



NetApp Goes Native with Fibre Channel over Ethernet (FCoE) Storage

By Dave Raffo, Senior News Director
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NetApp added Fibre Channel over Ethernet (FCoE) devices through partners today, including an embedded unified target adapter that brings native FCoE connectivity to its storage arrays.

NetApp is rebranding the QLogic Corp. 8152 as its unified target adapter, and offering it as a built-in converged network adapter (CNA) for its FAS arrays and V-Series virtualization devices. The adapter provides FCoE connectivity, and NetApp senior product marketing manager Mike McNamara said NetApp will eventually add iSCSI and network-attached storage (NAS) capability to the card.

NetApp has also qualified FCoE devices from Brocade Communications Systems Inc.—the Brocade 8000 FCoE switch, 1020 CNA and a new FCoE blade for the DCX Backbone switch—as well as the QLogic 8152 as a standalone card for host connectivity. NetApp already sells Cisco Systems Inc. Nexus 5020 and 5010 switches that support Fibre Channel over Ethernet.

With the unified target adapter, NetApp is the first to offer native FCoE embedded into its storage systems.

Bob Laliberte, an analyst at Milford, Mass.-based Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG), said embedded native FCoE connectivity for storage arrays "has been the missing link to end-to-end FCoE. This gives people an opportunity to test it out if they're thinking of putting it in the data center."

NetApp customers can run FCoE natively with the embedded adapter, or connect through FC to Cisco Nexus or Brocade DCX switches and from there to servers with CNAs. NetApp's McNamara said the time is right for FCoE because of the growing use of server virtualization and 10 Gigabit Ethernet (10 GbE).

McNamara said he expects the lure of consolidated networks and improved Ethernet performance to prompt Fibre Channel customers to move to FCoE. "We see, over time, that the traditional Fibre Channel customer is the one who's going to be likely to move to FCoE when bringing on new applications or a new data center," McNamara said. "Because of savings from a consolidation of physical assets, FCoE is the logical option when a Fibre Channel customer decides to do upgrades."

Amit Vashi, QLogic's vice president of marketing for host solutions, called NetApp's launch "a tipping point" for FCoE adoption. "What this does is eliminate the Fibre Channel cable," Vashi said of the embedded adapter. "Now FCoE has extended all the way to storage."

Is FCoE ready for prime time?

Even Brocade is becoming an FCoE optimist. The switch vendor has taken a measured response to Fibre Channel over Ethernet especially compared to its main rival Cisco. Brocade representatives have said all along that FCoE will come to the data center eventually, but that it's still years away. However, Brocade has pushed up the release of its FCoE 10-24 blade for the DCX, which had been planned for early next year. The blade is now scheduled to be released in September, and Brocade senior product marketing manager Ahmad Zamer said FCoE is getting closer to reality in data centers.

"If we're building a 12-story building, we've finished the building the 10th floor and we know where the 11th floor is going," Zamer said.

ESG's Laliberte sees FCoE in a place similar to that of solid-state drives (SSDs) in early 2008 when EMC Corp. became the first vendor to offer support. Nearly every other storage vendor followed in the ensuing months.

"Once the dam is broken, others will jump on it," Laliberte said of FCoE storage arrays.

But not everybody is so bullish on Fibre Channel over Ethernet. Unni Narayanan, CEO at investment research firm Primary Global Research, doesn't think NetApp will gain much from being first with FCoE because mainstream adoption is still far out. "It may help NetApp get into the enterprise, but wide-scale deployment of FCoE is a ways away," he said. "Our checks show no serious traction for FCoE for at least a year-and-a-half."

Brocade goes to end of row

The Brocade FCoE 10-24 blade has 24 10 GbE ports or eight 8 GBps Fibre Channel ports. The blade is used for end-of-row implementations, while Brocade's 8000 is a top-of-rack switch. End-of-row switches leave fewer devices and ports to manage, and benefit more from consolidation, because they can require more cabling than top-of-rack switches. Brocade's Zamer said he expects larger data centers to prefer end-of-row switches for FCoE.

More FCoE devices coming

NetApp's McNamara said his firm will sell other FCoE products, including the Cisco Nexus 2148T Fabric Extender and Emulex Corp. CNAs, when they're qualified.