OneWiFi launches 5G neutral host small cell platform

Public wi-fi specialist OneWiFi & Infrastructure has launched a 5G Neutral Host Platform offering in-building coverage and outdoor small cell solutions for mobile operators. The platform is based on OpenRAN/vRAN infrastructure which the company said costs 30% less than distributed antenna systems for supporting both 4G and 5G. "In the outdoor small cell environment, the cost savings and benefits are even higher," said OneWiFi managing director Mevan Jayatilleke. "The platform is designed to support the consolidation and harmonisation of mobile infrastructure with the environment, at street level and in-building, reducing clutter, whilst delivering high capacity 5G services."

He added the supporting platform includes all RAN components. "Our Neutral Host Platform supports all 3GPP frequency bands up to 3.5GHz and our technology roadmap provides we will soon have the capability to support the soon to be auctioned 26GHz band as well as future mmWave bands."

It's early days for in-building 5G coverage and in some markets like the US - where enterprise stakeholders can use 3.5GHz CBRS spectrum for private networks - and Germany, building owners and some large enterprises are seeing neutral hosting as an opportunity to bypass mobile operators by deploying their own O-RAN equipment.

To date, Australian mobile operators have only trialled OpenRAN systems with none committing to rolling out RANs based on the technology. However, Vodafone Group is actively pursuing OpenRAN in other countries and TPG is trialling systems in Singapore with partner Rakuten Mobile.

Jayatilleke said there is still something here for mobile operators. "At the moment we provide network augmentation solutions for the MNOs. Network services for multiple mobile operators can be provided with reduced time-to-market and complexity under a unified platform, compared to current deployments," he said. "The time to embrace 5G Neutral Host Platform is now, as the requirements of mmWave in the future will be even more challenging under the current model."

"Globally the largest mobile operators in the world are members of the O-RAN Alliance; we can clearly see the O-RAN model compelling and applicable in Australia, especially in supporting lower costs for 5G rollout and in enabling interoperability between equipment from different vendors," he added.

Sydney-based OneWiFi has partnered with O-RAN vendor Mavenir to deliver the new platform. "Given Mavenir is a leader in O-RAN, we have decided to, and are currently using Mavenir in the core (virtual) and RAN, which are fully 3GPP compliant," Jayatilleke told CommsDay. "O-RAN provides a logical upgrade path for mobile operators when they are ready to deploy the feature set."

NEW EXECS BOOST TELCO CREDENTIALS: As part of its commitment to making an impact in mobile network infrastructure, OneWiFi has bolstered its telco management experience. Roger Hawke, ex-CEO of telecommunications tower company Axicom, joined the board as non-executive director. In addition, Neil Robinson, formerly director of mobile network planning at Singtel Optus and Dean Karena, formerly a director at Urbis, will lead the mobile network technology and deployment functions respectively.

"Our Neutral Host offering is based on OpenRAN and vRAN principles and technologies. We chose to do this as these concepts are an embodiment of the future, towards which, the industry is being driven globally," said Neil Robinson. "The ORAN Alliance includes the world's biggest network vendors and operators. The advancement of technologies such as virtualisation and network intelligence, combined with feature development based on open interface standards, created through collaborative development, all lead to a more robust and competitive environment, supporting 5G solutions that are flexible, customisable, and available at greatly reduced cost compared to current offerings."

Karena added: "Deployment costs for 5G are cited as a barrier to extensive network densification and rightfully so. 5G will be important to social and economic development, but it can also be cost effective and a more visually acceptable form under a neutral host model, such as OneWiFi's."

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