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CIOs Sound Alarm on Network Security as a Top Priority as AI Fuels New Risks and Challenges

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Survey of 200 CIOs and Senior IT professionals finds majority of respondents desire a single integrated platform for networking, AI and security to improve productivity, streamline investments and ensure protection against evolving cyber threats

MORRISVILLE, N.C.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Oct. 9, 2024-- A new research report released from Extreme Networks™, Inc (Nasdaq: EXTR), titled "CIO Insights Report: Priorities and Investment Plans in the Era of Platformization," found that while AI has captured the attention of the technology industry, the majority of CIOs and senior IT leaders are primarily focused on the convergence of networking and security.

The survey, fielded in July and August 2024, polled 200 CIOs and senior IT leaders across a variety of vertical markets and found that CIOs stack ranked their top three IT priorities for the second half of 2024 as 1) securing their enterprise network, 2) integrating network and security and 3) evaluating and deploying AI across their organization. In fact, 88% of respondents said they desire a single integrated platform for networking, AI and security, reflecting increased industry demand for platformization, a robust integration ecosystem and a streamlined user experience.

Key Findings and Trends

- **Beyond the AI Hype, Security Remains Top Priority:**
  - 34% of CIOs ranked securing the network as their number one priority, while 22% of respondents ranked integrating networking and security as their second biggest priority.
  - 57% ranked protecting the network against potential threats as one of their top three challenges.
  - 55% of respondents said built-in security was one of their top three requirements when selecting a networking vendor.
  - 96% agree the network is the foundation of a robust cybersecurity and risk management strategy – making it clear that point security solutions bolted on as an afterthought are not ideal.

- **AI Implementation Requires More Bandwidth, Training, Strategy and Alignment with Security**: Though most organizations are prioritizing AI implementation, several factors, including network bandwidth, employee readiness and security concerns, are common barriers to success.
  - 84% of respondents have started to integrate AI into their tech stack; 40% cite that their biggest concern with AI is keeping data secure.
  - During AI implementation, 49% of respondents encountered network bandwidth challenges and 30% said they lacked proper guidance and training for employees.
  - 32% of respondents said they had not yet seen significant ROI from AI investments nor efficiency improvements post-implementation.

- **Platformization Emerges as a Priority as Cloud Networking Evolves:** More organizations are transitioning their network to the cloud to help streamline IT efficiency and lower TCO with 36% of respondents listing a seamless transition to cloud networking as one of their top three priorities. In tandem, there is a growing trend toward platformization, reflecting the need for a unified and scalable solution that can integrate multiple embedded components within a single, manageable user experience. CIOs overwhelmingly desire a single platform to incorporate GenAI and security into their network operations.
  - 88% of respondents said they would prefer a single integrated platform for networking, AI and security.
  - 86% of respondents are planning network upgrades within the next 18 months, with a significant focus on adopting cloud-based solutions that are highly available, easy-to-use and can support AI and other emerging technologies.
  - 55% of respondents emphasized the importance of integrating from a vast ecosystem of networking and security solutions, indicating a clear demand for unified platforms.

  In terms of ranking the most important features of a cloud networking platform,

  - 58% said they want a cloud networking platform that integrates AI and security;
  - 55% cited the option of a Network Infrastructure as a Service model (NIaaS); and
  - 45% ranked security within their top three priorities.

- **Expanding IT Responsibilities, Growing Complexities**: The proliferation of AI, IoT and other factors like hybrid work have introduced a host of new responsibilities and concerns for IT teams, exacerbating the need for simple management solutions.
  - 58% of respondents said managing and securing new devices being added to the network was one of their top three complexities.

- - 50% of respondents highlight expanding IT responsibilities as a top challenge.
    - 52% of respondents also said one of their top network challenges was ensuring integration and interoperability with emerging technology.
  - **Increased Importance of Sustainable IT:** Companies are increasingly prioritizing sustainable practices, and those responsibilities are shared by the IT team as technologies like AI use more energy.
    - 88% of respondents agreed that the IT department has a responsibility to recommend technology that helps mitigate the company's carbon footprint.
    - 82% of respondents said their company has sustainability initiatives and goals tied to the IT department.

To download the complete survey, click here.

Nabil Bukhari, Chief Product and Technology Officer and GM of Subscription Business, Extreme Networks, said**,** "In an era where AI, security and networking are increasingly intertwined, CIOs and IT leaders face a clear mandate: they need to prioritize investments that unify components and capabilities for their teams. This is another reason for the trend toward platformization and the increasing desire to integrate solutions into a single platform that is easy to use and deploy, is fully assembled and integrated out of the box and delivers exponential value through the continuous addition of new embedded capabilities and applications. Organizations that embrace the network as the foundation of their platformization strategy have the unprecedented opportunity to harness AI and security to deliver significant value to the rest of their organization."

Did You Know?

- Extreme helps customers across industries – including major retailers, leading healthcare providers, internationally recognized sports clubs and school districts of all sizes – modernize their operations and drive better outcomes across their organizations. To learn more about how Extreme helps its customers thrive through AI-driven innovation, click here.

About Extreme Networks

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