

NetEvents Meet Sees Huge Changes Coming in Networking

By: Kirtimaya Varma, Editor-in-Chief

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The recent NetEvents Asia-Pacific meet at Langkawi in Malaysia brought together the industry, research analysts, and the press to discuss trends that will impact the global and Asian electronics industry.

Amol Mitra, Director of Marketing for ProCurve, observed that from a networking perspective, the network is going to adapt to you rather than you having to adapt to the network. "So today, your experience on the wireless network or wired network is probably different. You go on a wireless network and your access is different than going on to a wired network. What you'll see is that the network itself will really start following you rather than you having to follow the network."

He elaborated on four business trends that are changing the networking marketplace. The current trend of moving about with a large number of gadgets will end. "You're going to have information access at your fingertips without having to get any new device, without having to get any new interface to get to. It's going to be all interface driven," he said.

The second trend is virtualization, which is the ability to use disparate resources. "You have different resources, you have storage space, you have processing power, you have network bandwidth, all of these are resources within a particular environment or within a network that everyone on the network can use," he observed.

The third trend pertained to security. "When you come on to the network, the network recognises that you are getting on to the network. Here are the security rights and access rights you have. You have access to these resources. You have access to these emails. You have access to just these servers. This is called identity driven management. Based on your identity, you are driving your network access and resource capability within your environment." But this is not just about identity management, he cautioned. It really is about identity management, identity enforcement, and the ability for privacy.

The fourth trend is edge interface, which is the ability to talk in human terms to machines. "How we talk is what is captured by the edge interface and the edge device, and translated back on to the network to somebody else. So it's no longer going to be about typing things and looking—it's really a conversation you're having with your PC, with your computer," he observed.

In the session on network security, Tom Dillon, AVP Research, IDC, said that the world created about 281 exabytes of content in 2007, and in 2011, this figure will reach 1,800 exabytes. From a security perspective, to protect, to manage, to secure such a huge amount of data is a massive task. There are three issues called as CPC involved in security. The first C is cost problem, which means budget restraints. The second issue pertains to people and their skills. And the last C pertains to complexity, regulation, changing threat natures.

In the session on current challenges for telecom operators in Asia, the Chair Michael Howard observed that the worldwide telecom spending will come to a plateau in 2009 and 2010, with capex continually shifting toward IP NGN. However, capex in Asia will continue to grow, mainly driven by mobile telecom in China and India.

Telecoms operators in Asia are changing their network designs, structures, technologies, and services, in response to the heavy growth of packet traffic. They are also transitioning from TDM to packet, in projects variously called NGN, IP transformation, or convergence. Packet traffic is growing very fast mainly from broadband, video, and mobile data, requiring service providers to upgrade their networks for capacity, and also face fast changing consumer and business applications and usage that increasingly involve mobility. 3G, mobile broadband, WiMAX, and the coming LTE will force mobile operators and mobile backhaul transport providers to move to packet backhaul. Capping these challenges is the poor availability of capex.

In the session on the latest advances in wireless technologies, Chair Jayesh Easwaramony, Director, ICT

Consulting and Head of Telecom Research, Frost & Sullivan, observed that "we have set ourselves a target of creating a connectivity vision of not just three billion but actually five billion customers in the next five to seven years. And it's quite interesting that it took 20 years to achieve two billion, but the next two billion could be achieved as quickly as five to seven years. And that's where the role of wireless technology becomes more and more important. Because for all these consumers, the means of access is going to be the mobile phone."

Wireless technologies are spurring the fast growth of connectivity in emerging markets and ubiquitous access in developed market. There is a continuous increase in the capability of wireless technologies like WiMAX to offer higher bandwidth and emerge as a key alternative to fixed access due to their cost effectiveness and faster ramp-up. However since there have been only small-scale WiMAX deployments, it is unclear whether it will live up to its promise or would it be overtaken by other access technologies. Mobile operators and other service providers could also use femtocells to expand their in-building coverage and offer greater bandwidth to improve their service offerings.

One trend that businesses should keep in mind is the colossal growth of social networking. Around 350 networks are already up and running, and the numbers are growing every day. As employees bring social networking skills and habits into the workplace, businesses can take advantage of the phenomenon to propagate their products and services, when the only constants are age, gender, and interests.

Some 15 vendors attended the meet, including Alcatel Lucent, Cisco, Symantec, Genband, Redback Networks, and Ethernet Alliance.