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ONS 2014: ADARA Provides SDN for SMBs

Networking vendor pushes "profit-based policy generation" and server-on-a-switch SDN and NFV platform.

By *Jude Chao* | Mar 4, 2014

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Much of the talk around real-world SDN deployments has focused on major virtualization providers like VMware and the mega data centers of global-scale organizations like Google, which have the resources to experiment and major scalability and agility concerns to address. Software defined networking isn't just for the enterprise elite, though. Today on the Open Networking Summit expo floor, representatives from San Jose, CA-based ADARA Networks showed off their new switch platform and discussed how their SDN solutions address the needs of their SMB customers.

Overlay and top-of-rack switch solutions

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ADARA offers a variety of solution sets that can overlay any type of network or fit into the infrastructure layer, as Frank Mlotkiewicz, senior director at ADARA, told me in a previous phone call. At the application layer sit the Echo set of GUI-based management, configuration, design, and visualization applications and the Hercules service and infrastructure choreography and orchestration engine. Five control plane applications sit beneath the application layer, among them the Ecliptic SDN controller, the Constellation SDN/NFV stack for enterprises and service providers, and the Polaris SDN/NFV stack for small and home offices. And at the infrastructure layer sits ADARA's AXIS switch platform.

First debuted at the Open Compute Summit in January 2014, the AXIS switch platform is the result of a partnership between ADARA, Interface Masters, and Broadcom. ADARA's SDN software is the heart of the switch, of course. Broadcom, according to company materials, provided OpenFlow 1.3 compliance and switch silicon to support Virtual Tenant Networks, among other things. Interface Masters contributed modular port bundle design for flexibility and a solid state server in the switch.

The server in the switch is particularly important, as Karthikeyan Subramaniam, ADARA chief software architect, told me. It can perform other network functions that often require additional hardware, such as firewalling and WAN optimization, so that customers have "only one box to maintain, no need for service contracts from multiple vendors, and no need to learn multiple devices," he said.

SDN for SMBs

The simplification of network infrastructure that the AXIS platform claims to provide may be of interest to ADARA's existing customer base, which includes a number of companies engaged in "the bread and butter of middle business—400 to 1000 employees," ADARA CFO Lillian Withrow told me. For those companies, cost reduction is a priority. ADARA's "profit-based policy generation" feature enables them to consume their network resources in the most profitable fashion by automating traffic prioritization based on the profitability of transactions. This way, non-revenue-generating traffic does not undermine revenue-generating transactions.

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"If you look back over the last 10 years at some of the companies that have really set themselves apart within their vertical, whatever that may be, they service the customers that matter the most," Withrow explained. As an example, she mentioned Delta Airlines, which recently revamped its frequent flier program to award miles according to ticket prices rather than distance flown, a program that thus rewards first class passengers over coach.

"We allow the network to do the same," Withrow said.

In addition to traffic prioritization based on profitability, the ADARA platform also provides SLA monitoring that

shows the real-time cost (per Mb, in the screen I saw) of traffic by provider, as well as a cost trend graph to help administrators identify problems and make adjustments as necessary.

Also of interest to SMBs, ADARA claims an ease of use that enables customers—those "bread and butter" companies who don't have the luxury of test labs—to evaluate ADARA solutions in the customers' own production networks and come back for more. Among ADARA's customers are Admiration Foods, a family-owned food manufacturing and distribution business, which initially deployed the ADARA Sirius and Orion routers and Comet SLA products and is now considering a migration from Cisco and Citrix to ADARA in their data center network. New York Downtown Hospital also implemented the Sirius solution and, according to a company case study, is now looking at ADARA for disaster recovery and data center to data center networking.

ADARA's development of a custom (proprietary) box to host its SDN solution may seem to run contrary to the spirit of ONS. It isn't, according to Subramaniam.

"Everyone's talking about taking the intelligence out of the box. We're conceptually doing the same, but we don't want the boxes to just do the dumb forwarding. The server in the switch brings some functions of WAN optimization and other appliances into the switch," he said. This simplification and consolidation of the network infrastructure helps bring those functions more closely under the ADARA controller's control. During our earlier call, Mlotkiewicz also pointed out that while customers looking to develop greenfield solutions should look at whitebox technology and NFV, ADARA's solution set "overlays any type of network and makes that network more efficient and can automate that network," ultimately reducing costs and bringing SDN to the masses.

That's not to say that ADARA is resting on its SMB laurels, however. The company is working with some large service providers at the moment, for example.

"We're absolutely whale hunting," Withrow said.

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