Is SDN Ready for Mass Market Deployment?
Due: January 15, 2014

Are you getting ready to deploy SDN this year? The genesis of that question is that SDN has been one of the hottest topics in IT for the last eighteen months and hundreds of articles, reports and blogs have been written about it. After all that time and all those documents, it seems reasonable to think that 2014 will be the year of SDN. But, as we all know, sometimes things that seem reasonable to occur don't actually occur.

In the fall of 2012 I wrote a research report for Information Week[1] on SDN. As part of research I did for that report, in July 2012 I surveyed almost four hundred IT professionals. Some of the topics covered by that survey were the familiarity that enterprise IT organizations had with SDN and the plans that these organizations had relative to deploying SDN. Slightly over a third of the survey respondents indicated that they had no familiarity with SDN and roughly half of the survey respondents who indicated that they were familiar with SDN indicated that they were only somewhat familiar with it. Having such a large percentage of IT professionals little or no familiarity with SDN send a strong message that SDN would not be broadly deployed any time soon. However, in contrast to that particular survey result, of the survey respondents who were familiar with SDN, twenty one percent expected to have it in production within twelve months. Since roughly two thirds of the survey respondents had at least some familiarity with SDN, this meant that roughly fourteen percent of the total survey base anticipated having SDN in production within twelve months.

In the fall of 2013 I wrote an updated research report on Network Virtualization and sdn[2]. As part of the research that I did for that report, in August and September of 2013 I surveyed well over three hundred IT professionals. One dramatic change between the survey results in 2012 and the results in 2013 is that in 2013 the percentage of the survey respondents who had no familiarity with SDN had plummeted to the single digits. I took that as a clear indication that all of the articles, reports and blogs that had been written about SDN were having an impact. My enthusiasm, however, was dampened by the fact that well over two thirds of the 2013 survey respondents indicated that they were either only somewhat or moderately familiar with SDN.   So, all of the articles that had been written had indeed moved the level of understanding forward, but not by a lot.

What I also found interesting about the results of the 2013 survey is that only six percent of the respondents indicated that they had deployed SDN somewhere in their production network. That is significantly less than the fourteen percent who just a year earlier had predicted that they would have it in production within twelve months.   That is not terribly surprising as it is extremely common for IT organizations to be somewhat unrealistic about what they will be able to accomplish over the next year or two.

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[1] http://reports.informationweek.com/abstract/6/9576/data-center/research-sdn-deployment-plans-and-tech-ecosystem.html
[2] The 2013 Guide to Network Virtualization and SDN, Webtorials/Metzler

Getting back to how I started this blog, if you are planning on deploying SDN in 2014 you will be on the leading edge of SDN deployments. If in contrast, you plan to do nothing about SDN in 2014 you will be amongst a very small minority of IT organization. I say that because the recent survey results clearly indicate that 2014 will not be a big year relative to deploying SDN.   2014 will, however, be a big year relative to enterprise IT organization analyzing SDN offerings and conducing limited trials.