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Accton to launch WLAN mesh products

By [John Cox](#), Network World, 05/30/05

[Accton Technology](#) last week introduced a line of wireless LAN mesh products in a move that could be a first step toward changing the way enterprise wireless LANs are deployed.

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Today, wireless LANs consist of access points that communicate with clients via a radio link, but are cabled to nearby Ethernet switches or WLAN controllers. In a wireless mesh, the access points can talk wirelessly to each other. That change eliminates the need for much of the cabling in conventional wireless LANs, so deployments are faster and less expensive. Mesh networks include auto-discovery and auto-authentication techniques, which let the networks configure themselves. The mesh nodes also create a more reliable network because

a packet can be routed around a failed wireless node. Finally, mesh WLANs can grow or scale efficiently: adding new nodes creates more paths for routing and balancing the wireless packet load.

Accton's mesh technology is, overall, similar to that offered by a flock of smaller companies, such as Strix and Firetide, which originally aimed at the enterprise indoor market, and BelAir and Tropos, which specialize in municipal outdoor networks. Nortel is one of the few big companies with an outdoor mesh node, but Cisco will introduce one soon, based on technology created by its Airespace acquisition.

But Accton, as a major contract manufacturer, will offer its mesh products to a range of brand-name network equipment vendors, including its own subsidiary SMC Networks. These vendors in turn will target large companies and small to midsize businesses, touting the benefits of a mesh in simplifying WLAN deployment and operations.

Accton designs and builds switching gear, WLAN access points, asymmetric DSL modems and other equipment for high-tech brand names. Accton doesn't release its customer names, but according to THT Research, a company that covers the contract manufacturing industry, those customers include Dell, Belkin, Nortel, Foundry Networks and many others.

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Accton's mesh capability, dubbed Wireless Intelligent Transport Network (WITnet), will appear first in an indoor mesh node, shipping in August, and in an outdoor node later this year. Both products will incorporate two standard radios, one for 802.11a, and one for 802.11g/b wireless connectivity. The nodes can be set up to use either radio for connecting with local WLAN clients, or with neighboring nodes to create a wireless backhaul that eliminates the need for Category 5 connections.

The WITnet architecture is the fruit of two years of work, on which Accton has filed for three patents, relating to security, routing and traffic engineering, according to Ted Kuo, the company's vice president for advanced development.

Accton's mesh announcement comes on the eve of the next development in the IEEE 802.11s task group, which is charged with hammering out a standard for WLAN mesh. Accton has been actively involved in the group since its launch in early 2004, Kuo says. The group has issued a call for proposals, and the deadline for submitting them is mid-June.

"The original 802.11 standard only defined how a client 'station' talked to a [wireless] access point, not how the access points could talk with each other over the air," Kuo says. "The 11s standard will address this: Access points will become interconnected, without depending on the wired net."

Accton didn't release pricing details, but says final WLAN mesh products sold by a brand-name vendor could be up to 50% more expensive than comparable, conventional, dual-radio access points.

PROFILE: ACCTON TECHNOLOGY CORP.

Location: Hisinchu, Taiwan (U.S. offices: Sunnyvale, Calif.)

Founded: 1988

CEO: A.J. Huang; with Accton since 1984 in various roles including vice president of sales. Previously, he worked with defunct Wang Laboratories, and with Taiwan Telephone and Telegram Bureau.

Business: Accton is one of the world's largest contract designers and manufacturers of networking and communications equipment; it builds products ranging from ADSL modems and set-top boxes, to WLAN access points, Layer 2/3/4 switches, blade servers, and VoIP equipment based on its own, or a customer's, designs. SMC Networks is a wholly owned subsidiary acquired in the late 1990s.

Customers: Yahoo Japan, Microsoft, Dell, Nortel, Philips, HP, Belkin

Finances: Reported 2004 net sales of about \$591 million and a net loss before taxes of about \$17.4 million. The company is publicly traded on the Taiwan stock exchange.

SOURCE: ACCTON TECHNOLOGY TAIWAN; THT RESEARCH

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