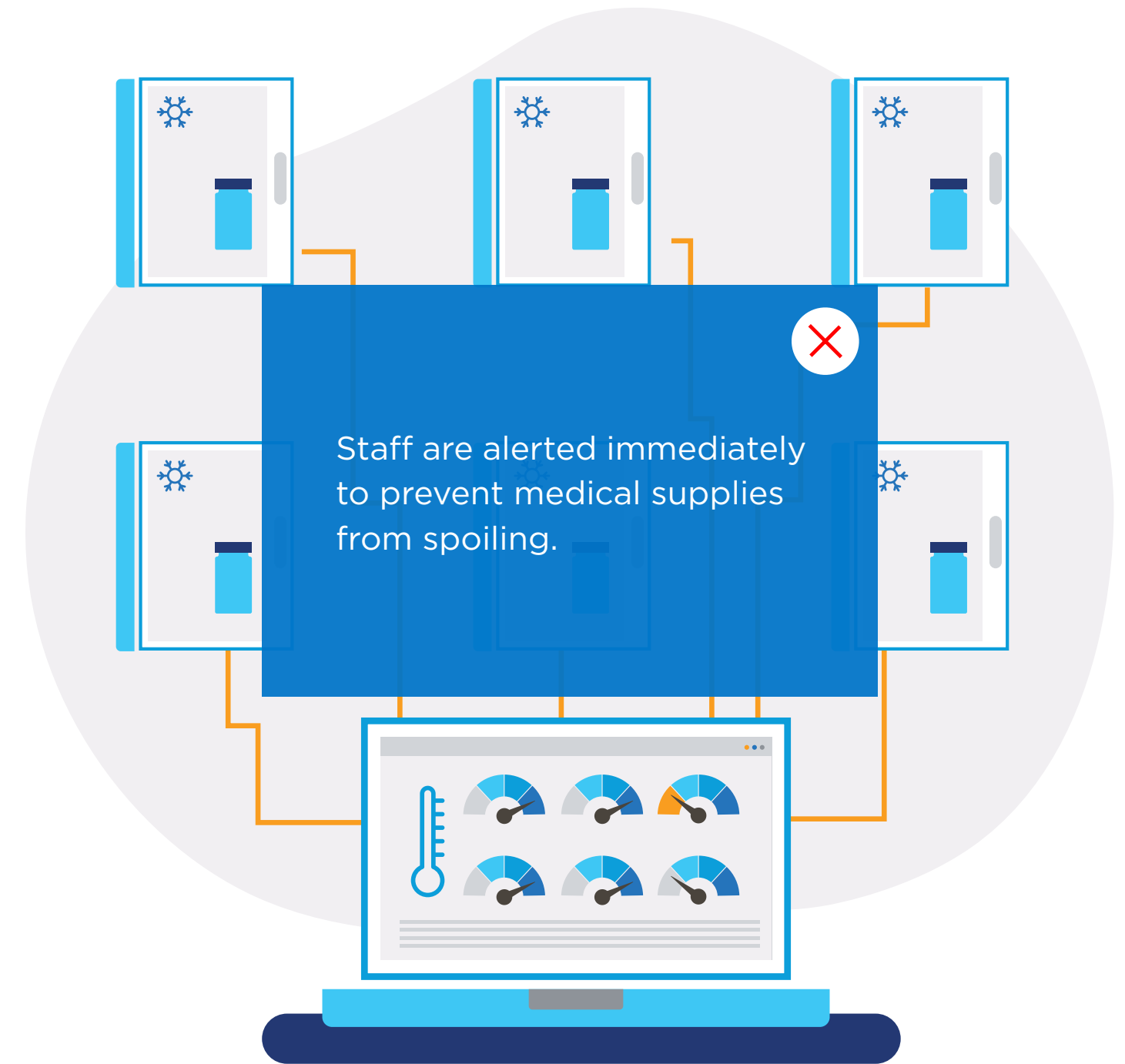
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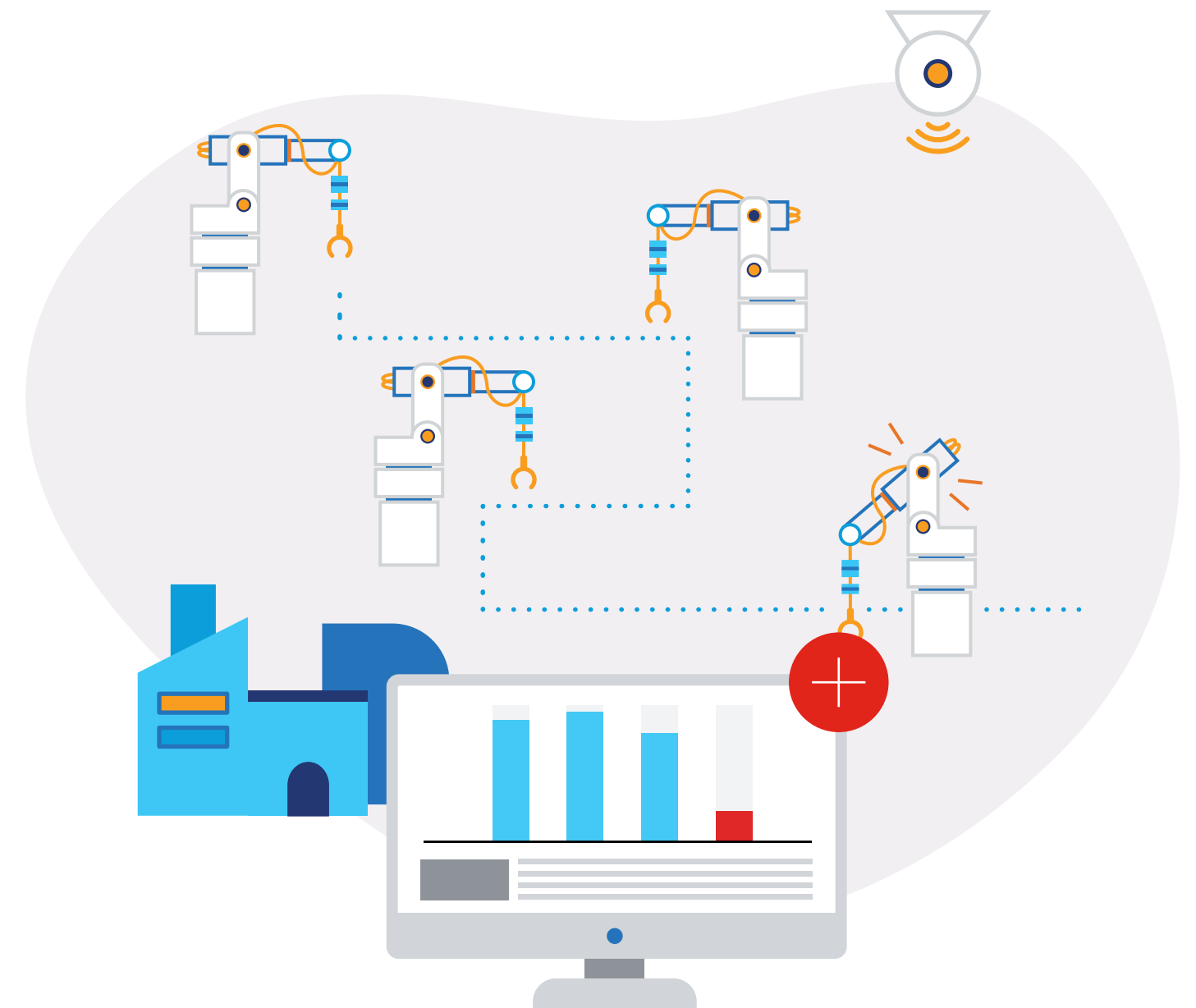
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Smart cameras scan a manufacturing company's plant floor to monitor robots assembling product components.

SD-WAN



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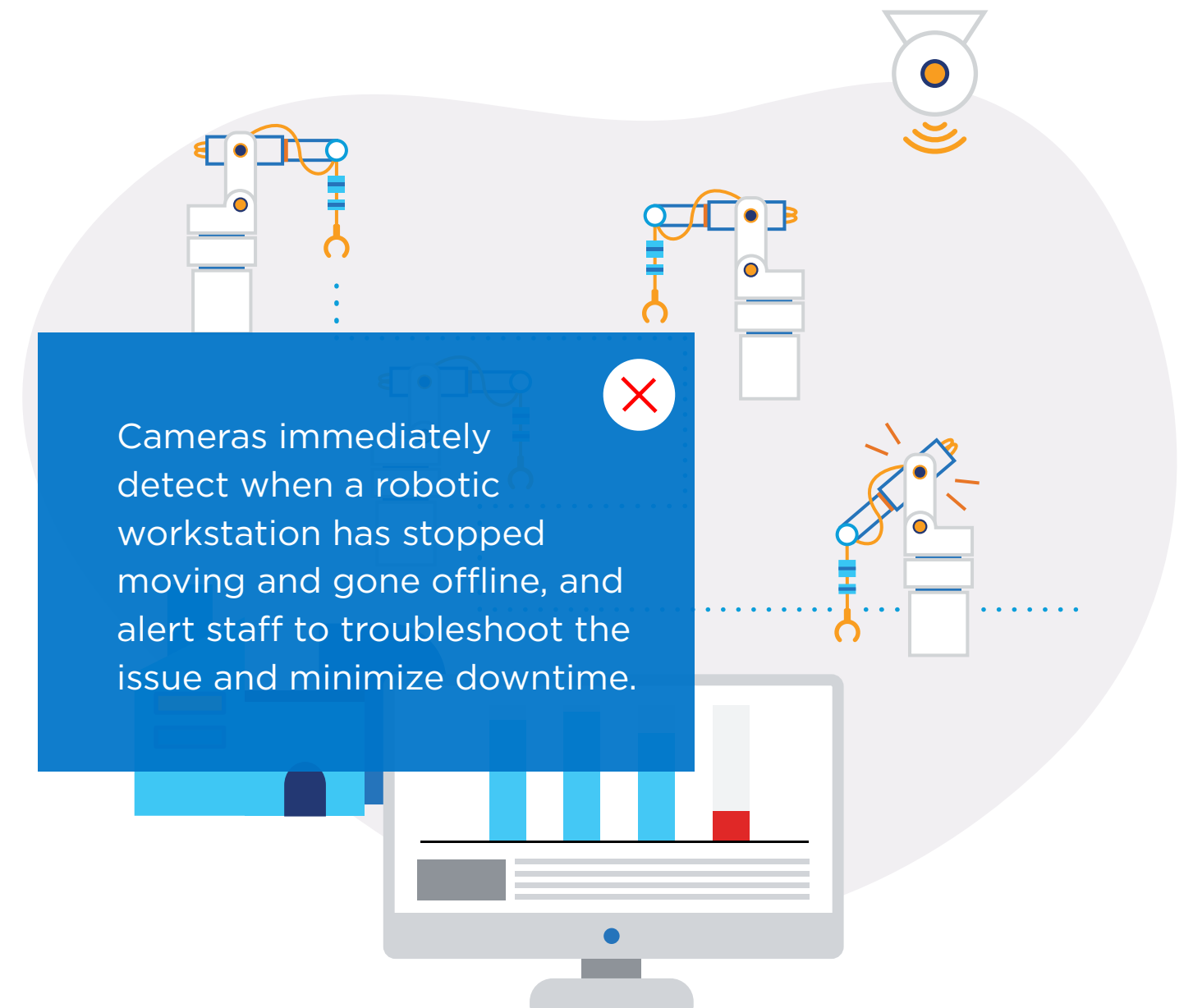
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SD-WAN

Through a web-based dashboard, remote IT staff monitor a college campus's SD-WAN network, including traffic associated with specific Web applications, from Gmail to Netflix.



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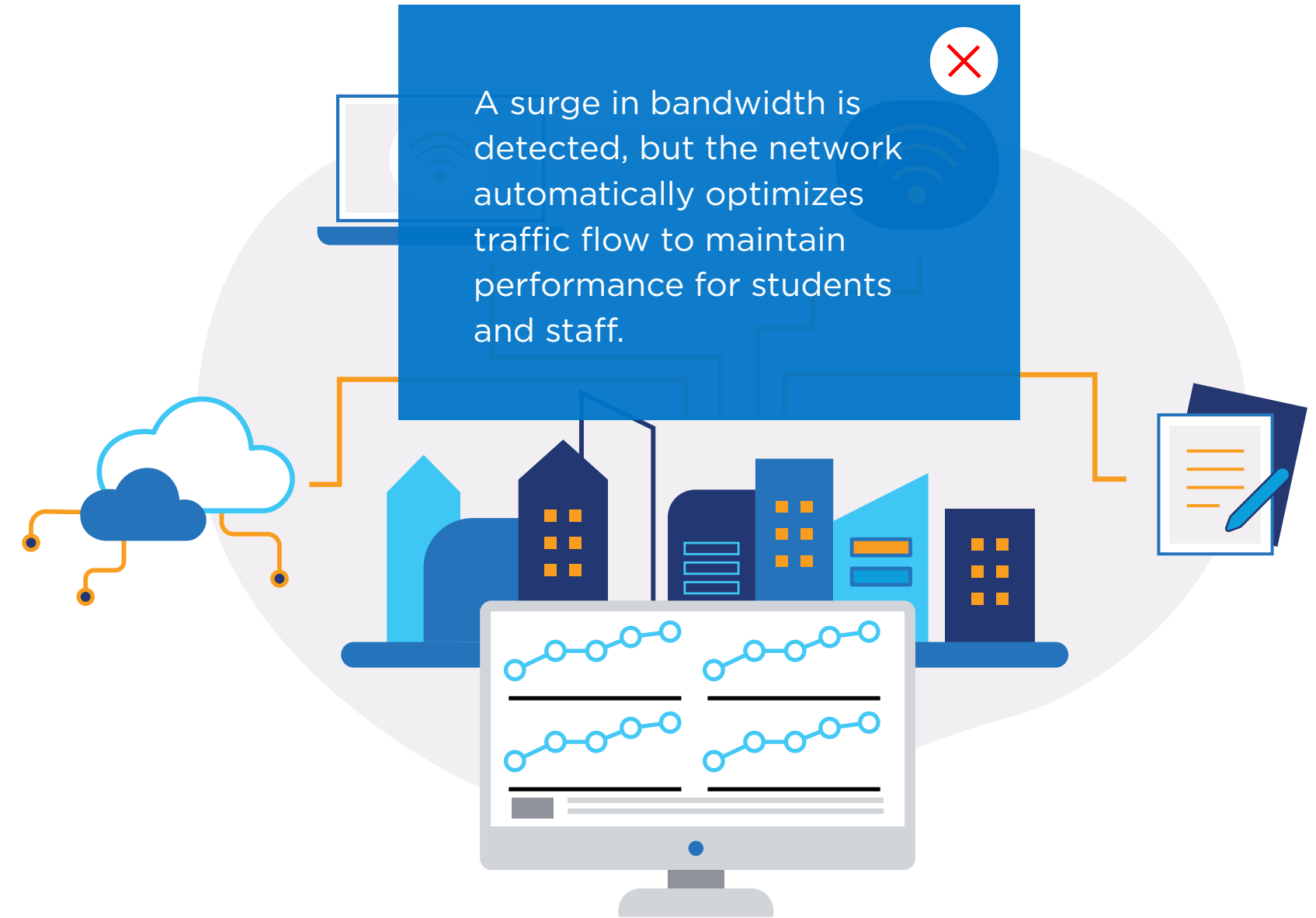


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Leverage data and networks to win and retain customers



What to do

Use your network to capture customer insights, including their preferences and purchasing behaviors. Optimize your offerings accordingly and send personalized communications via the network.



Why it matters

Not yet leveraging customer data from your network? You're [way behind the curve](#). Data powers superlative customer experiences, and that's what your customers expect. They'll pay up to a 16 percent price premium for a great customer experience.*

* PwC, [PwC Future of Customer Experience Survey](#), 2018



Competitive advantages

Customer loyalty

Deliver [consistently great experiences](#) based on network data to improve loyalty and word-of-mouth referrals.

Effective marketing

Drive sales with relevant, personalized offers and messages to customers when they access your website, app or in-store network.

Strategy in action

Examples of how businesses can leverage data and networks to win and retain customers

Location analytics

A retail chain analyzes customer foot traffic using its wireless network and smart cameras, then maximizes store layout and product placement for higher conversion rates.

Data analytics >

Proximity marketing >



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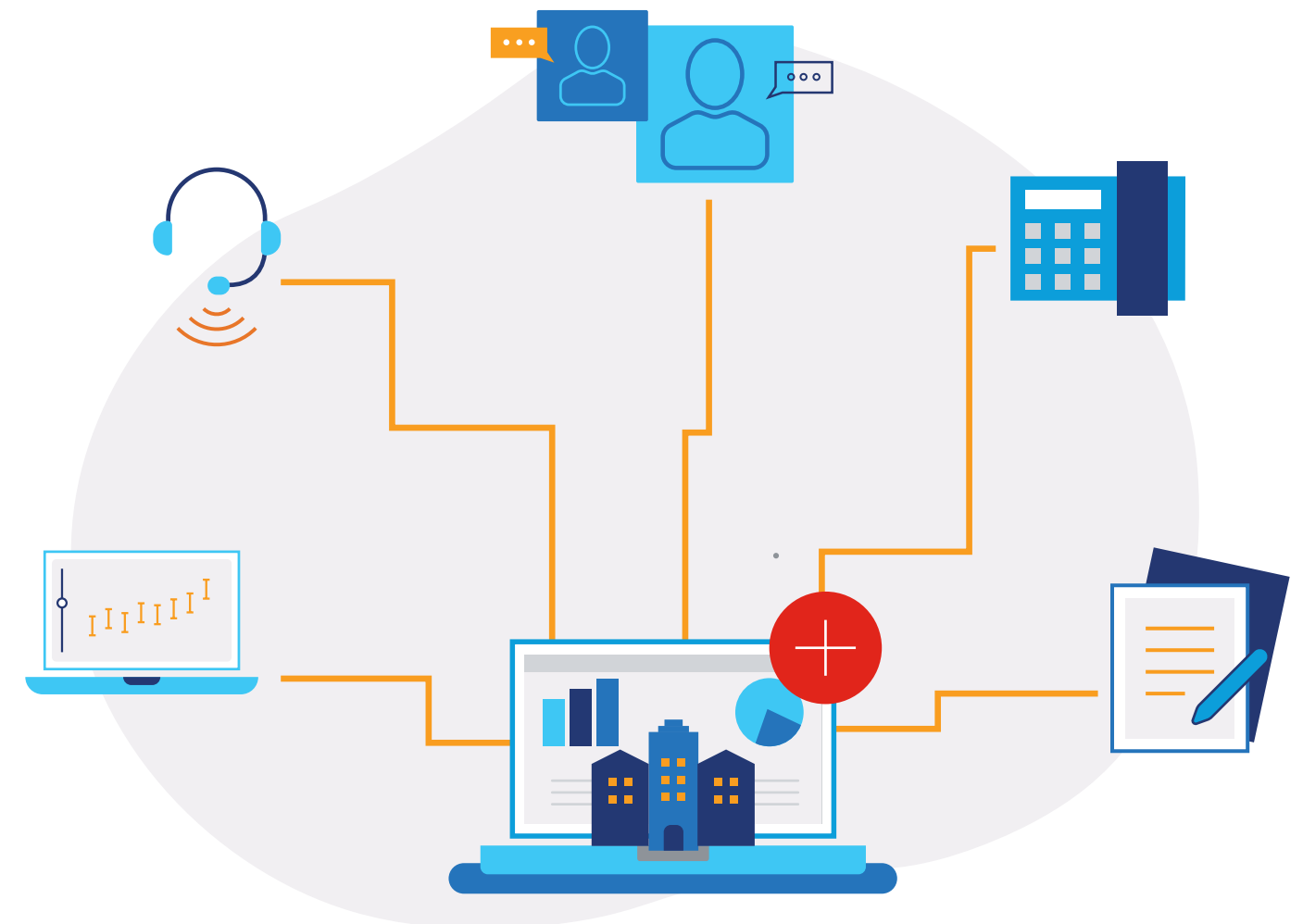
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Data analytics

A financial services company analyzes network data to understand which services drive frequent visitors to its locations, website, and app, then optimizes those services to maintain loyalty.

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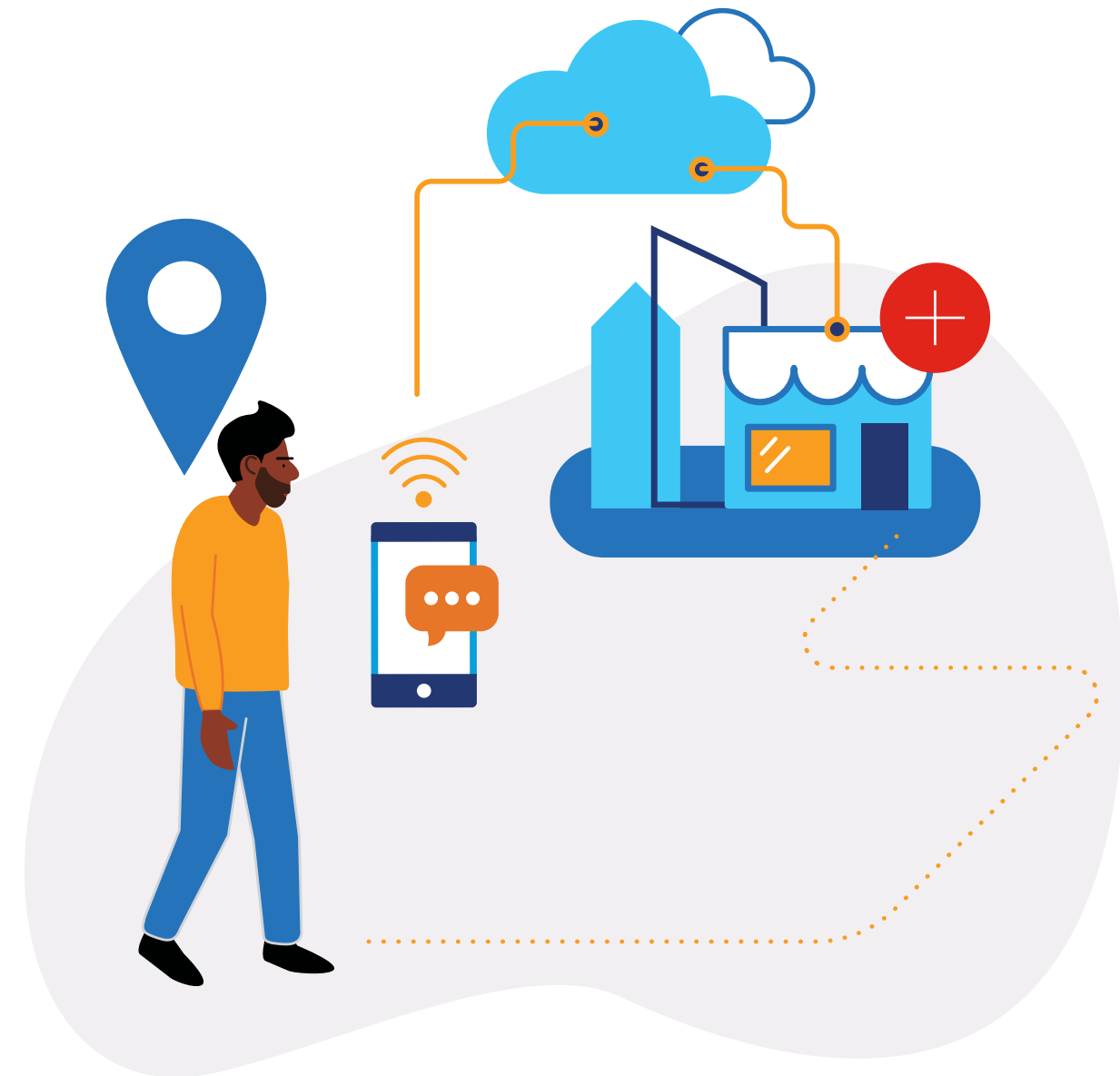
Examples of how businesses can leverage data and networks to win and retain customers

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Proximity marketing

A restaurant increases loyalty and satisfaction by sending personalized offers, rewards and messages to frequent customers when they access the business's Wi-Fi network or app.



Strategy in action

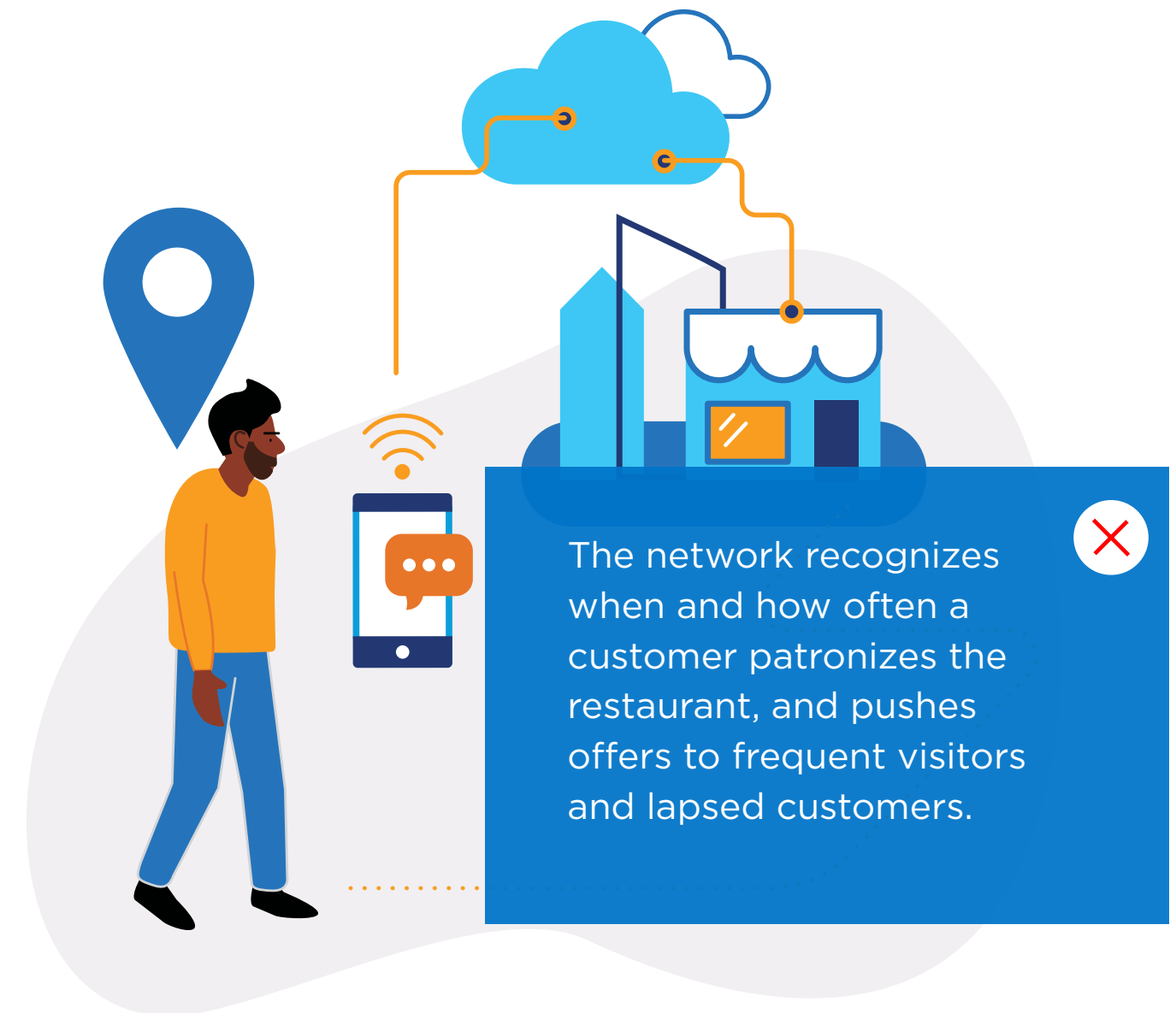
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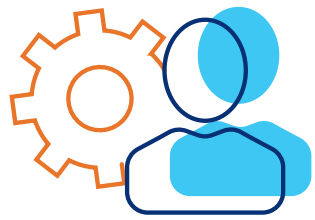
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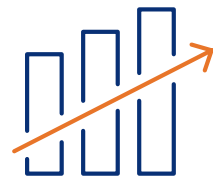


Blend digital and in-person customer experiences



What to do

Create a [seamless transition](#) between online and in-store experiences. Help your customers accomplish tasks and purchases digitally. Alternatively, enable them to begin a process remotely and complete it in-person on a fast Wi-Fi network. Make their purchases convenient and secure through your cloud platform.



Why it matters

E-commerce is exploding with up to 39 percent* in the first quarter of 2021 compared to Q1 2020. Businesses must expand their online presence but also [connect it to an in-store experience](#): 82 percent of shoppers conduct research on their phones before making an in-store purchase.**

* U.S. Department of Commerce, [Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales, 1st Quarter 2021](#), May 18, 2021

** Google, [Google Consumer Survey](#), April 2015, U.S.



Competitive advantages

Increased sales

Drive sales by making purchases fast and convenient, and by keeping customers in-store longer with free Wi-Fi accessed via customized splash pages.

Customer retention

Appeal to the majority of customers who prefer businesses that offer [free Wi-Fi](#) and more convenient, omnichannel shopping options.

Strategy in action

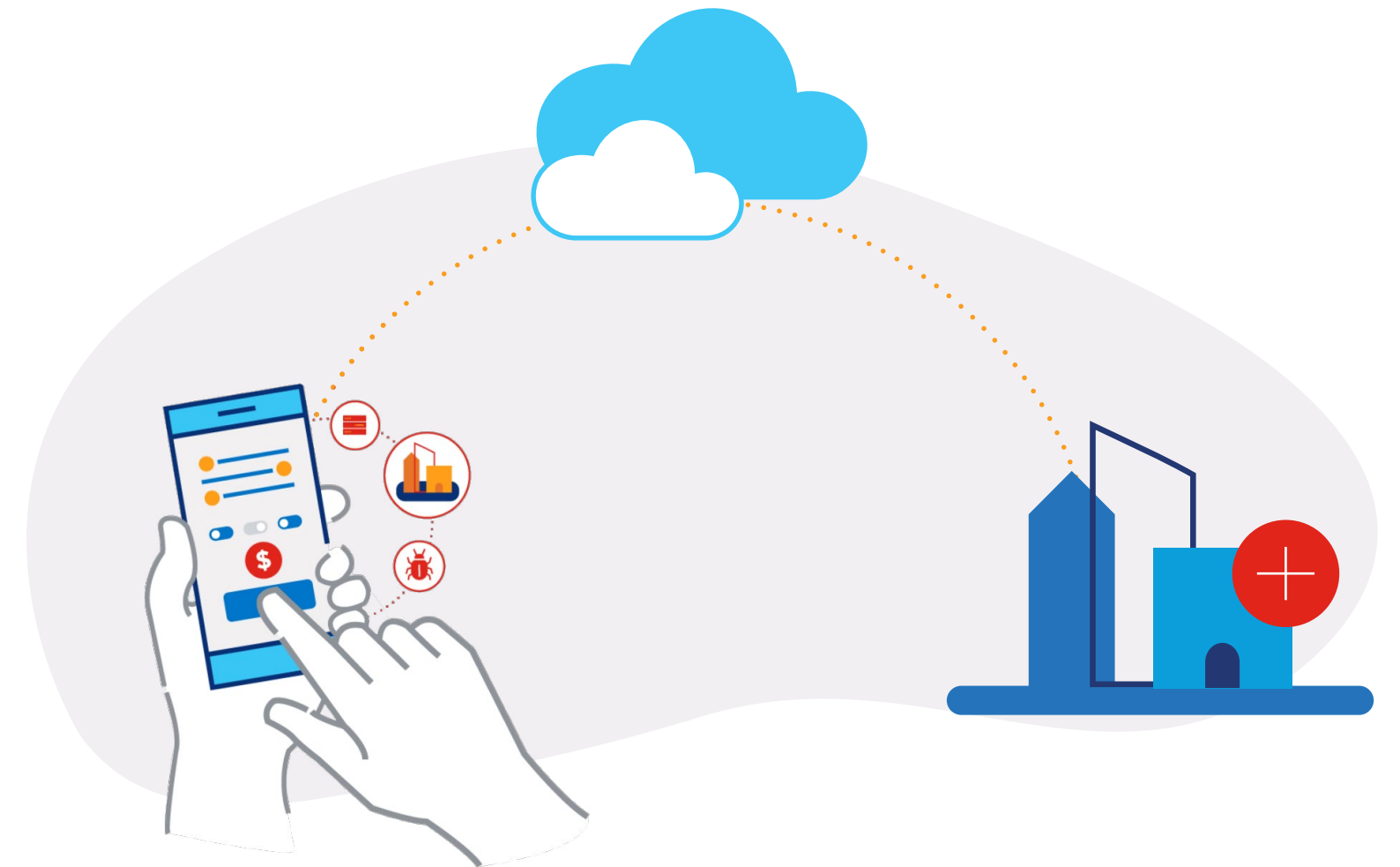
Examples of how businesses can blend digital and in-person customer experiences

Buy online, pick up in store (BOPIS)

A clothing retailer accelerates purchases through a third-party app integrated with its cloud platform.

Curbside pickup >

Wi-Fi 6 >



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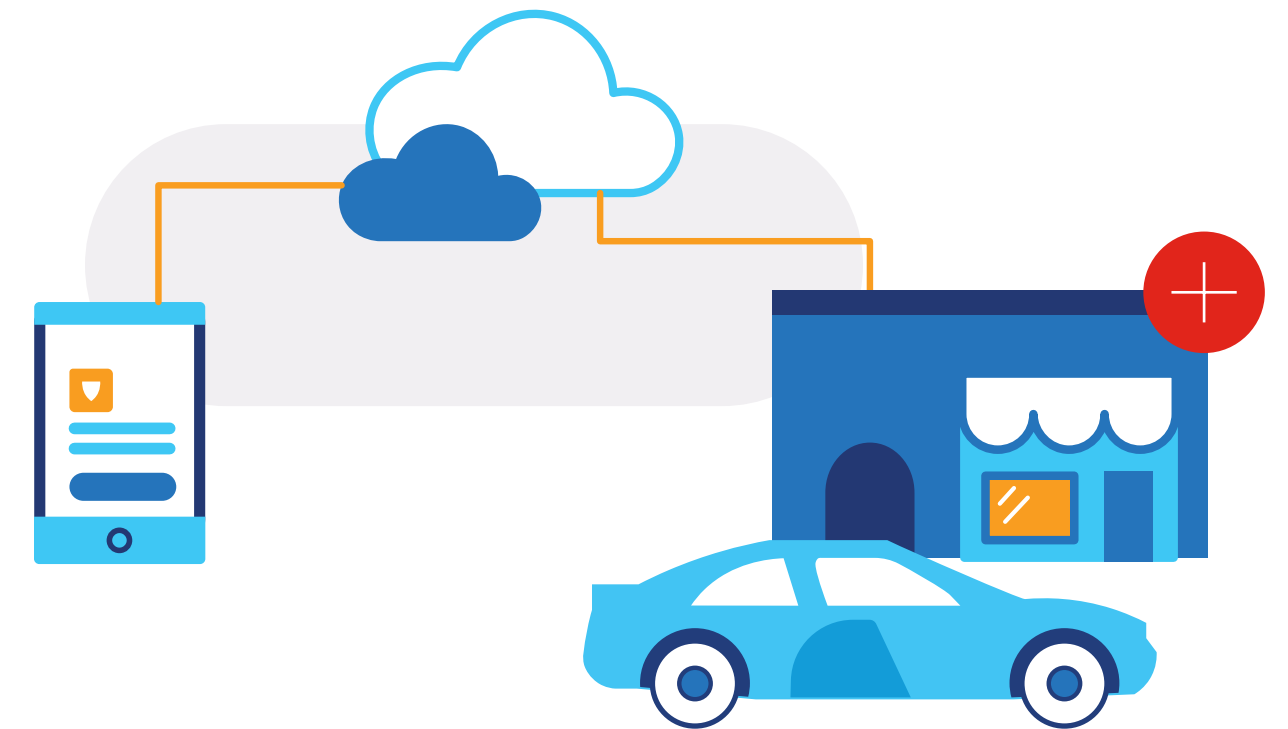
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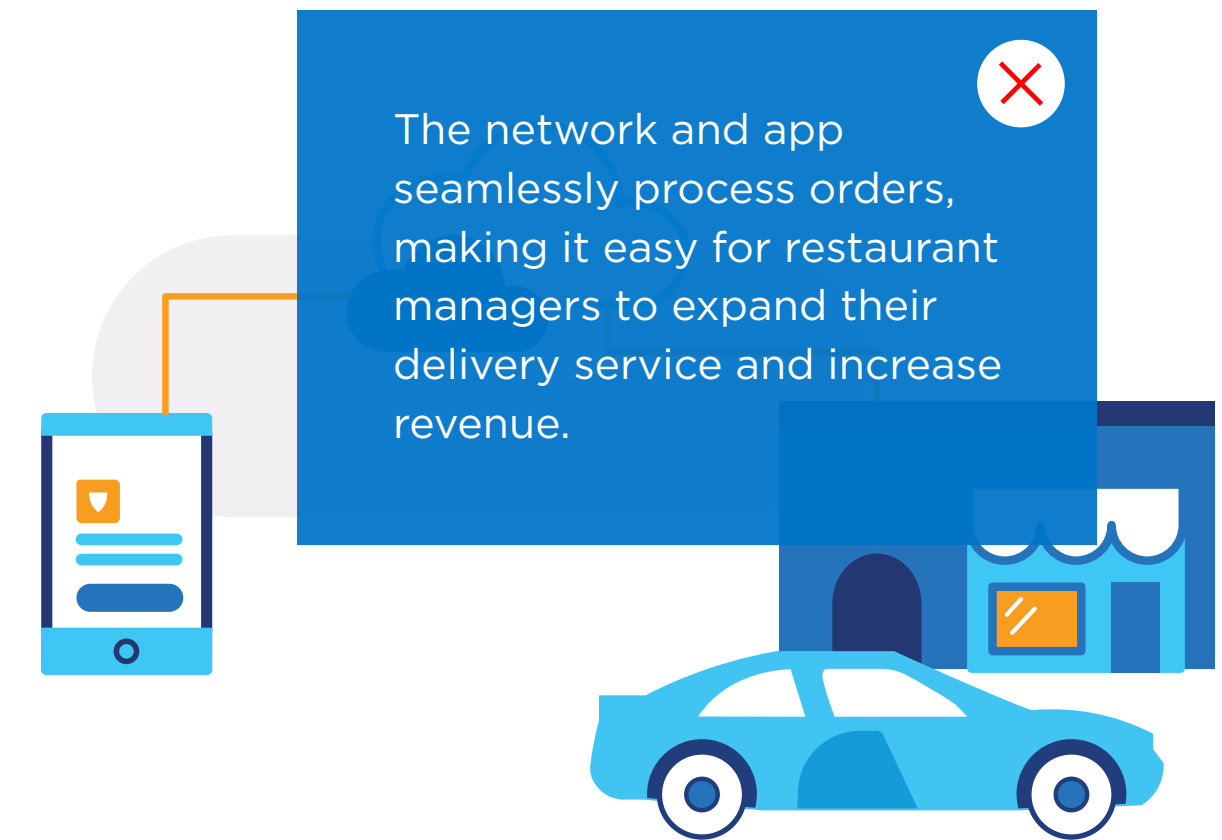
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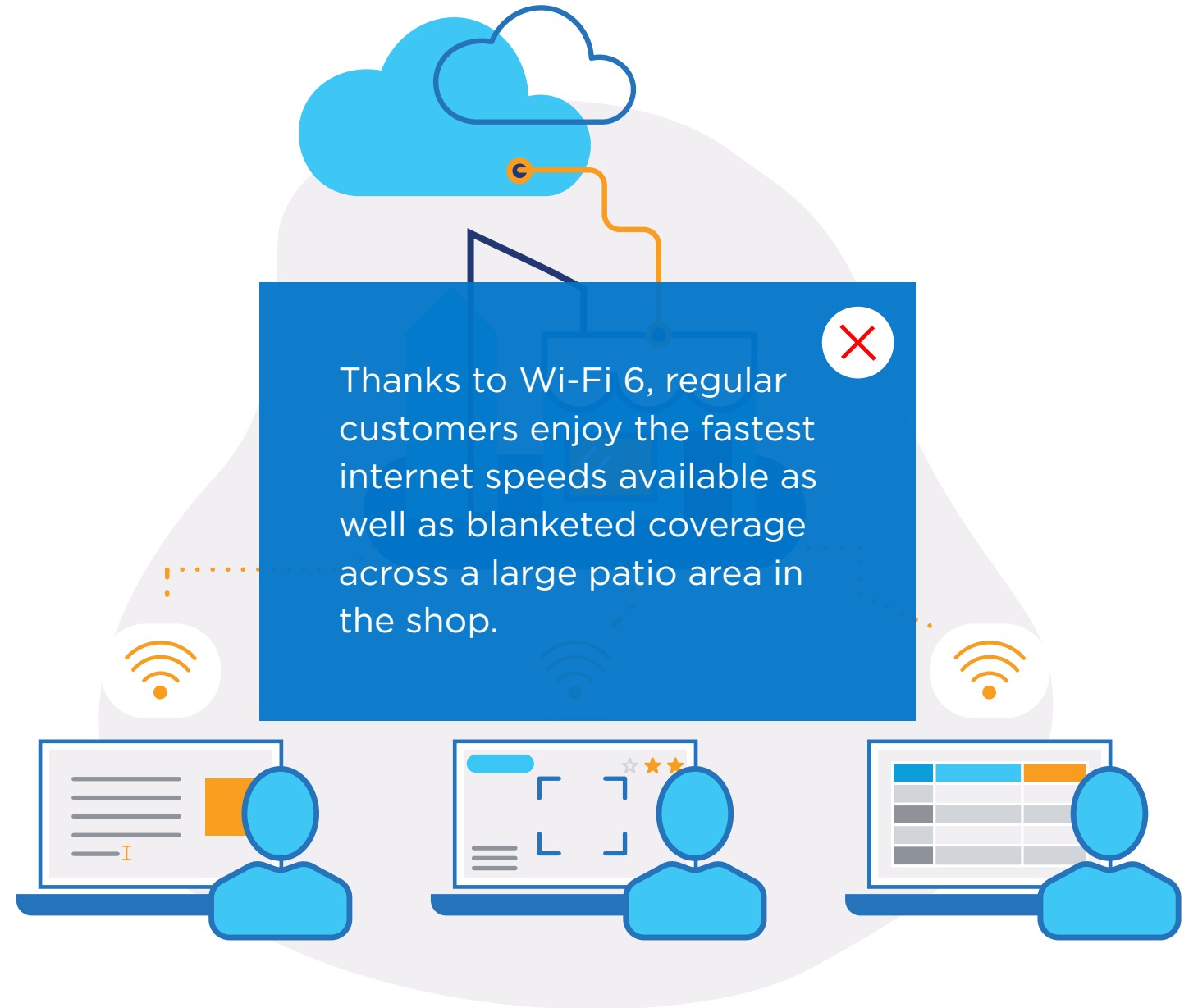
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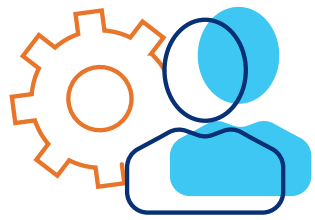
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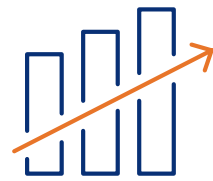


Expand the employee workspace



What to do

Transform offices into smarter, safer workspaces. Ensure flawless connectivity from any location. Give remote or hybrid employees the same powerful and [secure network access](#) through your cloud platform.



Why it matters

In the wake of the pandemic, nine out of 10 organizations say they will combine on-site with remote working,* because they recognize its value in increased productivity and employee satisfaction.

* McKinsey, [What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work](#), May 17, 2021



Competitive advantages

Employee productivity

Help employees get more done over fast, secure network connections.

Hiring and HR

In the midst of a 2021 labor shortage, better flexible work options can help your business attract top talent.



Strategy in action

Examples of how businesses can expand the employee workspace

Secure remote access

A financial services company equips each remote employee with a teleworker gateway for fast, secure access to business apps and networks, and encrypted data transmission.

Bring-your-own-device >

Safer workspaces >



Strategy in action

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A healthcare company allows in-the-field employees to use their own mobile devices with a management app to securely separate work and personal data, while maintaining full visibility.

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A small manufacturer uses sensors and cameras on-site to identify vehicles and people, track assets and equipment, and monitor spaces for compliance and employee safety.



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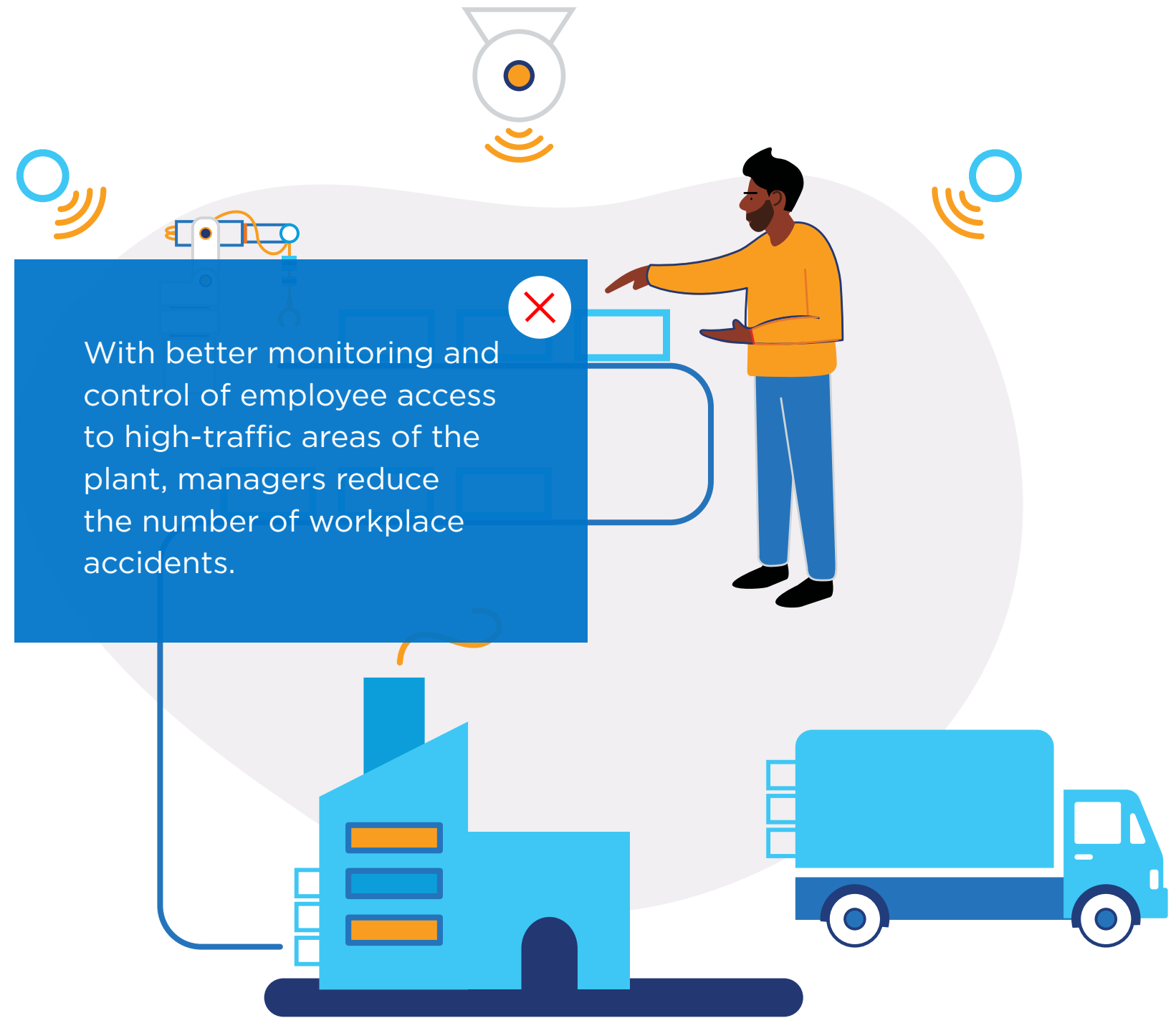
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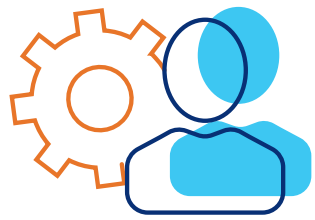
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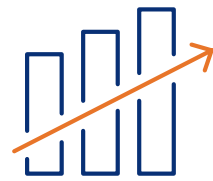


Focus on business innovation, not IT drudgery



What to do

Switch to an operating-expense (OPEX) model. Instead of managing complex and outdated hardware yourself, let a managed service provider install a state-of-the-art network and devices. The provider will then monitor and manage them remotely via the cloud platform.



Why it matters

Since the pandemic began, more organization leaders have [prioritized business agility](#).^{*} They want to focus on their core competencies and find ways to innovate and grow. Outsourcing day-to-day IT operations to a managed service provider can help achieve that goal.

* Accenture, [The Business Agility Report: Responding to Disruption](#), 3rd Edition, 2020



Competitive advantages

Cost savings

By decreasing capital expenditures, your business can dramatically reduce IT costs and, at the same time, increase network reliability and performance.

Innovation

Free up IT staff to focus on higher-level projects that support business growth and new initiatives.

Strategy in action

An example of how businesses can focus on innovation, not IT drudgery

Streamlined solutions

To meet the IT needs of a growing pharmaceutical company, a managed service provider first conducts a needs assessment to learn about the company's business goals and priorities. Then it tailors a cloud-managed IT solution that centers on SD-WAN to simplify network access and improve security at three locations.

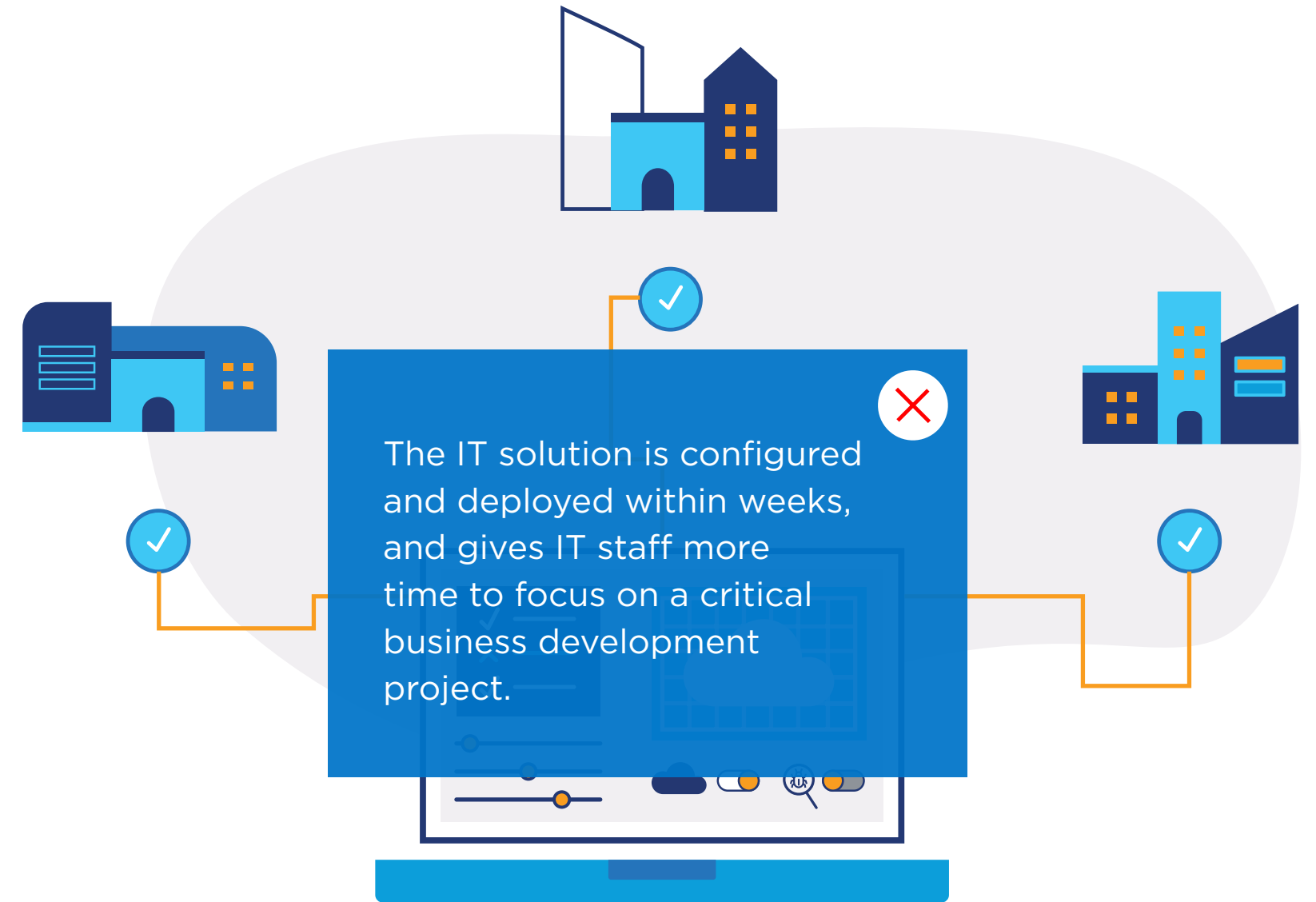


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Let Lumen and Cisco Meraki help you achieve your competitive advantage.

To execute these six IT strategies, choose Lumen® Managed Enterprise with Cisco Meraki, a simple-yet-powerful IT solution that is affordable for any size business.

Cisco Meraki platform technology

Cisco Meraki solutions provide the foundation for your competitive advantage. They are trusted by **576,000 customers** worldwide, and support **+3 million active customer networks** and **+8.5 million network devices**.



Wireless LAN (MR)



Wireless WAN (MG)



Security & SD-WAN (MX)



Mobile device management (SM)



Meraki Insight (MI)



Sensors (MT)



Smart cameras (MV)



Third-party integrations (SaaS, cloud services)

Delivered and managed by Lumen



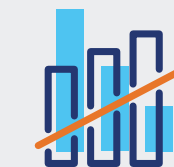
Turnkey services

Lumen expertly designs, procures, installs and configures your network.



Simplified management

Lumen provides hassle-free, 24/7 remote management and monitoring.



Cost savings and enhanced productivity

Lumen can help reduce your hardware and staffing expenses with its cost-effective OPEX approach.

Contact Lumen today

Connect with a Lumen specialist to discuss your challenges, needs and business goals, and learn what technologies can help.

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