

Is your network ready for the Fourth Industrial Revolution?

As the buzz of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution gets louder, just what does it mean for your network?



Johann Coetzee, managing director: Commercial at Datacentrix

Modernised, scalable telecoms networks are essential for businesses looking to seriously embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the fourth major industrial era since the initial Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, characterised by emerging, disruptive technology breakthroughs.

This was the core message from Johann Coetzee, managing director: Commercial at Datacentrix, a provider of secure ICT solutions, who was speaking at the recent 2018 Finance Indaba Africa in Sandton, a high-profile event drawing finance professionals from across the continent, alongside guest speaker Sean Taylor, managing director at Torch Telecom Lifecycle Management.

Fourth Industrial Revolution is already here!

“The Fourth Industrial Revolution isn’t something that’s looming on the horizon,” Coetzee told delegates, “it’s already here.”

He pointed to developed economies that may be a step ahead of South Africa on the road to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, noting that in the UK’s financial services industry, for instance, top-tier banks have closed over 4,000 branches

over the past decade.

“That’s more than one per day,” he noted.

And it’s not just financial services companies that need to adapt to this revolution. Coetzee said that organisations in every industry must reposition themselves, re-platform their architectures, and re-engineer their business models.

“The Fourth Industrial Revolution represents an exponential leap forward in human science, technology and innovation, and promises to alter every aspect of our lives. However, to truly access and participate in the shift, the network becomes critical,” explained Taylor. “Ultra-fast networks enable a world of new possibilities – from AI robots, to self-driving cars, remote medical surgery, immersive virtual realities, holographic teleportation, drone deliveries, smart agriculture, connected cities, smart logistics and more.”

The network of the future

But if the network is critical to unlocking all these incredible possibilities, just what does the network of the future look like?

“The traditional legacy architecture – a hardware-centric configuration based on clients and servers configuration – simply cannot scale,” Taylor said, “Over time, the costs of maintaining this infrastructure will billow out of control, as you fail to keep up with the demand of ever increasing data throughput.”

Instead, the future involves software-defined networking (SD-WAN), where the intelligence of the network lies in the software, which can more easily be updated, automated and outsourced to specialist networking partners.

Software-defined architectures are able to intelligently route traffic, so that certain mission-critical data is carried over dedicated MPLS (multiprotocol label switching) links, and other data is carried over direct Internet links.

This approach has several benefits, he added, including:

- The optimisation of network capacity;
- Increasing available bandwidth with lower levels of latency;
- Ensuring better application performance;
- Reducing costs (as you shift some traffic from expensive MPLS to hybrid WANs);
- Security controls remaining up-to-date all the time;
- Your network becoming ‘cloud-ready’ and able to handle all the demands of a cloud-first business;
- Quick deployment of new branches, or a boost in capacity as needed;
- No outages or downtime (as you failover automatically to redundant links); and
- A network that scales limitlessly as your demands increase.

Coetzee explained that for any organisation that’s looking to embrace the true potential for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, they’ll need a networking partner that can achieve all these outcomes.

“In fact, we’re reaching a point where one should be expecting certain guarantees. For instance, Datacentrix can provide guaranteed networking cost savings (these would be audited findings from an external auditing firm) and then bill you by

charging a percentage of these savings.”

That kind of structure aligns everyone’s interests around a common goal – a better, faster, more efficient, more competitive business, he added, and ensures the very best results.

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