# Enterprise Transformation in APAC with SD-WAN + SASE

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From an APAC perspective, some of the factors driving data network speed, resilience, and security look very similar to those elsewhere in the world. The ability to identify, extract, and leverage data—the very basis of digital transformation—has become a measure of great importance in the marketplace, including during the mass shift to working from home (WFH), now an embedded long-term trend.

Other factors have a specifically APAC dimension. Take cloud adoption, for example. It's already extremely widely used in North America and Europe to create rapid, low-CAPEX scalability, application accessibility and operational resilience—and is now gaining significance in terms of regional adoption.

And across the globe, security is a paramount concern. Cybercrime costs the global economy over $1 trillion per year, at an average of $4.24 million per data breach in 2021. Doing what you can to avoid cybercrime is not just smart, it's essential, as no one really wants to be on the receiving end of explaining why their customers would not complete an order or service request because their network was inaccessible.

## Learning about SD-WAN and SASE

With these trends, we are seeing an extraordinary rise in inquiries from our APAC partners about two related technologies: software defined wide area network (SD-WAN) and secure access service edge (SASE).

What are these technologies with the unfortunately cumbersome names? Basically, they are really important enterprise tools. SD-WAN technologies enable organizations to take control over how they procure, use, and securely manage their wide area networks (WANs)—the essential lifeline of an organization in an Internet-centric world

SD-WAN provides a much higher level of control over WAN performance and costs, including gaining event-driven automation, network insight, and network intelligence. At any given moment, IT can know who is connecting and to where, and manage resources to cloud destinations in the most optimal way possible.

APAC business management is well-known for hard-headed decision-making, and it's important to understand that this is not a case of new technology for its own sake. The interest in SD-WAN and SASE technologies is driven by the operating cost savings, greater data availability and greater protection from cyberattacks senior executives can see being enjoyed by competitors in other regions—while laying the foundations for digital transformation. And they want to find out more.

## Lower operating costs

Let's start with costs. Most enterprises develop their WAN infrastructure over the years, primarily based on MPLS, with network carriers who are ultimately inflexible and monopolistic and, as a result, expensive.

Thankfully, with SD-WAN and SASE, there is a clear alternative. With SD-WAN, IT gains more control over their network and the freedom to select the right service provider to fit their needs.

You can now add, remove, and upgrade connectivity providers according to your need, and then reconfigure the mix whenever appropriate. This sort of agility that also keeps operational costs low is precisely what can enable digital transformation.

Additionally, finding the right technology partner can make a huge difference in long-term operational support. With shortages in many markets for technically competent IT workers, managed SD-WAN service providers can enable IT teams to focus on their users, while eliminating the pain in managing multiple Internet suppliers and SD-WAN solution delivery across the region.

## Improve quality

The quality of the underlying networks carrying data traffic can vary enormously in the APAC region. In some markets, Hong Kong, Japan, and Singapore for example, quality issues are rare. In other countries, the picture is less positive. SD-WAN enhances the quality and resilience of data networks by leveraging multiple connectivity suppliers to increase resilience across lower-quality links, thereby ensuring greater overall connectivity and a better user experience.

With SD-WAN, you can match technologies to your business needs as they evolve by setting routing priorities and traffic thresholds, and designating certain applications as strategic so that data for those apps takes priority over less important traffic. Additionally, greater resilience translates into better application performance and greater certainty to meet IT service-level agreements (SLAs).

You can even automate monitoring to provide real-time visibility, rather than wait for reports to identify any issues. All this and more helps IT improve user quality and gain agility in the migration to the digital future.

## Increased security

The pandemic required millions of people worldwide to start working from home or remotely, relying on their own endpoint devices and domestic broadband connections. The scale of this shift to working from home has introduced new challenges to IT, including managing security in a more universal model.

And this is where the secured access service edge (SASE) comes into play. Pronounced "sassy," SASE is a framework identified by Gartner as the way to securely connect entities such as users, systems, and endpoint devices to applications and services when their locations may be anywhere.

Securing your gateway to the Internet has always been part of SD-WAN, and now with the emergence of cloud-based security partners, we've advanced our security offer with the ability to deliver extensive security options from the cloud to cover remote users and other endpoints.

This holistic approach between the branch and the cloud ensures our SD-WAN and SASE delivery is fit for purpose instead of a one-size-fits approach.

## How to get started

If the cost, performance and digital transformation benefits of SD-WAN and the enhanced security available with SASE sound like a logical next move, here are four steps to investigate your options.

**The first thing to do** is take stock of where you are today and where your data traffic is going to be. This will involve coordinating inputs and objectives among colleagues to find out if your current set-up is working well or if there is scope for improvement. How many sites and people are you dealing with? Is that number likely to change? Have you been experiencing any quality, bandwidth, cost or customer service issues with your current underlay and MPLS?

This assessment has to address any future plans, of course, such as whether you are intending to migrate apps and/or data to the cloud or whether you have any business app modernization

programs in place or about to begin. SAP's S/4 HANA impending migration deadline, for example, will involve a massive shift to the cloud for all SAP users.

Your assessment must also look at security levels in your organization. Does your data feel secure to you right now? Have you conducted any security tests across your network?

Also consider your organization's resource capabilities. Do you have—or want to have—the specialist skills needed to optimize your network and security, and the different skills to orchestrate those factors on a daily basis? Could you realistically recruit those skills if you did need them?

With this information in place, **the second step** is to assess your options based on your current network and what a future topology could look like. In this phase, you are basically creating your strategy. Here you are most likely going to need specialist input to advise you on factors such as whether you actually need SD-WAN or which SD-WAN set up you require, whether it is a good fit for the countries where you operate (some may not have the necessary infrastructure yet) or whether you have time to deploy a phased approach in which, rather than fully migrate, you keep half on-premises and half in the cloud.

If you decide to proceed from here, **the next step** is vendor and carrier selection. Again, you will likely need vendor-agnostic specialist input here to consider your hardware, software and underlay network carrier options. From the available options, you will need to assess which one gives you the right functionality for your needs without investing in unnecessary capabilities. On the carrier side, ideally you do not want to be taking advice from a network operator but from an organization that works with all carriers globally and who can give you unbiased advice.

That's quite a breadth of knowledge needed, and it has to be specific to the APAC region of course, where knowledge about network carriers country by country—even city by city—will make a massive difference to the quality and cost of the final result.

**Step four** is to find out whether you can actually deliver the potential value you identified in step one. Ultimately, SD-WAN has to enable you to do something new, better and at lower cost. And you want to find whether this is viable at the lowest cost possible with zero risk to current operations. Here Expereo recommends a Proof of Value (PoV) approach. This is different from the conventional Proof of Concept (PoC), which focuses on technical delivery rather than whether the implementation can deliver tangible business benefits.