

## Networking Leadership Brief

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## Michaels' Three-Week Shift to Network Infrastructure as a Service

### Highlights:

- Alkira Platform provides a cloud-delivered, global network fabric accessed through Cloud Exchange Points (CXPs), enabling centralized policy, segmentation, and connectivity across clouds and regions.
- Alkira's Network Infrastructure-as-a-Service (NlaaS) model shifts networking from capex-heavy builds to an operational model and can be stood up rapidly without customers deploying new hardware or software. Global infrastructure can be established in less than one hour.
- In this Futuriom case study, we explain how global retail chain Michaels leveraged Alkira's NlaaS across approximately 1,400 stores across the U.S. and Canada in three weeks, enabling a rapid modernization push without new capex investment.

# **1. Intro: A Better Way to Build Global Infrastructure**

Alkira offers a cloud-delivered Network Infrastructure as a Service that securely connects public clouds, data centers, and distributed enterprise locations. By abstracting the underlying network and centralizing policy, segmentation, and routing, the platform allows organizations to deploy and operate large-scale networks without owning or managing the physical infrastructure.

Enterprises seeking to modernize without heavy hardware investment or protracted rollout cycles have adopted this model to accelerate connectivity and reduce operational complexity. In customer environments validated by Futurion, including Michaels, the approach enabled rapid deployment at retail scale while lowering both capital and operational costs.

This leadership brief examines Alkira's deployment at Michaels, one of North America's largest arts and crafts retailers. Michaels used the Alkira Platform to extend secure connectivity from approximately 1,400 stores across the U.S. and Canada into cloud applications with minimal disruption and in a compressed timeframe.

Let's dive in and see how this happened.

## **2. Why Michaels Chose Network Infrastructure as a Service for National Scale**

To support large, distributed enterprises, Alkira provides a cloud-delivered network platform built on a global footprint of Cloud Exchange Points (CXPs). The service abstracts public cloud infrastructure, private datacenters, and SD-WAN into a single operational layer, allowing connectivity and security policies to be deployed consistently across locations.

This model has attracted enterprises seeking to move away from hardware-intensive networking while improving access to cloud services. For Michaels, it offered a way to modernize its network, reduce reliance on private datacenters, and extend secure connectivity from stores directly into Google Cloud at national scale.

### **Why the Alkira Platform Appealed to Michaels**

As Michaels prepared for peak holiday demand, the company needed a network that could support its large retail footprint while reducing dependence on private datacenter infrastructure. Previous outages tied to proprietary datacenter equipment had disrupted operations and resulted in lost sales, prompting the team to look for a more resilient and scalable approach.

The company was already shifting more workloads to Google Cloud as part of a broader modernization effort. According to Sreenu Sampati, Director of Security Engineering at Michaels, eliminating redundant backhaul to private datacenters was a primary objective. To support that shift, Michaels used Alkira to establish secure connections from stores directly into Google Cloud by deploying Cloud Exchange Points to connect GCP with Michaels' 1400 retail locations.

After validating the approach in a small number of stores, Michaels concluded it offered a more reliable and cost-effective alternative to the legacy model. As Sampati explained, reliance on datacenter-based networking had become a growing operational risk.

"We couldn't afford to have that happen again. Everything was backhauling to the datacenter. You can't have everything depend on the datacenter. Within a rapid amount of time, we needed to deploy 1,400 stores with connectivity to GCP." Sampati told Alkira CEO Amir Khan in video interviews about outages with traditional network models.

### **From Zero to 1,400 Stores in 3 Weeks**

After deciding to move away from datacenter-centric networking and connect stores directly to Google Cloud, Michaels needed a way to execute at national scale under tight time constraints. Alkira provided a model that allowed the company to bring individual locations online quickly and expand from pilot to full deployment without adding new network infrastructure.

Wei Dong, Vice President and Chief Information Security Officer at Michaels, said the team was able to go from zero to full connectivity for individual stores within hours and complete the companywide rollout in weeks.

"It really performed well so we deployed it to 1,400 stores nationwide and Canada in three weeks," Dong told Alkira. "It's really important for our network to be highly available, every second. Every minute the network is down, it could cost us millions of dollars.

The rollout began as a peak-season preparation effort to handle a 4X increase in traffic. After the initial deployment proved stable and reliable, Michaels expanded the architecture across its entire retail footprint. A key factor in the speed of deployment was Alkira's ability to abstract the network layer. By separating connectivity and policy from underlying hardware, Michaels was able to connect 1,400

### **Key Stat:**

**Alkira Network Infrastructure-as-a-Service was deployed across 1,400 Michaels stores in three weeks.**

stores directly to applications running in Google Cloud and operate the environment as a single, unified network.

### **3. Conclusion: Modernizing Enterprise Networks Through Network Infrastructure-as-a-Service**

The Michaels deployment illustrates how a cloud-delivered Network Infrastructure-as-a-Service model can be used to modernize large, distributed enterprise networks. By separating connectivity and policy from underlying hardware, Alkira enabled Michaels to move away from datacenter-centric networking while rapidly extending secure access to cloud applications across 1,400 retail locations.

Futuriom has observed similar adoption patterns across Alkira's customer base, including enterprises in retail, hospitality, manufacturing, and transportation. Deployments such as Michaels demonstrate how the model can reduce capital investment, simplify operations, and accelerate large-scale rollouts without requiring organizations to own or manage network infrastructure.

Futuriom will also be profiling Alkira's deployment at Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, providing additional insight into how the platform is being used in large, globally distributed enterprise environments.

#### **Key capabilities of the Alkira Network Infrastructure-as-a-Service model**

##### **Service-based deployment model**

A global footprint of CXPs provides a consistent point of connection into public clouds and private environments, allowing enterprises to connect sites, users, and applications through a common network layer. Networking infrastructure is deployed through a platform rather than built from physical infrastructure or software agents, allowing enterprises to scale faster without capital investment.

##### **Abstraction of underlying infrastructure**

The platform abstracts public cloud networking, datacenters, and SD-WAN into a unified operational model, reducing the need to manage vendor-specific hardware and cloud-specific constructs.

##### **Centralized policy and segmentation**

Connectivity and security policies are defined once and applied consistently across all locations, supporting large-scale environments with less operational complexity.

##### **Integrated Network & Security Services**

## Leadership Brief: How Michaels Modernized their Global Network Through the Alkira Platform

Service insertion (firewalls, IDS/IPS, traffic inspection) is baked into the fabric, allowing AI to reason across the full service chain without cloud-specific inconsistencies.

### **Rapid provisioning and change management**

New sites and connections can be brought online quickly because the network is delivered and operated as a service rather than deployed and configured manually.

***Futurion Take:** Futurion believes that Alkira's strengths in AI-enabled infrastructure automation stem from its flexible architecture and its efficient global, cloud-hosted network fabric, which provides many opportunities for automation. This is what is attracting customers looking at a NaaS-like operating model.*