

: Carrier Services

Carriers address Ethernet customer concerns

OA&M and quality are remaining adoption obstacles

by Doug Allen

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As with any new carrier technology, telco customers have a number of proof-of-concept concerns, especially since Ethernet is perceived to be weak on WAN-class prerequisites such as security and reliability. But the issues go deeper than that.

According to Rosemary Cochran, principal at Vertical Research Group, many equipment vendors report that carriers have two primary concerns constraining Carrier Ethernet deployment; first, operations, administration and maintenance functionality, and second ensuring service quality to customers beyond mere QoS.

Vendors are still working on implementing the appropriate back-office hooks and service- and subscriber-aware capabilities in their latest products, though new platforms from Redback and startup Zeugma, among others, are significant moves in this direction. Similarly, QoS, typically a weakspot for traditional Ethernet services, is being addressed beyond mere VLAN tagging through MPLS using DiffServ codepoint or IP Precedence bit marketing.

Service scalability is also an issue when it comes to multipoint WAN services such as VPLS.



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Alla Reznik, Manager of Ethernet Marketing, Verizon Business Group

"Many experts recommend keeping the numbers of end-points connected to a VPLS in multiples of a few dozen, which poses challenges for 1000 site networks," said David Hold, a senior analyst with Current Analysis. "Beyond that, you may have to segment the network with routers, which is doable, but in some ways that can

defeat the purpose of building a pure Layer 2 VPN. Hierarchical VPLS services are not yet in widespread commercial deployment.”

Turning to the end-user, Hold also sees a lot of market confusion about Ethernet service definitions that can make purchasing decisions more difficult. Given the large number of Ethernet services available that go under completely different vendor names and descriptions, many customers who lack networking expertise can get lost in the shuffle and decide to forego the move to Ethernet until a clear option emerges.

“If you think about frame relay, which was the most successful WAN service since T1, you did not have to worry about distance charges for example, except for the access circuit, and it ran over T1 so you could get it just about anywhere.” Distance spanned and service availability of course remain key constraints for end-users when choosing an Ethernet service.

And what do carriers see as customer adoption roadblocks?

“We see two major factors which may cause difficulties with convincing customers to move towards Ethernet,” said Alla Reznik, manager of Ethernet marketing at Verizon Business Group. “Cost-effective access for all of their locations, and trepidation about moving to a new technology especially when existing infrastructure is already working. These two issues are only indirectly related yet seem to cross all customer types, sizes and verticals.”

RCN Metro’s president Felipe Alvarez has more general concerns. “The primary concerns of our customers are reliability, serviceability and performance. Specifically, latency is an issue that customers raise as a primary concern. To date, we haven’t offered specific SLAs around latency, but it is something we’re looking to add. We find that we often need to educate the customer on our product suite, the architecture we are using to deploy the service and the best-in-breed technology we are utilizing to overcome any concerns.”

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