FatPipe Takes a VNF Portfolio Approach

By: Michael Vizard October 11, 2017

IT convergence is all but inevitable. In the short-term, platforms may emerge to solve a specific problem. But over the long haul they tend to get subsumed by larger more encompassing architectures.

That very scenario is starting to play out as software-defined wide area networks (SD-WAN) become the vehicle through which virtual network function (VNF) software will be distributed.

The most recent example is new VNF software from FatPipe Networks that was announced this week. Most of the focus on software-defined networking (SDN) has been on emerging instances of VNF software intended to run on a dedicated NFV platform. The VNFs would replace individual physical appliances that are relied on today to handle, for example, load balancing or security tasks, with software running on standard processors. The endgame is clearly a portfolio of diverse VNFs.

VNF Portfolio Approach

FatPipe Networks is now taking that shift to its logical conclusion by bundling a series of VNFs into a single FatPipe VNF offering combining firewall, security software, deep packet inspection, quality of service (QoS), WAN optimization, and Domain Name System (DNS) management in a way that simplifies deploying those function across a FatPipe software-defined wide area network (SD-WAN). In effect, the FatPipe SD-WAN has become the NFV platform for hosting NFVs.

Matt Gwyther, director of technical marketing for FatPipe Networks, says the company is trying to make it simpler for IT organizations to consume both VNFs developed by FatPipe Networks as well as third-party providers. Rather than having to invest in a separate networking platform, Gwyther says existing SD-WANs will simply morph into NFV platforms through which VNFs will be consumed. Each enterprise IT organization will then be free to craft whatever networking services it sees fit, says Gwyther.

At the same time, Gwyther notes that carriers and managed services providers (MSPs) will be making use of VNFs to deliver networking services on whatever NFV or SD-WAN platform they decide to standardize on. In time, Gwyther says that enterprise IT organizations will find themselves relying on a mix of VNF-enabled networking services that are deployed either by the internal IT organization or delivered by an external services provider.

The Multipurpose Cloud

It's already becoming apparent that once IT functions become defined by software, the line between them starts to blur. It's becoming more difficult to determine where one individual network service begins and another one ends; software-defined networks are being subsumed into both cloud services and larger software-defined datacenters (SDDCs) platforms encompassing compute, storage, and networking that are designed to be installed on-premises.

From an organizational perspective, most enterprise IT organizations are not ready to absorb that level of change -- but they can purchase it as a service. As IT infrastructure gets managed at a much higher level of software abstraction it becomes a whole lot simpler to automate a broad swath of IT functions.

It's now only a matter of time before just about every role within an IT organization is redefined. IT organizations as a consequence would be well-advised to consider now what physical appliances -- along with the IT professionals dedicated to specifically managing them -- are about to get abstracted away by software much sooner than most of any of them presently realize.

FatPipe is one of a dozen up-and-coming players featured in Futuriom's premium report, "The SD-WAN Growth Report," which profiles the growth potential and technology platforms for delivering new WAN services from the cloud