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Carrier ethernet becomes a de facto standard for the cloud

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The Metro Ethernet Forum (MEF) has chalked up its 10th-year anniversary and is very close to signing up its 200th member. The latest member is Thai service provider UIH. Australian carrier members include Telstra, Optus and the NBN. Uecomm, now part of Optus, was the first Australian carrier to join MEF in 2007.

Members pay US\$15,000 for the membership and work towards certification. There are 30 standards which are verified by MEF members but these constantly need updating. The main activities of MEF are marketing, education, compliance, certifying equipment and certifying service carriers' services.

The CEO of MEF, Nan Chen, said, "MEF activities include a new class of service extensions ratification in January 2012; packet loss is becoming important and we will prioritise service level agreements (SLAs) for different applications; mobile backhaul for multiclass service access, wholesale carrier access and carrier ethernet for cloud carriers."

Passakorn Hongsyok, Director International Business for UIH, said, "As a service provider, we see a huge opportunity for ethernet. It's growing rapidly in [Thailand], especially because of [the floods and political instability]. Customers are actually looking more and more for rapid deployment and increasing or decreasing bandwidth on demand ... and carrier ethernet is probably the only option we can offer the customer with that kind of speed. And it scales up pretty well."

Matt Walker, Principal Analyst, Ovum, forecast a \$233 billion cloud services market by 2016. He pointed out that although cloud is not a core focus for telcos, they can still benefit from the

connectivity gap, as the last mile is an issue. He summarised the benefits of carrier ethernet as flexibility, scalability, diversity and redundancy - describing it as a facilitator of the cloud: "Ethernet is now the de facto access standard."

Chen said, "Half the members of MEF are service providers. We see a lot of the virtual computing providers start to partner with the telecommunication service providers so that they can sell a slice of the computing."

Global carrier Verizon has been a member of Metro Ethernet Forum (MEF) since its inception and is one of the principal board members. Tom Garry, Director of Solutions Architecture for Verizon Business, said, "The benefit of being a member of the forum is we can drive further redevelopment and leadership in ethernet standards for access by producing documents and white papers setting out the protocol standards."

"By belonging to MEF, equipment vendors such as Cisco, Juniper, Huawei, Tellabs and Alcatel get credibility with the carriers and recognition that they have met the standards and their equipment can interconnect with any of the other vendors."

Garry announced that Verizon had been awarded global carrier of the year by MEF at the regional MEF conference held in Singapore last week. "This is the first time a global award has been announced at a regional conference and underscores the benefit for carrier service providers that belonging to MEF gets recognition in regional areas," said Garry.

"Ethernet is the choice of connectivity for all three variants of the cloud - hybrid, private and public because it provides flexibility of bandwidth purchase for the IT infrastructure. Ethernet is a key differentiator for Verizon," said Garry.

Stephen Liu, member of the Cisco service provider marketing team, stated, "Cisco has partnered with the MEF to accelerate the adoption and innovations of carrier ethernet as a foundational infrastructure to enable the delivery of new services to businesses and consumers. The next decade of market growth for carrier ethernet goes forward with Cisco commitment and partnership."

Peter Rossi, CTO, Huawei ANZ, said, "Huawei supports and plays an integral role in the development of industry standards participating in 123 standards bodies globally. Huawei understands that service providers develop products based on many different types of vendor equipment, hence standards are required to ensure proper interoperability and, more importantly, ensure the services have the same characteristics across multiple vendors."

"The MEF provides this function by defining implementation agreements on existing standards and also providing appropriate testing procedures and certification programs," said Rossi.

Shara Evans, CEO, Market Clarity commenting on the MEF, said, "The MEF specifications take ubiquitous, cost-effective ethernet technology and marry them with carrier-grade services. Using MEF-compliant equipment, carriers are able to offer ethernet services that include quality of

service (QoS) guarantees, support for VLANs, scalability, OAM (operations, administration and maintenance) and many other features.

“In my view, one of the most important aspects of MEF-compliant ethernet services has to do with service pricing: high bandwidth services are available at lower cost than competing services such as ATM or leased lines.

“A good example of this is in the internet backhaul market, where there are now two major connectivity options in use by ISPs: wholesale ethernet services or dark fibre.

“Another area where MEF-compliant ethernet is becoming increasingly important is in the mobile backhaul market, which is experiencing exploding requirements for scalable, resilient bandwidth, coupled with carrier-grade management tools. In particular, carrier ethernet is becoming the backhaul option of choice for LTE base stations, which require low-latency, high-bandwidth connectivity.

“The reason a carrier would join MEF is that the MEF is tasked with building consensus on ethernet service definitions, technical specifications and interoperability. So from a carrier perspective, MEF membership means having a say in these areas. It also allows access to testing and certification facilities.

“Metro ethernet services are increasingly becoming the Layer 2 connectivity option of choice - for both carrier and enterprise customers,” said Evans.