

[COVER STORY]

Best of INTEROP

New technology options are creating new IT headaches. This year's nine Best of Interop winners tackle those pain points.

Looking over the more than 130 entries for the Best of Interop awards, it's clear that vendors are scrambling to meet IT's demand for better management products. As always, the simpler things look, the more work required behind the scenes. For virtualized and cloud resources to deliver on the promise of faster and more responsive computing and storage, IT needs controls to track those dynamic resources—a need that winners such as Cisco, Citrix, Panzura, and V3 fill. Likewise, the demand for mobile data access creates new management problems for IT teams, and winners such as Alcatel-Lucent, Cloudpath Networks, and McAfee bring new ideas to mobile.

Our Best of Interop overall winner also promises simpler management, but it does something more: It breaks new ground. NEC's Programmable-Flow PF6800 Controller is the first enterprise-class, OpenFlow-compliant network controller. The PF6800's relevance lies in the growing interest in

software defined networking (SDN), which could dramatically change networking strategies.

Though Ethernet is an open standard, the control plane for switching is not. That means network administrators are limited by the proprietary management options provided by their hardware vendors. The SDN movement could upend the network management status quo by abstracting the control plane from the networking hardware, using an open standard like OpenFlow for network control. But it has to do that without sacrificing the reliability expected of large networking environments. That's where IT teams will look to products like NEC's ProgrammableFlow PF6800 Controller.

What follows are details on all the Best of Interop winners in nine categories, with analysis from each of the judging teams.

—*Steven Hill, Best of Interop lead judge*
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Don Clark of NEC accepts the top prize from Interop GM Jennifer Jessup



server hardware of choice. This can be important for those companies that prefer to minimize their hardware footprint.

The PF6800 is based on the OpenFlow 1.0.0 standards published by the Open Networking Foundation, making it cross-functional with products from dozens of OpenFlow-based networking companies that have sprung up. The open standards also could make networks more vendor agnostic, thus increasing competition. There's still a lot of work to be done with software defined networking, but the promise is that it will make deploying network capacity as quick as launching a virtual server.

OpenFlow is only a few years old, but already there are some big names in the industry, such as Google, that are touting software defined networking's potential, so it's worth more than a passing glance. NEC's introduction of enterprise-class products is an important step toward giving SDN a chance to prove itself in the enterprise IT environment. You'll have to do your own research on whether SDN makes sense in your IT operation. But it's possible that you'll look back on this as the time when network management began a dramatic change.

—Steven Hill

BEST OF INTEROP AND MANAGEMENT, MONITORING, AND TESTING

NEC ProgrammableFlow PF6800 Controller

Though there were more than 40 entries in this category, there's nothing on the market today with which to compare NEC's ProgrammableFlow PF6800 Controller. It stands alone as the first commercial OpenFlow network controller to advance beyond the open source projects offered by others in the software defined networking movement.

That makes the PF6800 an important first, since OpenFlow networks require a master controller to orchestrate the network environment. Being the first at any-

thing paints a huge target on your back, so NEC deserves a lot of credit for taking OpenFlow out of the lab and into the real world.

The open source controllers out there are a good starting point for testing and development purposes, but most companies want a product with a vendor—and the accompanying technical support—behind it before trusting production loads to such an important role. NEC offers the PF6800 controller as an appliance or as a software product that can be run on your

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