

Extreme Pumps Up the Network

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The company is offering software and switching options designed to offer richer functionality at a lower cost.

Extreme Networks on April 23 will try to set itself apart from larger networking companies by offering lower cost and richer functionality in new software releases and new switching options.

The latest release of the ExtremeXOS network operating system adds support for Extreme's SummitStack technology, allowing as many as eight fixed configuration switches to operate as a single virtual switch.

"All switches in a stack coexist with the same binary image as the operating system, which reduces the burden of having to upgrade multiple images," said Scott Lucas, senior director of solutions marketing at Extreme Networks, in Santa Clara, Calif.

If one switch in the stack fails, it does not affect the availability of the other switches in the stack, making Extreme's stackables suitable for supporting VOIP (voice over IP) traffic. A single stack can support a mix of port configurations.

Extreme Networks implemented distributed control of the Layer 3 protocol and the Internet Engineering Task Force's Ethernet Automatic Protection Switching Protocol to enable faster failover.

ExtremeXOS also improves the security of converged network designs where a computer is plugged into an IP phone attached to the network by

treating the traffic stream from each as separate, the company said. "We can detect both those devices on a single port and apply a separate policy to each," Lucas said.

The new Universal Port Manager in Extreme's EPICenter management suite provides network administrators with a graphical console to design complex security and QOS (quality of service) policies and troubleshoot them to ensure that they will have their desired effect before moving into production. It also allows the administrator to monitor how the policies are performing.

"The policies are contained on the switch, so you don't have to go to a central repository" that could be overloaded by requests, Lucas said.

Extreme also added a new 10/100 switch to its Summit lineup of LAN switches that allows enterprises to buy an appropriate level of speed and get the security, QOS and high-availability features they need, the company said.

The Summit X250 series fixed-configuration switches can exploit the advanced security, high-availability and QOS functions in the ExtremeXOS operating system at a 10/100 price point.

"We suspect people are buying Gigabit - Ethernet - because it's the only way to get advanced features," Lucas said. "With this we can hit a sweet spot for telephony applications - that don't require Gigabit Ethernet speeds - but all need advanced security, high availability and so on. We're providing those in speed and a form factor and price level that makes sense," he said.

Such a move does not make sense to David Passmore, research director at the Burton Group.

"An [application-specific integrated circuit] is an ASIC. It doesn't cost Extreme more to put a 10/1000 port on their switch than a 10/100 - port - . Why introduce a 10/100 switch when for very little additional cost you could add Gigabit - Ethernet - ?" Passmore said. "I understand there are many enterprises that are perfectly happy with 10/100, but why not future-proof it?"

The Summit X250 series is available in 24- and 48-port configurations without POE (power over Ethernet), and in those configurations supporting POE. All four models work with a power shelf that offers three different power supplies to enable redundant power to be designed into the network architecture in a modular fashion.

"This is about resiliency and readiness to add VOIP," Lucas said.

Extreme Networks is also offering a new WLAN (wireless LAN) controller and access points that are integrated with Extreme's security and management software.

The new Summit WM series controllers and Altitude 350-2 APs are designed to allow network administrators to apply consistent security and management policies against both wired and wireless networks from a common console.

The modular WLAN controller appliance, available in two models, supports the forthcoming IEEE 802.11n standard for Wi-Fi connectivity. It is designed to scale to support a single roaming domain for thousands of users and at the same time better support remote branch office users by locally bridging WLAN traffic.

The Summit WM200 switch supports 59 APs and can be upgraded to support 100 APs. The Summit WM 2000 switch supports up to 200 APs in a single controller.

The ExtremeXOS 12.0, Universal Port Manager and Summit X250 series are available now. The WLAN controllers and AP are due later in the quarter.

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