

So what was the buzz at the ONS?

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I just attended the 2014 Open Networking Summit (ONS) in Santa Clara, CA. While there, one observation I made is that there were a lot more exhibiting vendors at the conference this year than there were last year. Given that all of those vendors were in attendance raises an obvious question: Was there any excitement at the conference or was it merely a rehash of things that have been said many times before?

Before I begin to answer that question I should point out that while there was a significant increase in terms of the number of exhibiting vendors, there wasn't as great an increase in terms of the number of attendees. I attribute that to the "SDN fatigue" that comes as a result of all of the conferences, seminars and webinars on the topic.

During his presentation Francois Locoh-Donou of Ciena told a story that I found to be both interesting and exciting. Francois was one of 90,000 people who descended onto Barcelona the previous week to attend the Mobile World Congress. He discussed how virtually all vendors, from local street vendors, to airlines and major hotels and car rental companies adjusted their pricing and in some cases, the services they offered in response to the onslaught of that many people. There was, however, one class of vendor who didn't make any changes to their products or their pricing: the mobile operators. Francois stated that during his stay he would have been happy to pay extra for gold level service if that service buffered him from the poor call quality that was a result of all of the extra demand. His point was that the combination of data about their customers, sophisticated analytics and a SDN-based network will enable mobile operators in the future to be able to dynamically change their service offerings to respond to changes in the environment.

Another presentation that I found to be very exciting was given by John Donovan of AT&T. Everybody knows that there has been an explosion in the volume of mobile traffic. John quantified that explosion when he stated that the mobile traffic on AT&T's network has grown 50,000% in the last seven years. Put another way, that represents an increase of two and a half orders of magnitude. John stated that AT&T is making significant changes in terms of how their network is built – to focus on SDN; the equipment and the software they use, including open source based products; who they are buying from – startups as well as medium and large companies; and their culture. One of the changes that John highlighted is that AT&T will retire 1,000 applications that are part of their Operations Support System (OSS) portfolio. I have always known that a carrier's OSS and Business Support System (BSS) portfolios were ungainly, but I was very surprised that they had 1,000 applications that they could retire.

John was asked if AT&T would be implementing changes to the network via an overlay network. He caught everyone's attention when he said no and he further stated that on a going forward basis, all of AT&T's capital investment would be SDN-based. AT&T has been saying this for a while internally and also saying this to some of their closest suppliers, but this is one of the first times they have said it in public.

While I was excited by what they had to say, Francois and John were not the only sources of buzz at the conference. To get some insight into some of the other presentations, I suggest you go to the conference website: www.opennetsummit.org.