

Force10 Networks Looks to Midrange

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Force10 Networks is hoping to leverage its reputation for high performance and high reliability in high-end LAN switching to gain a foothold in midsize data centers and enterprise campus networks.

Force10, known primarily as a scientific and grid computing LAN switch supplier, on May 14 will launch the C-300, the first of a new C-Series of switches designed to bring the resiliency and scale of its high-end switches to the wiring closet and midsize data center.

Changing network traffic patterns and a business' increasing reliance on the enterprise network translates into a greater need for network reliability outside of the data center, as well as greater scalability and more flexible network control, said Stephen Garrison, vice president of marketing for the San Jose, Calif., company.

"With the increasing use in the enterprise of peer-to-peer applications, hosted applications outside the LAN and traffic going from suburbs to metro to long-haul, traffic will go every which way [not just from client to data center server and back], and the concept of always-on networking needs always-on thinking," Garrison said.

The new chassis-based C-300 leverages the features of Force10's E-Series high-performance data center switches such as the modular Force10 Operating System; redundant power supplies, route processor

modules and fans; the ability to swap out components while a switch is in operation; a passive backplane to eliminate a single point of failure; and the ability to perform in-service troubleshooting.

"Essentially, they are extending what they believe to be their key attributes for the - large - data center and making the case that those same technologies are needed in the campus," said IDC analyst Cindy Borovick. "I agree. The network has to be responsive to what the bus needs are. It's not acceptable for the network to be down anymore."

The C-300, which has eight slots to accommodate a mix of 48-port Gigabit Ethernet and four-port 10 Gigabit Ethernet, supports POE (power over Ethernet) on all ports. Power can be centrally controlled to each port to ensure that VOIP (voice over IP) phones or WAPs (wireless access points) that require more power get what they need.

"We can lock up power to specific ports - at the expense of others - so that a WAP port that's used a lot has what it needs. And we can measure watts per port to see what's currently being used and plan for future capacity requirements," Garrison said.

To set itself apart as the best-of-breed foil to one-stop shops such as Cisco Systems, Force10 created an ecosystem of LAN partners based on an open framework.

The ecosystem includes Aruba Networks for wireless, Avaya and Mitel Networks for VOIP, and Microsoft and StillSecure for security. Force10 and those partners have conducted interoperability testing of their products, can create management hooks between their devices and carry out joint selling activities.

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