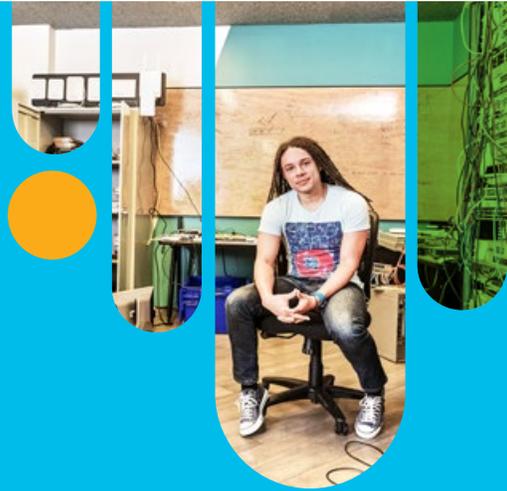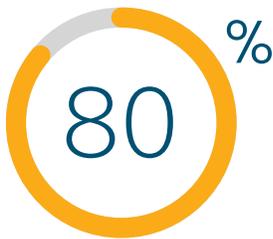# SMB IT challenges need a smart, simple answer

In a world irrevocably changed by the tides of digitization, automation, and the Internet, company performance is becoming synonymous with the ability to use IT not just to function normally, but to maximize efficiency, revenue, and customer satisfaction.

## 80%

of SMB respondents believed digital technology can help their firms grow.[1]

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) recognize and want the full utility and value out of IT for digital transformation. A poll done by United Overseas Bank (UOB) in Singapore found that over 80 percent of SMB respondents believed digital technology can help their firms grow.[1] But for the SMB IT manager tasked with actually making this happen, there are some obstacles that get in the way.
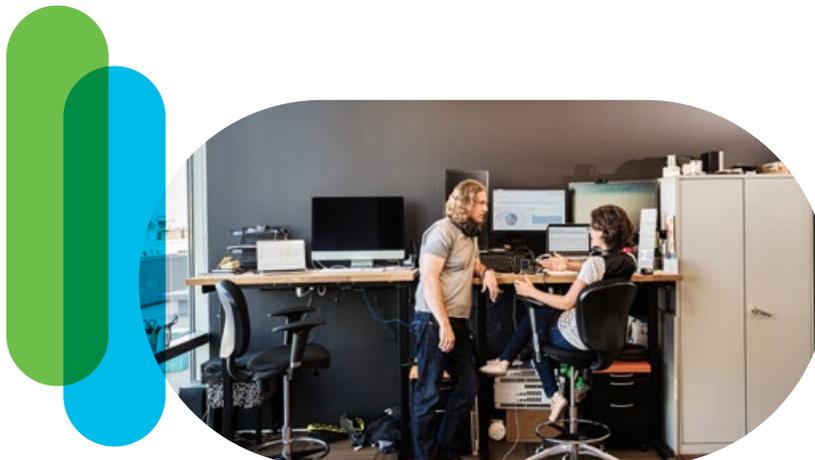
## 1     A small IT environment increasing in density and complexity

It may surprise some, but even SMBs can have densely complex IT systems. With the prevalence of bring-your-own-device (BYOD) policies, cloud adoption, and user expectations of 24/7 availability, managing the infrastructure and network becomes a mind-boggling exercise—and an enormous responsibility. There are many vulnerabilities to outages, data loss, and threats. When something goes off, say a server crashes, it can be a nightmare for both IT and users alike.

## 2     Limited IT manpower

**41 %**

Limited IT manpower was the top challenge cited by 41 percent of respondents in the UOB survey.[1]

In larger companies, the burden is shared among several IT staff. On the other hand, most SMBs either have one IT manager or a small team that may not entirely comprise full-timers. Other SMBs do not have dedicated IT staff—the same person or group takes care of IT and other non-IT obligations. In all scenarios, it is common for IT manpower resources to become overstretched in managing the complicated IT environment to support business demands. This was the top challenge cited by 41 percent of respondents in the UOB survey.[1]

## 3     Overcomplicated IT solutions that are not user friendly

While not always the case, full-time IT managers in SMBs tend to be generalists rather than specialists. They may get overwhelmed by the dizzying array of bells and whistles in complicated IT products, especially if the product's capabilities focus heavily on technology at the expense of usability. Implementation can become too long or complicated, delaying the gap that SMBs need to fill with more advanced technology as they enter a new market or growth phase.

## 4    Communicating with the business side

Even when SMB bosses or CEOs embrace IT as an essential aspect of the business, they are only invested if the technology produces value and results for the business; otherwise IT remains a service delivery function and cost center. IT managers must prioritize their ability to translate implementations meaningfully and accurately into numbers and terms that the business owner can appreciate, such as cost savings, speed to market, and growth acceleration.

## 5    Constrained IT budgets

Last but not least is the one obstacle that can unravel any efforts done to address the earlier four challenges. IT managers naturally want purchases to be easy on the wallet, not just up front but also in the long term, from the upkeep to the total of cost of ownership (TCO) and return on investment (ROI). However, the dilemma comes when the business is expanding aggressively or changing strategy. Products with enough scalability might be priced out of the company's budget, whereas those within the price range may not have sufficient functionality to suit the company's evolving needs.

As business reliance on IT grows, so will the burden on the shoulders of SMB IT managers. And with the push for digital transformation, the pressure from these five challenges will only intensify.

SMBs need IT products that are easy to manage and do not sacrifice performance for price. But what defines simple and smart solutions that SMB IT managers should look for to make wiser buying decisions?
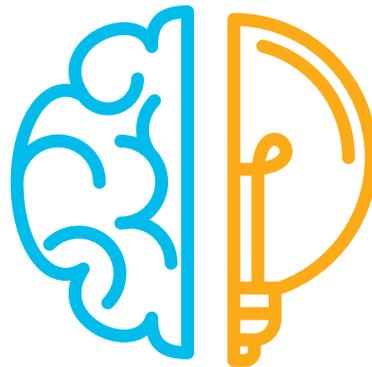
## Simple

This does not mean basic, watered-down features. Rather it means products that tailor the latest technology appropriately for SMBs. Obviously it must be easy and fast to set up. But after deployment, it must also be hassle free for the IT manager to maintain and scale in the years to come. This will save a lot of time, costs, and frustrations when the business demands to instantly leverage trends such as mobility and cloud.

## Smart

Products need to have innate user friendliness and security as well as the ability to track and capture granular insights. This allows IT managers to work and react faster so that the business in turn can become more agile and achieve results without sacrificing security. If it's a connectivity solution, for example, IT should be able to easily provision secure and reliable access for users to connect wirelessly to the corporate network, giving them maximum mobility. At the same time, IT should retain control and visibility to enforce policies and monitor device activities.

SMB IT managers should never have to choose between budget and capabilities for their organization. Whether it's for collaboration, cloud management, or connectivity, all of the Cisco Start products and solutions tailor powerful, enterprise-class technologies that fit SMBs' needs and budgets. IT managers can better tackle the challenges cost-effectively and with confidence that the technology is scalable and secure. No longer inundated with keeping the lights on and putting out fires, SMB IT managers can finally start to focus on becoming a strategic partner to their business owners.

1. "Going Digital Will Boost SMEs' Growth," The Straits Times, Feb. 22, 2017.
http://www.straitstimes.com/business/going-digital-will-boost-smes-growth-survey