IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE: Why Isn't Cisco Squashing Competitors?; A Request For Clarity; Hey, turn on those images, they might be amusing. Or not. Probably not. But it's worth a try.

PACKETPUSHERS
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A Newsletter About a Life in Networking

**Table of Contents
(aka The Project Plan)**

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The "Try something different" issue.

Thought For The Week:
"Do we have any Halloween candy left?"

1. Why Isn't Cisco Squashing Competitors?

by Greg Ferro

Cisco is a sales bulldozer that crushes competition by making it difficult for customers to NOT buy Cisco products.

Let's be honest: Cisco's technology isn't the best, its software quality is poor, bug fixes take months, and it's slow to add features. Yet this didn't stop Cisco from outselling competitors for the last decade.

Following Not Leading

Cisco's mode of 'innovation' is to buy successful companies. This instant innovation is much cheaper than internal research and development.

After Cisco makes a purchase, it adds the product to its supermarket. For example, Viptela's SD-WAN goes next to the ever-popular branch routers, just above the branch switches, and down the aisle from branch security.

This business model was a winner for John Chambers' Cisco, but it's not working so well now. Why?

Speed Of Change

Networking didn't change much from 1999 to 2012 or so. Same routing protocols, same basic designs, and customers didn't really want to invest in networking except to go faster by moving from 100Mbps to 1Gbps.

We dropped fewer packets as silicon got faster, but the software and features were basically unchanged. This slow-moving market was good for Cisco's sales-only focus; customers kept buying the same products, and deploying the same designs.

At the same time, Cisco did very little to modernize and it avoided research and development.

In last five or so years, dozens of networking startups have emerged across a wide range of the market. The first startups were attracted to the 80% gross profit margins of everyday products like campus switches and branch routers (see SD-WAN).

Startups can move quickly, going from concept to product in as little as two years. This is about the same amount of time it would take to get a **concept project** approved internally at Cisco, much less bring a product to market.

Anti-Automation

Cisco has many business units (BUs) internally, and each is ruthlessly focused on its own profits. Cisco pays generous bonuses when your BU exceeds targets. So it's not a surprise that some BUs want to bring new products to market, but existing BUs fight hard to prevent them.

Cisco's slow acceptance and implementation of automation is key here. Many BUs simply refused to implement automation because it was seen to impact their own profits.

If they did bow to customer pressure, each BU acted independently and often with low quality. It's a simple trick to under-resource a project or allocate your worst people to something you don't like.

But automation is now required if enterprise networks are to keep up with the accelerated pace of application deployment. Only recently has Cisco converged on a single YANG model. Mandatory implementation for automation and rumors of direct CEO intervention abound.

Sales First

Cisco is a "sales first" culture where the "deal" is everything and success is measured by the dollars sold this quarter. Change causes

sales to slow down. You can see the problem.

Sales-first cultures have problems when the products keep changing or when competitors have better technology or a better story. The ability to close deals relies on sharp business practices like creating artificial pricing schemes (list vs. street price) to create reasons to engage sales.

Cloud has changed this. Self-service models of limited but clearly defined products don't need expensive sales humans.

Commodity Products

In addition, people realize that that sales don't add value. Why waste hundreds of hours working on complex licensing and hardware comparisons? Buy it from a website and move to the next problem.

It's now true that Cisco is only one of many suppliers for hardware and software for networking. Indeed, savvy customers are building their own solutions with automation to avoid having to deal with vendors.

Cisco Is Trying To Change

There's no question Chuck Robbins is forcing change at Cisco. He is merging BUs and forcing them to cooperate instead of compete (for instance, ACI was merged into single Data Center BU).

He's overhauling stale product lines, launching initiatives such as SD-Access, and moving rapidly into new markets like IoT as Enterprise IT shrinks.

Cisco has a mixed record of being successful at change; in my view it gets about half of new efforts right. That's why I'm standing back and waiting to see signs of success before I would commit to Cisco as a single source vendor.

2. A Request For Clarity
by Drew Conry-Murray

The other day I was researching a product for a blog I was writing. After twenty or so minutes on the Web page, I still had no clear idea what the product did or how it worked.

Like a fortune teller reading entrails, it was up to me to make sense out of a bloody mess of the marketing grizzle strewn among the bones of "intent" "automation" and "machine learning."

And then I realized that was the point.

If, like a fortune, a vendor's language is broad enough and vague enough, it can encompass just about any problem a potential customer is trying to solve.

The language that vendors use on their Web pages isn't meant to inform. It's meant to entice me into further contact and turn me into a lead.

I can't get my question answered until I hand over some contact details, which starts me down a sales funnel like a pig through a chute.

Good Leads And Leadership

I get that vendors need to sell products. They have employees to pay, facilities to operate, and shareholders to satisfy.

And I understand that to sell products, vendors need to keep the sales pipeline flowing with leads.

But are 100 crappy leads from confused and irritated engineers more worthwhile than 3 or 4 strong leads from engineers who actually know

what your product does and want to find out more?

Are you enhancing anyone's productivity—your employees' or your potential customers'—by sitting through innumerable calls, meetings, and white board sessions just to find out you're not really a fit?

Tech organizations are always looking for ways to be thought leaders. Well, here's a great opportunity:

Demonstrate industry leadership by jettisoning all marketing bullshit and buzzword-washing. Commit to clear, descriptive language when describing your product or service.

It might mean a smaller pipeline, but also one that requires less filtering of crap and waste. Isn't that better for everyone?

Thanks, Internet

All kinds of amusing things wash up in our social feeds. Here's one that caught my eye.

ROCK STAR DEVELOPER

Join the Packet Pushers' new membership program and get benefits including our weekly Link Propagation newsletter and more. [Click here for details and to sign up](#).

Internets Of Interest

A collection of pre-loved links that might interest you. "Pre-loved" because I liked them enough to put into this newsletter. It's not *true* love.

By Drew Conry-Murray

The Three Paths Of Enterprise IT

Ivan Pepelnjak [posted a blog](#) that speculates on the different ways enterprise networking could diverge in the coming years:

- Those who move primarily into public cloud
- Those who adopt a hyperconverged/private cloud

- Those who control their own destiny by investing in networking software

What path are you on?

[LINK](#)

Looking Back At Questions About IP Networking

Russ White [takes a journey](#) to the (recent) past to look at a 2003 technical paper from the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) entitled "Will IP really take over the world (of communications)?"

Russ notes the paper's conclusion--that packet switching is superior to circuit switching--and then examines the reasons for this conclusion to see if they hold true today.

[LINK](#)

The Cure For Revenge Porn: Send Nude Pics To Facebook?

Revenge porn, in which a disgruntled a**hole posts nude images of an ex online, is a reprehensible crime. It's also difficult to prevent because digital images are easy to copy and share.

Now the Australian Broadcasting Corporation [reports on a partnership](#) between Facebook and an Australian government agency with a trial solution:

Send your nude pics or videos to yourself via Facebook's Messenger app. Facebook will run the images through an algorithm to generate a hash value, and block content with the same hash value from being posted on Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger.

The government agency in the article claims Facebook won't store the images or videos.

OK, I get the concept behind this idea, and I'm glad Facebook takes the problem seriously. But I have a hard time trusting the security of this content with Facebook. It seems both counter-intuitive and downright creepy. Am I wrong here?

LINK

Product News

Find out about interesting new products, or get essential information about things you might already be using.

ThousandEyes' New Device Layer Integrates SNMP With Performance Monitoring

[ThousandEyes](#) has announced a new capability for monitoring network performance. Called [Device Layer](#), the new capability uses SNMP to collect data on routers, switches, APs, firewalls, and other networking gear.

The company integrates this data with the agent-based active testing it performs to give administrators and operators more visibility into the network and more context to measure performance and identify the root cause of problems.

[LINK](#)

Barracuda Networks Adds DDoS Protection To Its Web Application Firewall

Barracuda Networks has [added a new DDoS protection service](#) to its Web Application Firewall (WAF). The new feature, called Active DDoS Prevention (ADP), is designed to filter out volumetric attacks against Web application targets.

[LINK](#)

Briefings In Brief: A New Packet Pushers Podcast

Want more tech news? [Subscribe](#) to our newest podcast channel, [Briefings In Brief](#). We take five minutes or less to summarize and analyze tech news, product announcements, or other interesting items that come across our desks.

[LINK](#)

Recent Podcasts

The last five podcasts published on Packet Pushers

PacketPushers.net - The Last Five

[PQ 135: Mastering Python Networking – The Book](#)

[Datanauts 109: Run VMware Apps In The Cloud With Ravello (Sponsored)](#)

[Network Break 160: VMware Buys VeloCloud; Qualcomm Sues Apple](#)

[Show 364: ThousandEyes Adds Infrastructure Visibility (Sponsored)](#)

[PQ 134: Meet ZeroTier – Open Source Networking](#)

Full Stack Journey tells personal stories about the ongoing quest to become a full stack engineer. [Subscribe today!](#)
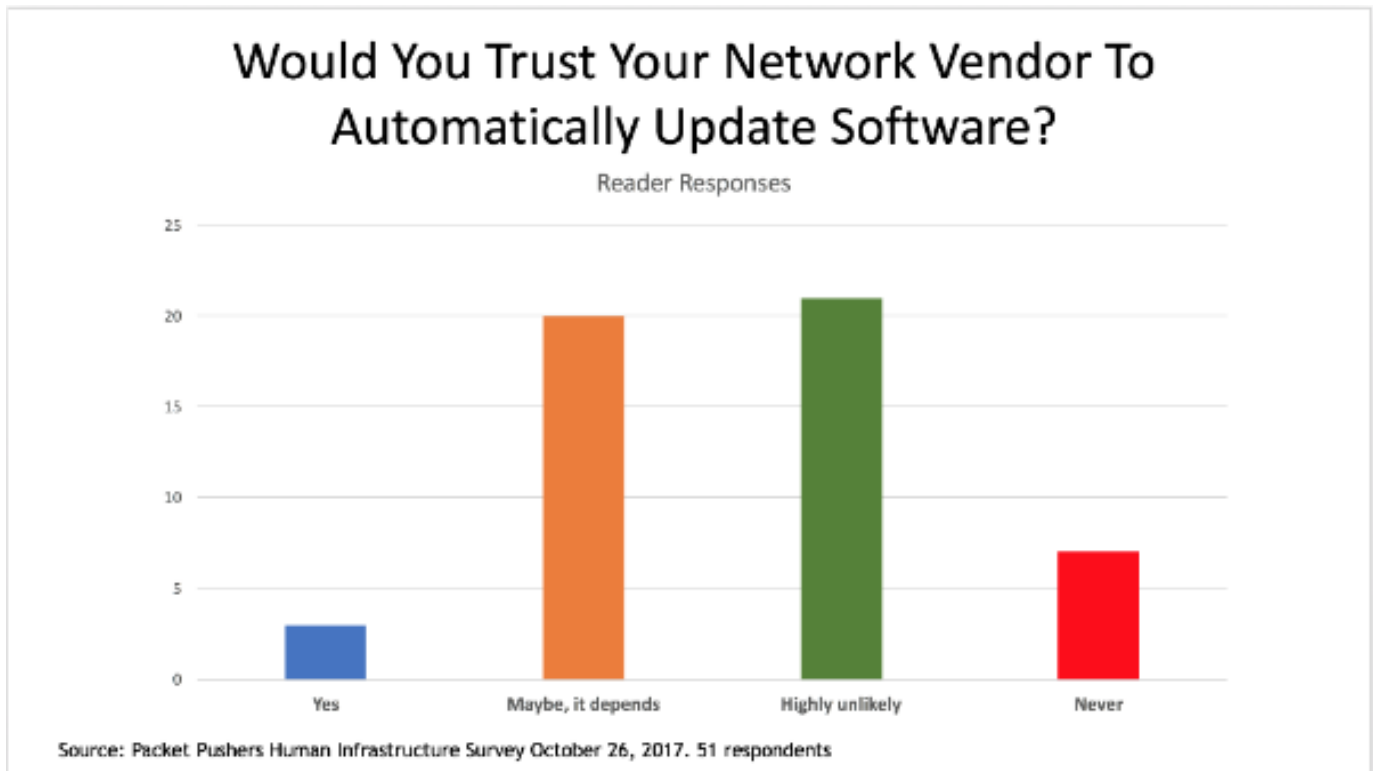

Priority Queue tackles niche and nerdy tech topics and cutting-edge research projects. [Subscribe here!](#)

Quick Survey: Professional Development Focus

A lot of IT pros invest personal time and money on professional development. Where are you putting the majority of your efforts?

[A. Automation/Coding/Scripting](#)
[B. Business study/MBA](#)
[C. Certification in my primary field](#)
[D. Certification in a secondary field](#)
[E. Self-directed study (i.e. a bit of this, a bit of that)](#)
[F. Other](#)

Last Issue's Survey Results

Would You Trust Your Network Vendor To Automatically Update Software?

Reader Responses

Source: Packet Pushers Human Infrastructure Survey October 26, 2017. 51 respondents

Did We Miss Something?

Got an link or an article to share? Email it to
humaninfrastructure@packetpushers.net