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AT&T's SDN network design winner launches as Waltz Networks with $8.15M in funding

April 20, 2016 | By Mike Dano

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Waltz Networks announced that it raised $6.75 million in Series A funding from New Enterprise Associates (NEA) and $1.4 million in National Science Foundation grants, bringing its total financial war chest to $8.15 million. The company is essentially a collection of Cornell University engineering students who recently won AT&T Labs' first-ever SDN Network Design Challenge.

In a release, Waltz Networks said its technology offers "innovative control schemes which enable intelligent, real-time network control that can be integrated seamlessly into any network. For businesses, the resulting competitive edge is unparalleled availability, higher bandwidth utilization and lower latency, all at considerably reduced operating costs."

"The explosive growth of dynamic network traffic means that current infrastructure is just unable to adapt and maintain good application performance," said Nithin Michael, Waltz's co-founder and CEO, in a release. Michael received his Ph.D. in electrical and computer engineering from Cornell University, and his dissertation at Cornell forms the basis of Waltz's core technology. "Our mission is to enable, for the first time, automatic and real-time network control that invisibly resolves issues before they ever affect end users."

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AT&T in March announced that Cornell University was its SDN Network Design Challenge winner. The Cornell team -- which included Kevin Tang, Waltz's CTO and co-founder -- was awarded $50,000 and a summer internship at AT&T Labs for up to two students.

AT&T is working to virtualize 75 percent of its network by 2020, and the company's SDN Network Design Challenge for universities was intended to "nurture the next-generation of innovators in software-defined networking. The challenge

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empowered academia to innovate at scale and work with a realistic, carrier-grade network."

However, neither AT&T nor Waltz offer much details about the startup's SDN technology. On its website, Waltz said it offers "breakthrough control schemes to enable networks of all sizes to be self-managing. For the first time, real-time control can be delivered seamlessly in any existing network for exponential improvements in resiliency and performance."

AT&T continues to make progress with its virtualization initiatives, particularly those related to the implementing open source software. John Donovan, chief strategy officer and group president for AT&T, said recently that the carrier not only doubled the amount of open source software it used in 2015, but it's on track to have 50 percent by the year 2020.

Further, AT&T said recently that it will migrate 80 percent of its applications into a private cloud by the end of the year.

AT&T's Network on Demand capability, being deployed as part of its User Defined Network Cloud (UDNC) strategy, launched in February 2014 and essentially stands as one of the first applications offered by AT&T through SDN technology. As of the end of 2015, AT&T said its Ethernet on demand service has attracted 275 customers.

For more:
- see this Waltz release
- see this AT&T post

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