

## IP - it's complex, but it's here to stay

By Bob Tarzey, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd, Jan 26th 2007

Fifteen years ago a plethora of different network communications protocols were being used for computer communications. Getting computers to talk to each other was a complex business and vendors like Novell made a good living enabling them to do so.

Things are different today – there is but one network protocol used for the vast majority of computer communications: the Internet Protocol or IP. This was the first round of "network convergence" that allowed any computer anywhere to easily communicate with another. Arguably, IP has been the most successful open computing standard ever.

But for the last 10 years or so, network convergence has come to mean something quite different. Vendors like Cisco who helped drive, and benefited from, the first round of network convergence saw an even greater opportunity. That was to take over an even larger network, the global network for voice communications. This second round is well underway and businesses are now using their single powerful IP network for far more than computer communications: voice calls, video communications, storage, networking, and so on. This has created a vast network of IP enabled devices that extends from our pockets to outer space.

A single standard on every device - all using a common language - sounds utopian and, compared to what might have been, it is pretty good. But businesses are left with some problems. First, having a single network for all communications means failure of that network can mean total communications failure. Fortunately, IP networks are resilient and such events are becoming rare. But a second problem is harder to mitigate – that is successfully managing the IP network to make sure it provides adequate performance at all times and that the right priority is given to different applications.

It is not surprising then, that in a recent survey by Quocirca, in which 473 senior IT and network

managers from European and Middle Eastern enterprises were interviewed, they placed monitoring availability and performance as more important than user access when managing their IT networks. After all, access to a poorly performing network is not much use.

Quocirca's research also showed that there were gaps in the capability to manage IP networks over the importance placed on them. Respondents worried that their ability to integrate network management with other activities was lacking and that they had relatively poor access to information about and tools to proactively fix their networks.

Interestingly, small enterprises felt they had better IP management capabilities than larger ones. This may well be because the political issues around network convergence lessen in small organisations where there is more likely to be one group managing both the computer and voice communications requirement.

But the survey also showed that senior IT management is more bullish about their organisation's ability to overcome such concerns than those who report to them – a good thing if network convergence is to continue moving forward apace – the arguments need to be won at board level.

The complexity of managing a single IP network for so many different business critical applications is daunting, so many are turning to third parties for help. They majority of respondents were already working with managed service providers for most aspects of network management. In particularly sensitive areas like network security the number was as high as 90 per cent.

The message is clear, IP is here – big time – and seems to be here to stay; at the moment it is unrivalled as the emergent technology standard for all types of communications. Businesses accept this, but do face challenges in monitoring and managing their networks – they need third party help.

Quocirca's report - Managing 21st Century Networks is free to readers at <http://www.quocirca.com/pages/analysis/reports/view/store250/item3609/>

## About Quocirca

Quocirca is one of Europe's leading independent industry analyst firms. One of its biggest assets is the core team of highly experienced analysts drawn from both the corporate and the vendor communities. This team prides itself on maintaining a bigger picture view of what's going on in the IT and communications marketplaces. This allows all of Quocirca's activities to be carried out in the context of the real world and avoids distractions with fads, fashions and the nuts and bolts of specific technologies. Quocirca's focus has always been the point of intersection at which IT meets "the business".

## Quocirca Services

The insight and experience that comes from working as an industry analyst as well as a practitioner allows the Quocirca team to contribute significantly to IT Vendors, Service Providers and Corporate clients. To this end, it provides a range of consulting and advisory services. Details of these, along with some of Quocirca's latest analysis, may be obtained by visiting <http://www.quocirca.com>

Quocirca's primary research involves the surveying of many thousands of technical and business end users each quarter, analyzing their perceptions of the possible impact of emerging, evolving and maturing technologies on their businesses.