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Metcalfe seeks peace between warring comms camps

PALO ALTO, Calif. – Bob Metcalfe is trying to avert the next big war in the communications industry. Specifically, he is trying to get two competing sides of the debate over software-defined networks to form an alliance.

The father of Ethernet is an appropriate elder statesman for such a role. While spending a day back on the Xerox PARC campus where the technology got its start, he talked to a trio of reporters here about his peace efforts, his opinions on other issues of the day and plans for a **40th anniversary celebration** for Ethernet.

Software-defined networking is an approach to making nets as programmable as computers. It's being driven by the Open Networking Foundation (**ONF**), a group of "mostly computer companies like Google," Metcalfe said.

By contrast, much of today's network traffic runs over carrier-class Ethernet systems made by members of the Metro Ethernet Forum (**MEF**), a group of "carriers and companies like Cisco," he said.

"It would be really boring if those two organizations wound up at war because we have done that five times before, so why do it again?" quipped the veteran of battles between his 3Com and Ethernet vs. IBM and Token Ring.

Metcalfe recently hosted a dinner between MEF chairman Nan Chen and ONF chair Dan Pitt. He also gave a speech encouraging MEF to embrace SDN and the two to forge an alliance.

"My secret weapon is the Ethernet 40th anniversary," Metcalfe said. "It is really a project to unify the two and give peace a chance," he said.

"I also discovered no one really knows what SDN is," he added.

Indeed, the industry has debated the fine points of software-defined networks for nearly two years. The technology could radically disrupt traditional comms systems vendors such as Cisco that implement network features in proprietary ASICs and software.

A passionately opinionated Bob Metcalfe makes a point to reporters in the Xeroc PARC cafe.