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Cloud needs network catch-up

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The 40-year-old technology of Ethernet is not in for demise – on the contrary, it may be what cloud deployment needs, says James Walker, president of the CEF.

Cloud is here. It is happening and growing at a rapid rate – and now the infrastructure that supports cloud services needs to rally in sync. So says James Walker, president of the recently formed CloudEthernet Forum (CEF), speaking at a NetEvents spotlight on the cloud, in Nice, France, this week.



Launched four months ago, at the [Ethernet Innovation Summit](#), in California, the CEF was created in the wake of burgeoning demand for cloud services and the mutual technology required to meet this. "CEF explores the challenges of scaling Ethernet to meet the needs of the cloud. It is a multi-layered, cross-industry approach driven by customer requirements," says Walker.

Catch up, collaboration

Phil Tilley, senior director at Alcatel Lucent, says it is the network that makes the cloud, and the network needs to catch up.

"Everything is about the cloud. The cloud infrastructure – where it is and where we are in our preparedness to deliver – is something that needs attention. We are at a stage where the compute and storage capacity is there. It is virtualised, instant, available and easily consumable – but the network is not.

"[The network] is still in a place where it takes days or weeks to get connected and become as easily consumable as the rest of the cloud infrastructure."

Alcatel Lucent along with Citrix, Ericsson, Avaya, HP, Huawei, Tata Communications – and more – have signed up as members of CEF.

Tilley says the ultimate goal of the CEF is to break the barrier between data centres and networks to the end of bringing cloud to the market affordably – for big and small businesses. "The aim is to get the barriers out of the way, not to create a new paradigm."

There are a number of criticalities in this regard to be overcome. For one, says Walker, greater agility is needed; services need to be more instantaneous, and closed ecosystems need to morph into open forums. "The speed of change and constraints on development times mean we need to share. Problems are resolved faster if we openly collaborate."

"We can't have disparate units doing their own things. We see the CEF as a forum where groups can come together and remove the divide between the data centre and the network. We need to remove the demarcation point and automate the process through to end-users."

Reshaping business

In a white paper exploring the benefits and challenges confronting service providers, large businesses and network vendors in the deployment of Ethernet-based cloud services, the CEF outlines how cloud is expected to reshape the futures of many businesses for the next decade-plus.

According to the paper, cloud experts forecast three waves of change:

- * Data centres and consolidation: Fortune 500 businesses are spending billions of dollars a year to consolidate smaller data centres into large cloud infrastructures, allowing them to shed IT costs. Some examples the CEF cites are Amazon, Boeing and Walmart.

- * Service providers are consolidating: traditional telecoms providers are shedding fixed-line assets to reinvest in mobile and cloud infrastructures (eg, Vodafone, SingTel and Verizon). This is driving a new wave of service provider consolidation and shifting capital spending priorities across all geographies.

- * Software and hardware vendors are reinventing themselves, investing in IT or network services as a hedge to first protect and then grow their traditional software and hardware businesses (eg, Microsoft, IBM, Oracle).

At the end of the day, says the CEF, the networking industry faces a series of inflection points. "Advances across several disciplines are disrupting traditional network and compute business models. The cloud is reshaping the future of service providers and large enterprises as much as Internet, VOIP and mobile devices have done in the past."

The exponential growth in mobile and cloud applications are also creating new market dynamics that force incumbent companies to evaluate their business models and product futures.