

State of Wireless 2026: What It Means for Your Network



Agenda

01 Report highlights

02 Recommendations

03 How Cisco can help

6,098

Wireless
Professionals

30

Countries

Key regions

22%

Americas



28%

Europe, Middle East, and Africa



50%

Asia Pacific



Investment momentum in wireless is accelerating



8 in 10 organizations have **increased wireless investments** in the past 4-5 years

1 in 3

Expect **wireless budget increases of 50%+** over the next five years

Wi-Fi ROI can go beyond connectivity

Simultaneous improvements across:



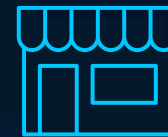
Customer engagement and
experience



Product
Delivery



Employee
Productivity



Critical
Infrastructure



Operational
efficiency

The multiplier effect: **one network, many outcomes**

But four barriers converge to block return on investment in 2026

Legacy Wi-Fi infrastructure



Operational complexity
beyond human scale



Intensifying wireless
security threats



Growing
talent gaps

Only **19%** of organizations are
operating Wi-Fi 6E or 7

And around **half** are using legacy Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi 5

43%

Wi-Fi 6

19%

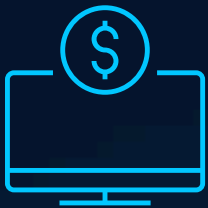
Wi-Fi 6E

12%

Wi-Fi 7

7%

Organizations with legacy Wi-Fi infrastructure



Are less likely to achieve strong ROI



Struggle with client scale



Cannot support high-bandwidth applications

Addressing these issues is the path to unlocking ROI

Legacy Wi-Fi infrastructure obstructs ROI growth



Operational complexity
beyond human scale



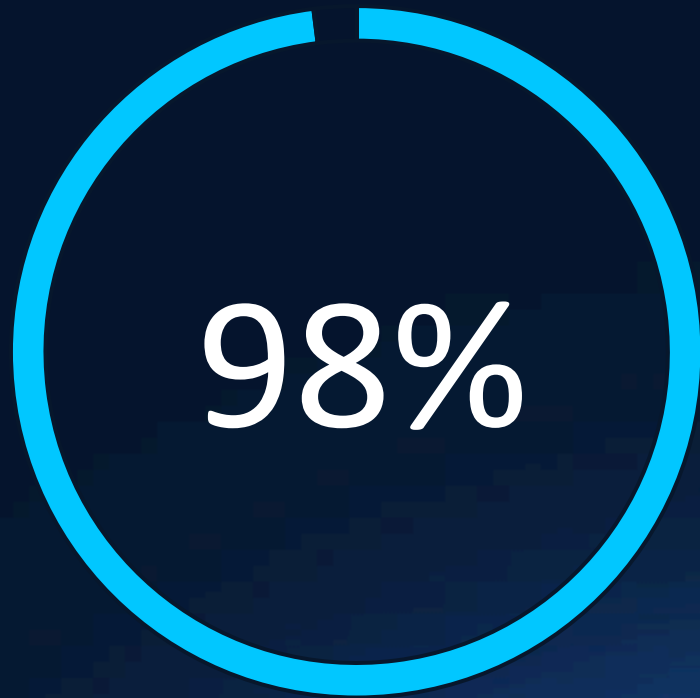
Intensifying wireless
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Growing
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Operational complexity is overwhelming current capabilities

Operational complexity beyond human scale



Say operational complexity is increasing

64%

Expect ticket resolution times to increase

55%

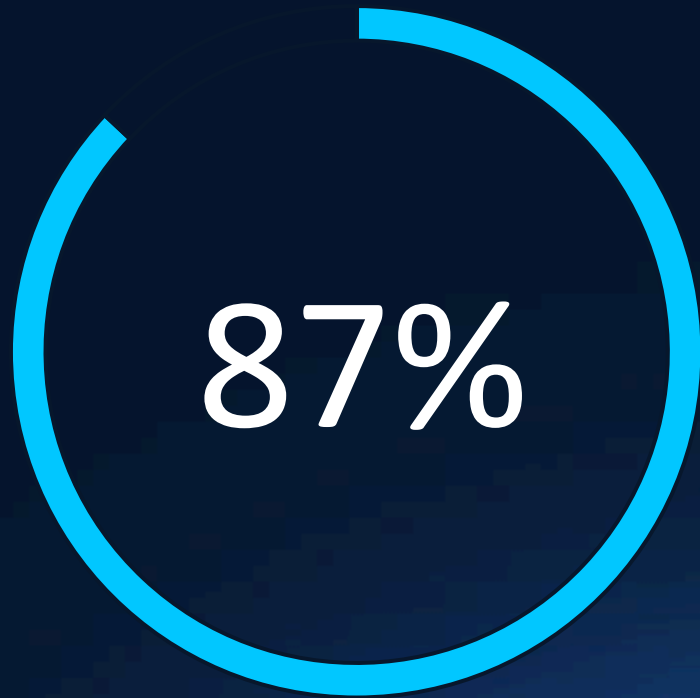
Spend most of their time on reactive troubleshooting

Result is less time for training, modernization, and strategic initiatives.

When operational complexity rises, the business ultimately feels the impact.

Lack of visibility exacerbates complexity

Operational complexity beyond human scale



Report **visibility gaps** when
troubleshooting

Leading blindspots

- #1** Poor client visibility
- #2** Poor application visibility
- #3** Poor packet visibility

Operational Complexity? AI is the answer

Operational complexity beyond human scale



Believe AI-driven automation will
simplify operations

Adoption reality gap...

AI usage by organization

29% for managing wireless tickets

29% for security monitoring and response

23% for planning and provisioning

Legacy Wi-Fi infrastructure obstructs ROI growth



Operational complexity
beyond human scale



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AI and IOT accelerate wireless security threats

And security
modernization faces
cross-organizational
challenges

#1 Implementation complexity

#2 Legacy infrastructure

#3 Performance Concerns

The impact goes beyond unauthorized access. It's about operational survival.

3 in 5 saw financial losses from security incidents in the last year

50% of those saw financial losses of over \$1m

1 in 3 lost customer trust

1 in 3 faced regulatory penalties

Legacy Wi-Fi infrastructure obstructs ROI growth



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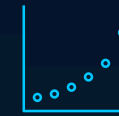
The growing talent gap is more than an HR issue

Growing talent gaps



of organizations
struggle to fill wireless roles

The cost of vacancies



Higher operating costs



Lower Morale



Reduced innovation



More security failures

AI is the #1 driver for each operational barrier

#1

Driver of operational complexity:
AI workloads

#2 Security risks

#3 Bandwidth demand
and unpredictability

#1

Security threat:
AI generated attacks

#2 Unmanaged devices

#3 Increased usage of IoT

#1

Recruitment challenge:
AI skills

#2 Internal budget constraints

#3 Geographic limitations
and remote work demand

Inversely, AI is empowering IT teams with



Significant time savings



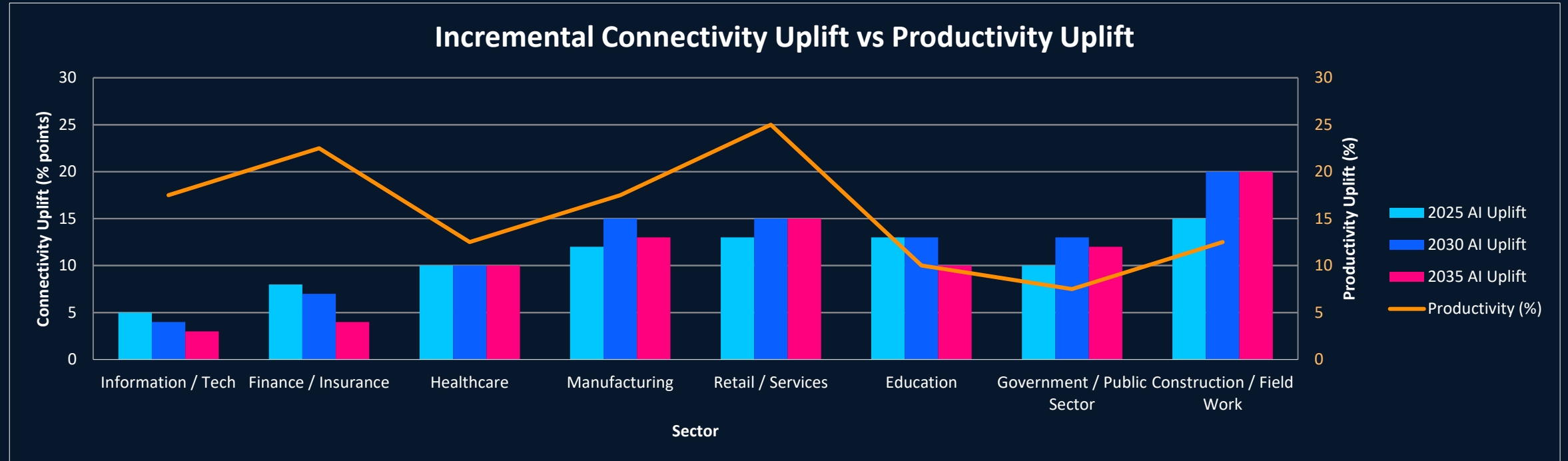
Fewer wireless tickets



Faster wireless ticket resolution

AI Megatrend Impact – connectivity uplift

Time Spent Connected for Work



Sector	Main Drivers for AI Uplift	Trend
Information / Tech	Uplift driven by coding assistants, DevOps automation, cloud inference, and edge workloads.	Smaller gains as saturation nears 100%.
Finance / Insurance	Fraud detection, compliance monitoring, algorithmic trading, support. Continuous low-latency feeds required.	Strong uplift early, tapering as saturation is reached.
Healthcare	Telemedicine, diagnostics, imaging, drug discovery, patient monitoring. Operations require reliable bandwidth.	Steady +10pp uplift as offline sites digitize.
Manufacturing	AI enables predictive maintenance, robotics coordination, digital twins, and quality inspection.	Connectivity demand rises with Industry 4.0 rollouts, peaking ~2030.
Retail / Services	AI for personalization, inventory optimization, cashier-less checkout, logistics.	Uplift remains high as small retailers and restaurants digitize operations.
Education	AI tutors, adaptive learning, virtual labs, proctoring tools. Strong early uplift.	Slight taper by 2035 as equity gaps persist but overall digital reliance nears 100%.
Government / Public Sector	AI in citizen services, e-gov, smart cities, and security analytics.	Slower adoption curve, steady uplift as services digitize by 2030.
Construction / Field Work	Largest uplift. AI-driven drone inspection, AR/VR overlays, safety monitoring, project digital twins.	Traditionally offline tasks move online, requiring real-time connectivity.

This is the wireless AI paradox:

AI is both the **primary source of escalating challenges** and, the **leading driver for wireless ROI and simplicity.**

The paradox matters because it
connects the barriers to ROI

So overcoming these barriers **one-by-one** leads to incremental gains

Legacy Wi-Fi infrastructure



Operational complexity
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Overcoming these barriers **simultaneously** resolves the paradox and unlocks ROI

Refresh legacy infrastructure



Simplify Operations



Mitigate wireless security threats



Address talent gaps

Organizations that take a holistic approach...

4X

More likely to achieve strong ROI from wireless

63%

Higher ROI on wireless investments

And a holistic approach drives the multiplier effect



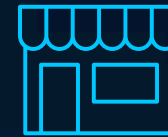
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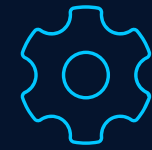
Product
Delivery



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efficiency

One network, many outcomes

The Resolution: Recommendations for Accelerating ROI

01



Accelerate
Wi-Fi refresh
timeline

02



Get on
the path to AI +
automation

03



Prioritize holistic
security
modernization

04



Build and
enhance
wireless talent

Accelerate Wi-Fi Refresh Timeline

Organizations with Wi-Fi 6E and 7 report:

+38%

Higher capacity

+41%

Improved ability to support bandwidth intensive applications

+33%

Higher scalability across sites

Compared to organizations with legacy Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi refresh decisions should be tied to business outcomes, not just hardware lifecycles

Get on the path to AI + Automation

850+

hours freed up
per year, per team member

12%

faster ticket
resolution times

Prioritize holistic security modernization



Lower financial
losses from security
incidents



Improved
ROI from wireless
deployments



More likely
to predict security
failures

Build and enhance wireless talent



Highly certified teams
modernize faster



Implementing AgenticOps
could attract new talent



AgenticOps enables IT to
become strategic

How can Cisco help?

The Cisco Advantage

Cisco clears the path to the multiplier effect with: [End-to-end, full stack networking solutions powered by AgenticOps](#)

Organizations who spend most of their wireless budget on Cisco see heightened benefits:

23%

Lower financial losses from wireless issues

22%

Lower financial losses from wireless security incidents

17%

Faster time to ticket resolution

Recap

01

Wireless is becoming a strategic platform for the AI era

Investment is accelerating, but ROI is constrained by legacy infrastructure, operational complexity, security threats, and talent gaps.

02

Organizations that address these barriers together unlock stronger ROI

- Accelerate Wi-Fi modernization
- Adopt AI-driven operations
- Modernize security holistically
- Invest in wireless talent

03

Cisco helps organizations implement this with an AI-ready secure network

- Simplified operations powered by AgenticOps
- Security fused into the network
- Scalable infrastructure ready for AI

Download the Cisco State of Wireless 2026 report to go deeper and plan your next steps



<http://cs.co/stateofwireless>

