

Force10 goes multi-media to ease 10Gig adoption

But snubs 10GBase-T as too little, too late.

**Bryan Betts, Techworld
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10Gig isn't taking off as fast as predicted and needs a kick, according to switch developer Force10 Networks. The company added that 10GBase-T, the spec for 10Gig over twisted pair copper, is dead in the water, being too power-hungry and too late.

Stephen Garrison, Force10's marketing VP, said part of the problem for 10Gig is that the upgrade steps are too big. In particular, buyers of chassis switches don't want an eight-port 10Gig linecard taking up a whole switch slot when they don't yet have uses for that many 10Gig ports.

So Force10 has developed a mixed-media linecard for its C-series resilient switches that offers a combination of ports closer to that found on some stackable switches. Called FlexMedia, and listing for \$14,000 (around £7600), it combines 36 Gigabit copper, eight Gigabit fibre and two SFP+ 10Gig slots, with the latter able to take modules for fibre or the new SFP+ Direct Attach coax copper cabling. Both PoE and non-powered models are available.

Speaking at the NetEvents conference in Portugal, where FlexMedia had its European launch, Garrison described it as an interim product. He claimed it would "increase deployment flexibility" by making it easier and cheaper to upgrade inter-switch links to 10Gig.

"We want to foster 10Gig, but we are acknowledging that it takes time to migrate and it costs money," he said. "10Gig is seeing a linear price decline of about 20 percent a year, and I don't see it coming down any faster than that."

The migration from Gigabit to 10Gig has been significantly slower than was the migration from Fast Ethernet to Gigabit a few years ago, he said, adding that it's all down to cost - Gigabit pricing fell far faster.

"I see SFP+ Direct Attach leapfrogging both 10GBase-T and CX4 to become the de-facto standard for 10Gig over copper," he said.

"10Gig copper is still too power-hungry. People are choosing co-ax or fibre instead. 10GBase-T is too late and it's too high power. SFP+ came along at the same time and we said, Hang on, that's a better way to do it."

SFP+ Direct Attach is about 30 percent cheaper than an equivalent fibre connection, he noted.

Garrison added that Force10 has updated its FTOS operating system to include features such as automated power saving and fault detection. He said the new software also allows

administrators to set policies that optimise traffic by type and automatically assign users to VLANs.