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Forum intros 'third network'

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The Metro Ethernet Forum (MEF) has outlined plans to improve future network services by launching its vision for a 'third network' that draws on the collective power of multiple operators to create "agile, assured and orchestrated services worldwide".

Addressing delegates at the NetEvents Press and Service Provider Summit in Portugal yesterday, MEF founder and president Nan Chen said the vision for network services aims to build on the "tremendous market success and energy and momentum of Carrier Ethernet 2.0 ([CE2.0](#))".



Carrier Ethernet 2.0 will be a springboard for the envisioned third network, says MEF president Nan Chen.

Chen said modern data networks fall into two categories: the CE2.0 networks that deliver assured service performance and security, although they can take days to initiate when multiple providers are needed. The second, according to Chen, is the Internet of IP networks that delivers on-demand and ubiquitous services, but with no performance guarantees – leaving users to tackle security concerns.

Chen said the MEF wants to see a new service developed that is "agile like the Internet, assured in performance and security like the CE2.0 networks, and has end-to-end service orchestrated seamlessly".

Always on

Andrew McFazden, MEF board chairperson, added the new initiative aims to provide reliable connectivity, regardless of whether users are at home, work or on the road. "Imagine that just by connecting to your service, your required performance profile is loaded onto your device – whether it's a laptop, tablet or a smartphone. A high performance network is set up and you are ready for business."

He added the service could be always-on as well as on-demand, while it could also "provide performance-assured network experiences" to frequent travellers and remote workers, and also enable innovation.

The MEF also aims to grow cloud services, which McFazden says will be "seamless with service on demand and as you go that inter-connects user locations to virtual machines or virtual network functions running on blade servers in remote data centres".

'Third network' as service

According to Chen, the MEF aims to implement its new vision using network as a service principles. The organisation aims to build on the foundations of Network Functions Virtualisation (NFV) – which decouples network functions from proprietary hardware appliances, so they can run in software.

Another element forming part of the foundation is software-defined networking (SDN), which enables the network control to become directly programmable, and underlying infrastructure to be abstracted for applications and network services.

Chen says the third network is concerned with connectivity services business or individuals actually purchased, in addition to the functional elements in NFV and SDN. "The new third network can only come to being by working closely with many industry leaders. An expanded collaboration programme involving key industry standard bodies has been established." He says the programme will be critical to the acceleration of deployment as the MEF looks to maximise the impact of its new initiative.