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Networking 'will never be a commodity'

By [Guy Kewney](#)

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NetEvents In his keynote speech to the NetEvents European Summit in Garmisch, Germany today, HP Procurve VP John McHugh stuck his neck out, and said: "Enterprise networking is not going to be a commodity."

McHugh's keynote was a look into the year 2010. He can claim a good track record for anticipating technology developments, such as the failure of ATM on the desktop, or the collapse of Token Ring, and he has some interesting predictions for the next five, ten and fifteen years. But amongst those he is definite: corporate networking won't commoditise.

"Every year for the last 15 years, I've heard that enterprise networking is commoditising; and I've said no, I don't think so. One of our bad calls in the past was when we followed that path a couple of times, and got injured. We're back on course. I still believe it's not commoditising" McHugh said.

Predicting the future accurately is key to his business, he said. "If we just tried to develop products for every aspect of networking, we'd be in the unfortunate position of a gambler who tried to bet on every number on the roulette wheel."

So, what does this future spy think will happen in 2010?

Wi-Fi access, he thinks, will be robust, universal and properly billed. "It will be the time mobility comes of age. It will achieve the level of robustness, accounting reliability and security which people expect. Wi-Fi account billing will be supported in most public hot spots - you can feel comfortable that you can turn your phone on anywhere in the world, and be sure that the bill will be accurate."

He also predicted that 10 gigabit Ethernet over copper to the desktop would be being deployed.

But VoIP would still not have swept away conventional phone networks. "It will continue to be installed on a case by case and account by account basis, but it will take 10, 15, 20

years before the old system is swept away - just look how long Token Ring lasted after it died. VoIP will continue to overtake TDM, and will win over customers one by one. But there's no 'hockey stick' coming in VoIP."

Video calling, however, will still be unused. "People simply won't use it, because they don't like using it," he predicted.

And storage would, finally, start being a standard Ethernet based service, rather than a series of highly proprietary storage area network technologies.

And Unified Network Access? "We can predict that Trusted computing will announce yet another unified access protocol, and will still struggle with achieving relevance," he said. "We can also predict that the cycle of replacing the dominant networking company will continue; so where Cabletron replaced IBM, where 3Com replaced Cabletron, where Cisco replaced 3Com, someone will replace Cisco as the industry leader." ®

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