

EMA Vendor to Watch: Sideband Networks

Sideband Networks: Key Value Proposition

A brand new entrant to the Application-aware Network Performance Management (ANPM) market as of late 2013, Sideband Networks officially launched and began shipping products on April 1, 2014. The

essential focus of the Sideband Networks solution is to make good on the oft-promised but rarely delivered concept of true network performance management – **combining monitoring with closed-loop controls**. The company calls the approach an “Analyze Alert Act Network Performance Management” (A³NPM) solution.

Use cases for Sideband’s closed-loop control capabilities will span both security and operations objectives. Examples could include: blocking traffic when policies have been violated (such as a user exceeding maximum usage of an external service), recognizing and capping non-business traffic, adjusting QoS class definitions when critical apps or services are not being delivered with sufficient quality, or quarantining users that appear to log-in from two geographically disparate locations simultaneously.

The solution is based on well-established packet inspection approaches for gaining application aware visibility into network traffic and activity. Coupled with that is a discovery engine that determines actual connectivity at layers 2 and 3, as well as recognizing both physical and virtual network devices and topology. Further, the system creates an internal model spanning applications, endpoints, and the network that ties them all together. Next, the system applies analytics in real time to observed network and application activity to identify current or potential performance, behavior, or policy compliance issues. And finally, the system can automatically apply corrective actions to mitigate recognized issues.

The solution is delivered via one or more XRE appliances, which can take either a physical (XRE-4000) or virtual form (vXRE). The XRE-4000 offers 8x10G ports and is stated as supporting over 40G total capacity, while the vXRE can support 1G rates. All XRE appliances can do collection, analysis, and presentation of data, and connect to share data when deployed in a distributed manner. Underneath the covers are a number of innovative approaches to constructing the database and model, to topological discovery, and in the abstract rules language used for defining control actions – several of which have already been patented by the company.

EMA Perspective

Sideband Networks was only first organized in 2012 and has, in a relatively short period of time, put together a product that includes a full complement of app-aware network performance monitoring features. This alone would make them a worthy competitive alternative for visibility purposes, but the company goes further by adding a unique ability to take direct, automated actions based on monitoring findings.

Sideband Networks started with the premise that there is still a largely unmet need for clear, accurate visibility and analytics regarding what networks are carrying on a permanent, sustained, live operations basis. EMA research on ANPM solutions confirms that while many other products are capable of such usage, a minority of organizations uses them in that way. The predominant use case for ANPM tools continues to be as-needed troubleshooting rather than continuous monitoring. Automatically applying control measures to improve network performance is also not a new concept, but no vendor to date has successfully delivered a flexible control function that is tied directly to deep application awareness from the network perspective other than in the form of point solutions, such as ADC/Load balancers and WAN Optimization appliances.

Solutions including enterprise-wide ANPM, topological awareness, detailed analytics, and closed-loop controls are not unique in concept, but Sideband is the first to build all of these capabilities into a single product. And in doing so, Sideband will be unique in reality.

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