Inside MEF 3.0

Stuart Corner (Computerworld) 08 June, 2018 10:12

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MEF, formerly the Metro Ethernet Forum is on a mission: To save the world's telcos from being relegated to providing basic connectivity in every greater volumes without proportionate increases in revenues, according to its senior vice president Dan Pitt.

"Operators face rising costs from rising internet traffic that is exploding. They are not seeing increases in revenue from current services," Pitt said.

"They are seeing equipment costs go down but not significantly compared to the rise in traffic and they are seeing new competition from new players like Amazon. They need to be able to compete. They need to become more dynamic businesses. They need to be more software-based businesses."

MEF is working to help them do this by developing standards and software that, according to Pitt, will enable them to create services for customers that are agile, assured and orchestrated both within their own networks and across interconnected networks of multiple carriers.

"By adopting automation wherever we can we will enable them to create, deploy and certify services that they have thought of and that they can instantiate in software without having to get a vendor to put it into a product with proprietary software so it can be unique to that particular operator," Pitt said.

"This means they will be able to offer services over any technology, not just carrier ethernet, and then concatenate those services with other operators where necessary to get broader geographic range."

The MEF's project to achieve these goals goes by the name MEF 3.0. According to Pitt, it has four main pillars: SD-WAN; Carrier Ethernet; Layer 3 IP services; Layer 1 optical services.

"We are developing the formal definitions of Layer 1 optical services, Layer 3 IP services and higher level services such as SD-WAN, security-as-a-service, analytics and other application services," he said.

Interconnected SD-WAN demo

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Pitt was speaking to journalists at a NetEvents forum in San Jose last month ahead of announcements by MEF of plans for a demonstration of interconnected SD WAN services across different networks using technology from multiple vendors.

"It turns out that quite a few network operators already have SD-WANs from multiple vendors in their networks, and they don't want multiple orchestrators for each," Pitt said. "They want single policies to apply everywhere. That is what we are helping them do."

MEF subsequently announced that Riverbed, VeloCloud (now part of VMware) and Nuage Networks (a Nokia subsidiary) and software development services provider Amartus were participating in an implement of MEF 3.0 capabilities.

Each SD-WAN vendor will implement an SD-WAN based on its own products on MEF's cloud-based Dev/Test platform, MEFNet, and then interconnecting these through a central gateway.

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MEF plans to demonstrate this project at its MEF18 global networking event to be held 29 October – 2 November in Los Angeles.

"The respective SD-WANs will be orchestrated with a single LSO [lifecycle services orchestration]-oriented service orchestrator via the newly standardised LSO Presto network resource provisioning (NRP) API to create connectivity services that span two or more SD-WAN vendor solutions – thus bypassing the lack of interoperability between SD-WAN controllers and SD-WAN edge devices of different vendors," MEF said.

According to the co-leader of the MEF 3.0 multivendor SD-WAN implementation project, Joe Ruffles global standards architect with Riverbed: "Using LSO to orchestrate a connectivity service that spans multiple SD-WAN implementations is an immediate and cost-effective solution for them that we want to encourage in order to grow the SD-WAN market as quickly as possible."

In parallel with its SD-WAN implementation work, MEF says its members are also working to define the service components, their attributes, and application-centric QoS, security, and business priority policy requirements needed to create multi-network SD-WAN services. This project is being led by Riverbed and VeloCloud with contributions from Fujitsu.

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Nokia and Chorus trialling MEF 3.0 Layer 1 services

Separately, Nokia and New Zealand telco Chorus have also announced a trial of MEF 3.0 Layer 1 services over the Chorus metro fibre network in Auckland.

Nokia said the trial would enable Chorus to offer on-demand assurance and fulfilment of Layer 1 services, and the technology had "the potential to open up an entirely different approach to wholesaling optical wavelength services."

"Due to their high capacity, low latency, and inherent security, layer 1 connectivity services are increasingly popular with large enterprises and governments migrating more and more IT operations to the cloud," Nokia said.

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"Standardisation of these services simplifies the fulfilment and assurance, and facilitates end-to-end orchestration in open, multi-vendor environments."

MEF offering training for the 'new telco'

In addition to its MEF 3.0 standards work MEF is also aiming to upskill telco staff for the new software-defined era.

"We are also helping them in the area of skills development," Pitt said. 'We recently announced a much expanded skills certification program for professionals that goes beyond carrier ethernet.

"We are adding SDN and NFV skills. This will be done in collaboration with ETSI, ONF and other industry players. The operators need these sort of skills; a lot of the old skills will not be needed in the future."