

NetScout Extends Solution with Packet Flow Monitoring Switch Acquisition

Event

On November 21, 2011, NetScout Systems, Inc. announced the acquisition of Simena[®], LLC, a privately-held network packet access tap, switch and testing company based in Sterling, Virginia. Simena's solutions have enabled IT organizations in both enterprise and service provider environments to aggregate, filter and control network traffic for data, voice, and video monitoring as well as Cyber Security objectives. The technology will become part of the NetScout[®] Unified Service Delivery Management solution and extend the capture capabilities of NetScout's nGenius Service Assurance Solution. The Simena PFS1524, a packet-flow monitoring switching product, is available now to NetScout customers as the nGenius[®] 1500 series packet flow switch. NetScout will support existing Simena customers, and Simena employees will be integrated into NetScout's ongoing operations. Financial terms of the transaction were not disclosed; however, the transaction is not expected to have a significant impact on earnings per share in fiscal 2012.

Context

NetScout's newly acquired packet flow switch fits into a category of products best known as aggregation or matrix switches. These products collect, aggregate, and filter packets to ensure greater efficiency when it comes to managing and securing networks. Aggregation switches are an evolution from traditional taps, adding software and silicon to provide packet stream manipulation that is similar in many ways to the core functions of a packet switch. These switches are traffic-aware and operate above the physical connectivity layer, covering OSI layers 1–4. The common role of these devices is to allow one network tapping point to be shared among several monitoring and analysis tools, such as network performance, IDS/IPS, DLP, and packet recording, rather than requiring a tap for each. In cases where SPAN is being used to monitor packet streams, the need for sharing becomes even more critical, as network switches typically offer only one or, at most, two SPAN ports.

NetScout's newly acquired packet flow switch aggregates and filters network traffic, allowing multiple monitoring systems to share a common packet stream.

The other major role these devices play is media conversion. For example, a 1Gbps-rated IDS can be connected into and monitor traffic on a 10Gpbs link. This both extends the life of monitoring tool/appliance investments and assures continuous monitoring coverage during network upgrades. Consequently, these solutions have become very popular and, by some accounts, are present in a majority of enterprises.

A number of vendors offer aggregation switches to the enterprise, government, and communication service provider sectors. Simena competed in this space with NetOptics, Gigamon, Anue Systems, VSS Monitoring, APCON, Network Critical, and Datacom Systems, among others. Most all of these vendors got their start in basic network tap solutions and have subsequently expanded into aggregation solutions (and beyond, for some) as a way of growing value and served opportunities. Historically, NetScout has worked with many of these vendors agnostically, and has resold NetOptics tap products for years as part of expanded solution sales. NetScout has not, however, resold aggregation switches in the past.

Simena's portfolio included other products beyond aggregation switches, ranging from basic taps to a LAN traffic generator and a WAN network emulator. These products were secondary elements of Simena's business and are being reviewed by NetScout for long-term fit/value within the Unified Service Delivery Management solution strategy.

NetScout Extends its Reach

The nGenius 1500 series packet flow switch is available immediately, and represents network-monitoring switching capabilities that will improve the control and distribution of IP traffic being fed into nGenius InfiniStream® appliances alongside other monitoring devices. From a features perspective, the nGenius 1500 offers 24 ports of switchable 10G/1G Ethernet connectivity, with fine-grained controls to aggregate, distribute, intelligently filter, replicate and load-balance network packet streams. This can be used to deliver targeted flows to a diverse range of monitoring, measurement and security tools, achieving targeted visibility into business applications and unified communication services to understand user experience, transaction performance, and network integrity. Additionally, monitored traffic can be optimized and highly conditioned to improve end-device performance by delivering only required/essential data from a particular packet-flow or user session. The solution has found particular success in high-performance, low-latency network settings, such as financial trading, by virtue of a design that emphasized extreme scale and extreme low port-to-port latency.

NetScout believes it can leverage this new capability to meet known, proven needs of new and existing customers across all industry sectors. Since many of its customers continue to seek aggregation switching, the new product allows NetScout to offer a more complete solution. It also puts NetScout in an advantaged position to adapt its solutions to customer needs during upgrades to higher speed networks, such as 10G Ethernet today and, in the future, 40G and 100G.

EMA Perspective

Simena took its name from a small Mediterranean seaside village on the Turkish coast dating back to the 4th century BC, known for its idyllic beauty and turquoise waters. While Simena LLC was also relatively small (those outside network engineering and operations are unlikely to have heard much of them) it was able to establish a significant presence in the high frequency financial trading sector and, in the process, mature its aggregation technology. To further the analogy, Simena products fit “idyllically” into NetScout's existing portfolio of offerings, representing both incremental revenue opportunities for the company as well as a simpler combined solution for network engineers seeking to establish a more streamlined monitoring architecture.

In the longer term, the addition of this technology into the NetScout portfolio represents another important hedge – that of flexibility. By owning the aggregation switch layer, NetScout will have more options for designing, deploying, and configuring solutions attuned more directly to the requirements of specific customer environments and priorities. The move also opens the door for additional NetScout solutions to be brought to bear, such as the nGenius Voice | Video Manager, without requiring additional access-layer planning, procurement, and deployment.

ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) views this as a strong and logical move by NetScout that brings immediate benefits both to the company as well as its customers. NetScout will continue to offer and work with other access layer solutions, but in a world of rising demand for multiple forms of network and security monitoring, advanced aggregation solutions, such as the nGenius 1500 series packet flow switch, are likely to experience continued and increasing popularity.

About EMA

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