



BUILDING GENERATIONAL WEALTH

First Bank fulfills its family-owned financial services mission with connected innovation

Financial services industry trailblazer leverages secure, resilient, high performance SD-WAN connectivity to provide business, commercial, and personal banking solutions using HPE Aruba Networking.



Customer: First Bank
Industry: Financial Services
Country: United States

Building, protecting, and transferring wealth

As an independent, family-owned bank with more than a century of experience, First Bank remains deeply committed to helping clients achieve long-term financial success. It delivers tailored solutions across consumer and commercial lines of business, always aligned with the unique needs of each client.

With 80 branch locations across Missouri, Illinois, and California, and more than 400,000 annual virtual interactions through its extensive network of interactive teller machines (ITMs), First Bank ensures clients have secure, consistent access to banking anytime, anywhere.

“When your mission is to support family-owned and privately held businesses, their families, and their employees, a reliable and resilient banking experience is essential,” explains Marc Ashworth, CISO at First Bank. “That’s why we’ve built a robust IT infrastructure to maintain availability and security across all of our digital and physical channels.”

Pioneering SD-WAN in banking

After becoming a financial services leader in adopting cloud solutions for infrastructure and applications, including core banking systems, First Bank’s embrace of cloud across data, video, and voice eventually ran into performance speedbumps.

With the data traversing its network outpacing available legacy Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) bandwidth, First Bank experienced significant WAN performance degradation. In addition to dragging down application responsiveness, and affecting business productivity, the MPLS system frequently dropped voice calls.

Rather than following the traditional industry path of building out its costly and complex legacy WAN systems, First Bank chose the trailblazing strategy of investigating SD-WAN.

“After extensive evaluation, we discovered that HPE Aruba Network EdgeConnect SD-WAN was the only product that truly did what it was supposed to do,” says Ashworth. “During testing, we could completely unplug one of the redundant circuits with no impact on voice calls. It was amazing.”

“HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN is the best SD-WAN solution on the market. I highly recommend it.”

– Marc Ashworth, CISO, First Bank

Vision

Provide reliable, premier banking services by transforming connectivity

Strategy

Deploy a secure, resilient, streamlined, high performance, SASE-based SD-WAN

Outcomes

- Slashes costs by more than \$1M annually
- Boosts application performance by 35%
- Supports a cloud-smart technology strategy



SASE foundation for zero trust

In addition to other attributes of HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN, First Bank appreciated the solution for its future-ready architecture. Engineered using secure access service edge (SASE) principles, HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN fits the bank's commitment to approaching data security using a zero trust framework.

"With about 50% of our employees working remotely, supplying them with secure, seamless access is important to fulfilling our mission," Ashworth says. "The ability to leverage SASE with the HPE Aruba EdgeConnect SD-WAN solution provides a faster, more efficient way for our users and third-party individuals like bank auditors to securely access assets across our network and in the cloud."

Boosting bandwidth 67x while saving \$1M annually

Upon deploying its new HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN, FirstBank quickly realized multiple benefits. Performance improvements, reliability enhancements, complexity reductions, and cost savings rapidly added up. Business productivity and network resilience also soared.

"We immediately gained an available bandwidth increase of 67 times greater than our legacy MPLS," Ashworth says. "This resulted in our application performance improving by an average of 35%."

Further, using HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect WAN Optimization enabled the institution to achieve a 98% compression rate for backups, significantly enhancing business continuity.

Connectivity costs also plummeted. "We saved over \$1 million per year with HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN, compared to our previous MPLS network," says Ashworth.

Seamless resiliency enhances business productivity

From a branch perspective, the advantages of SD-WAN for First Bank are also significant. "Using MPLS, it required three months, or more, to get a new branch up and running," Ashworth says. "With HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN, it takes as little as a few days."

Every branch is also more resilient. "With our SD-WAN, we have a diversity of carriers serving each location," says Ashworth. "And, we have greater flexibility with choosing geographic locations as we can use cellular as a secondary circuit in areas that are underserved by telcos."

Regardless of connectivity type, the bank's SD-WAN has proven rock solid. "In addition to our own IT estate, we've also deployed HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN in the cloud data center at our core systems provider, FIS," Ashworth says. "No matter where a circuit goes down in our network, our users don't notice because the SD-WAN automatically fails over so rapidly and seamlessly."

This resiliency is equally true of locations that rely on cellular as a backup. "Our users don't even know the network has failed over from a traditional connection to cellular," says Ashworth.

“We’ve saved over \$1 million per year with HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN and reduced our monthly telco costs by over 85%.”

– Marc Ashworth, CISO, First Bank

Supporting innovation to stay competitive

Over time, the innovation, resource utilization, and savings rewards from SD-WAN have continued adding up. For example, First Bank continues leveraging reliable and stable connections, regardless of urban or rural location, to replace legacy ATMs with ITMs. This enables the institution to provide full-service assistance through video chat to more clients.

“The ability to speak live via the ITMs enhances experiences everywhere,” says Ashworth. It also facilitates moving into new markets and permits First Bank to offer significantly extended hours in its retail grocery locations—a branch banking concept the institution also pioneered.

“All of these innovations contribute to being competitive in a crowded financial services landscape,” Ashworth says.

Automation enables staying lean

Despite First Bank’s growing physical footprint, the automation and security advantages of HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN have enabled the institution’s ultra-lean IT department to pursue higher-value business projects without adding headcount. “The ability to standardize WAN connectivity with the same configuration at every location, and quickly apply new policies universally, is huge,” Ashworth says.

From a savings perspective, First Bank continues driving down costs by having the flexibility to negotiate new telecommunications contracts rapidly. “We’ve reduced our monthly telco costs by over 85% since we first deployed HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN,” says Ashworth. “We expect to chisel off another 2 to 3%.”

Nanosegmentation amps up access control

By taking advantage of other access control tools added to its SD-WAN environment, First Bank most recently completed a significant microsegmentation

initiative. The project dramatically enhanced security by permitting the bank to establish exceptionally fine-grained device and application access without adding hardware costs or complexity.

“As HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN automates segment management, we were able to nanosegment our network,” Ashworth says.

“This approach supports our zero trust framework by restricting access to only what’s absolutely required by a device or a user,” he adds. “It also permits us to respond quickly and precisely if suspicious behavior is detected.”

Next up: Evaluating security service edge

Moving forward, First Bank is considering options for building out its SASE capabilities, which include testing HPE Aruba Networking Security Service Edge (SSE).

With HPE Aruba Networking SSE, enterprises like First Bank can improve data security using technology capabilities such as zero trust network access (ZTNA) and secure web gateway (SWG) while also reducing reliance on cumbersome legacy VPN technology.

Further, by adding HPE Aruba Networking SSE to an HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN deployment, enterprises gain a standardized and tightly integrated solution, along with the ability to manage both solutions from a single intuitive interface.

“Anytime we have the opportunity to consolidate onto a leading solution that is easier to manage, we’re open to evaluating it,” Ashworth says.

“HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN has enabled us to use a nanosegmentation approach for supporting our zero trust framework.”

– Marc Ashworth, CISO, First Bank



“When a circuit goes down, our SD-WAN automatically fails over so rapidly and seamlessly that no one even notices.”

– Marc Ashworth, CISO, First Bank

The best of breed advantage

No matter what the future holds, First Bank appreciates its relationship with HPE Aruba Networking. “It’s critical to provide our users with great experiences safely and securely in the context of zero trust,” says Ashworth.

“We’re extremely happy with HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN as it’s the best solution on the market with the best management tools,” he concluded. “I highly recommend it.”

[Learn](#) more about HPE Aruba Networking EdgeConnect SD-WAN

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