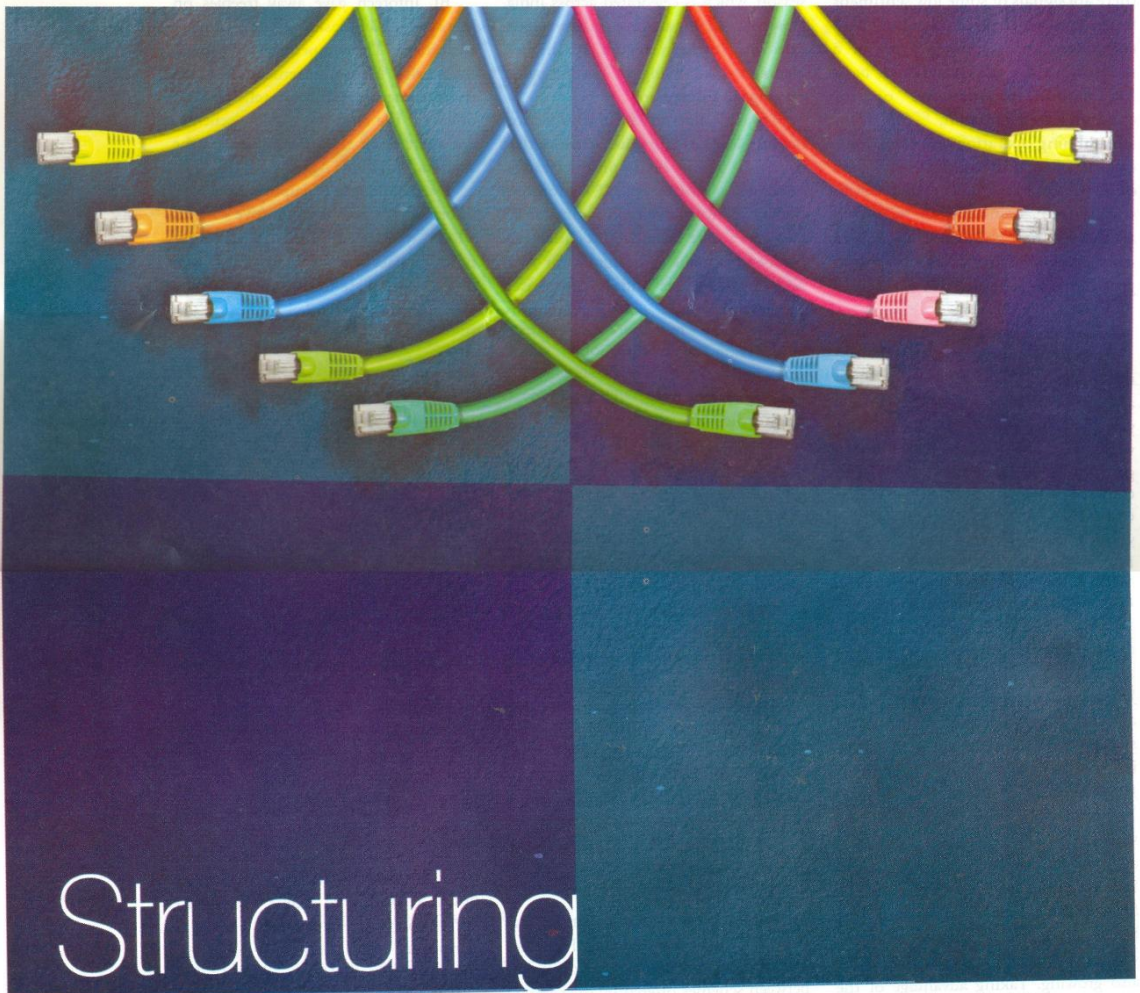


ECB Sales Guru

The growing deployment of IT solutions has increased the demand for structured cabling. Syeda Beenish and Pujya Trivedi find the latest trends and opportunities in the structured cabling market



Structuring the network

Structured cabling is perhaps that element of the infrastructure which does not need any upgradation for several years. Because of the long life of this network component, there is always a demand for cabling solutions.



The enterprises today are ready to make investments and deploy solutions to create a robust infrastructure.

According to Access Markets International (AMI) Partners, a US-based consultancy agency, the data-center structured cabling market in the Asia-Pacific region is the fastest growing with compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 46 per cent. The overall structured cabling market is expected to grow from \$127 million in 2005 to \$345 million in 2010 with CAGR of 22 per cent.

DS Nagendra, General Manager - LAN, Nexans Singapore finds the structured cabling industry growing by 22 to 25 per cent during the current fiscal. The estimated size of the market would be anywhere near Rs 1,200 crore, he states.

The sectors that are driving the structured cabling market include BPO, manufacturing, telecom, healthcare, retail, government and BFSI. "With the government, SEZs, and multinationals participating equally in infrastructure development, the cabling market will see an imperative growth despite the recent economic turmoil," says Prasanna Kumar, Regional Director - India & Saarc, Enterprise Solutions Division, CommScope.

"As the number of large networks increases, the market for intelligent cabling is going to grow," adds Neeraj Lijhara, National Channel Manager, ADC Krone.

Apart from this, as business goes global, there is a growing need to meet the international business standards to beat the competition in the market. As the demand for high bandwidth increases, spending on structured cabling is bound to pick up. Alamuri Sitaramaiah, GM, Sales, Fluke Networks, says, "Compliance with international

standards, ability to support future technologies with ease and smooth management of IT infrastructure are the key reasons why companies are spending on cabling." According to Debraj Dam, AVP-SCS Business, D-Link India, the government & PSUs and BFSI spend around 18-19 per cent on cabling, followed by manufacturing and SoHo segments with 11 per cent spending.

High on technology

Analysts point to an increased demand for new technologies and applications to drive the growing need for high bandwidth. "10G over copper is one of the focus points, while intelligent cabling is making its presence felt in large networks where efficient network management, fault detection and documentation are required," says Lijhara.

On the UTP side (unshielded twisted pair), Cat-6A is expected to gain momentum. There is a growing demand for high frequency use for copper products with fiber optics becoming popular in LAN/WAN fields.

Enterprises have realized advantages of intelligent patch panel solutions and PoE solutions. D-Link's Dam says, "Using the right cabling solution can provide high-end data transmission hand in hand with low-end application like voice."

The challenges involved

Key challenges that partners face are, firstly, the layout plans should incorporate the networking requirements during interior design of the building. Says ADC Krone's Lijhara, "If this is not done at an early stage, it becomes difficult and clumsy to incorporate networking designs later. There has to be proper co-ordination between vendors for different types of

equipment like floor designing air-cooling, electrification, etc. Key challenge is availability of proper documentation of the network."

To specialize in structured cabling, partner should be able to understand the technical requirements of the customer. Only if they can understand the requirements properly, can they suggest the proper solution.

Prasanna Kumar of CommScope comments, "Partners have to work closely with the vendor in understanding their marketing plans and strategies. This will help them adapt to dynamic changes that impact business. Showing commitment to services and products they represent, long-term plans, and growth strategies to reap the returns in due time are necessary."

Kumar mentions that the biggest challenge for a vendor or a partner is to educate the customers and varied decision-makers in the customer organization on newer and available technology solutions in cabling.

Lijhara says, "The partners should be able to understand why the company requires a network and what type of a load it will carry. Secondly, the partner should understand what will be the lifetime of the deployment. The customer should specify whether he intends to remain in the premises for a short or a long period of time."

Training efforts by vendors

Cabling is a complex deployment and not too many people know about the proper installation of the equipments. The complex nature of deployment of structured cabling compels the vendors to provide extensive training on their technologies and solutions.

Sudha Jagdish, COO, Dax Networks says, "We provide hands-on technical training programs on routing, cabling, switching. These programs are targeted at technical support executives in user organizations, system integrators, OEMs, and distributors. We offer them in combination with our newly introduced sales orientation program."

Similarly, ADC Krone conducts training programs, workshops for the partners to receive technical and managerial support. Lijhara says, "Since most of the problems result from faulty implementation, the partners are given

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continued to pg 30



continued from pg 27

detailed training in this field."

Fluke Networks helps its partners in verification, qualification, and certification of installed cabling systems. Sitaramaiah of Fluke says, "We provide training, tools and help partners keep abreast with the new technologies." Fluke Networks provides certified training programs to partners in testing, troubleshooting and certifying the performance of cabling systems. Fluke Networks CCTT program is one of the widely accepted programs by the industry.

About selling techniques, Nexans educates its partners from design level cabling, how to create bill of material and their focused approach to data centers. "We encourage partners to come with hybrid packaged solutions offering various combo to ensure better return on investment to the customers," says Nagendra.

The meticulous strategy that Nexans believes in, is to handhold partners in the form of training at various levels of installation to make them more confidently position the solutions. "We are launching Nexans Club program soon, forming a group of partners to redeem the points and avail major incentives," says Nagendra. He recalls that Nexans has bagged 80 customers to its account in the structured cabling space targeting the mid size customers to begin with installing around 2500 range nodes.

D-Link conducted road shows in 62 B&C class cities and seminars across the country. The event targeted resellers and customers, focusing on technologies like 10G and IPLMS solutions.

Likewise, ADC Krone conducted TrueNet program for its premium structured cabling products and awarded partners for their contribution towards company's growth. Last year company conducted seven city road show for partners, in an effort to ensure that all partners are adequately trained in structured cabling implementation. Lijhara says, "These programs allow ADC Krone to obtain valuable feedback from the partners."

Dax has trained more than 1,500 engineers across India. To give better understanding of technologies to partners, Dax trains through a concept



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GM, Sales, Fluke Networks

center which is equipped with high-end routers, switches and advanced cabling technologies where trainees get hands-on exposure to these networking technologies. At the end of the program, qualifying trainees are certified as Dax Certified Network Engineers (DCNE). Sudha says "We have a deep understanding of the networking requirements and challenges in Indian enterprises. We share this understanding and knowledge with our partner community through our technical training programs."

Apart from providing the training, vendors also have criteria for choosing the partners. Dax Networks only allow partners who have knowledge of networking and should be able to understand the new technologies.

Sitaramaiah says "Basic knowledge of networking is necessary, OEM certifications will only stand in good stead for the partners to communicate professionally with customers and also to enhance their professional reputation in the industry."

New avenues

Data center is a new market for structured cabling. A data center is planned in such a way that it can be upgraded without hassle. It has three areas where cabling is used: server-to-server connectivity, storage area, and backplane. All three interconnects require fast data transfer to manage multiple client requests. An emerging trend is the proliferation of Green Solutions in structured cabling. In this respect ADC Krone's AirES cable is innovation that uses air as an insulator thus significantly reducing the diameter of cables.

The opportunities in structured cabling are enormous. As Lijhara says,

"Any person who has more than one IP device is a potential customer. The market is directly proportional to the number of PCs sold." As far as the trends go, Nexans finds 10 G shielded cabling products and its Lanmark 7A category gaining popularity amongst healthcare and media customers.

Apart from the expanding market, there also are several opportunities as the market trends converge. As current market focuses on CAT-6 and CAT-6A, the current application requires more bandwidth, secured connectivity and high speed data rate.

Sudha says, "To meet the customers' requirement on performance, Cat-6 is the ideal solution. It satisfies the customers' demand with zero bit error-free performances and with 100 per cent assured performances. But as the customer requirements will grow newer technologies will make its way."

One of the evolving cabling requirements is the need for high bandwidth. Cat6A copper cabling systems, Cat7 cabling systems, and consolidated cabling systems are some of the newer technologies architecture that can support 10/100GB speeds. Some of the emerging technologies of structured cabling are physical layer management, fiber optics for backbone cabling and Cat 6A UTP solutions. Also a variety of green technologies are making its way as companies get environment conscious.

With widespread acceptance and deployment of IT in government, SOHO, cabling opportunities exist even in small and medium towns. As smart buildings in IT Parks and SEZs come up across the country with plug and play model, the structured cabling market is set to witness significant expansion from the deployment. ■

- With inputs from N GEETHA