

The Arrival of Openflow



Nathan Pearce, 2012-06-06

During the recent Metro Ethernet World Forum there was much buzz around Openflow, a new open standard for deploying experimental protocols on networks. With companies such as HP already beginning to produce network control applications, Openflow represents a standard that developers can begin to get to grips with.

Essentially the system works by separating the data and control paths which are usually bound together in a usual router or switch. With Openflow, the data path functions are retained with the switch, but the high level routing decisions are made by a separate control function on a server. By dividing the two Openflow provides a wider variety of options for routing and switching that could be used in virtual machines or high-security networks. While companies have been looking at the standard for a couple of years, it's only been in 2012 that it's really taken off, with open source packages being released and the creation of Floodlight controller, an Apache-sourced Openflow control.

With IBM, Cisco, HP and NEC already on board, and Google even redesigning its own internal network to accommodate it, Openflow looks set to gain more exposure in the years to come. What will be interesting is how the networking and ethernet sectors respond to the challenge of incorporating the system into their new designs and meeting the demands of businesses hungry to integrate their networks into the core of their processes.

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