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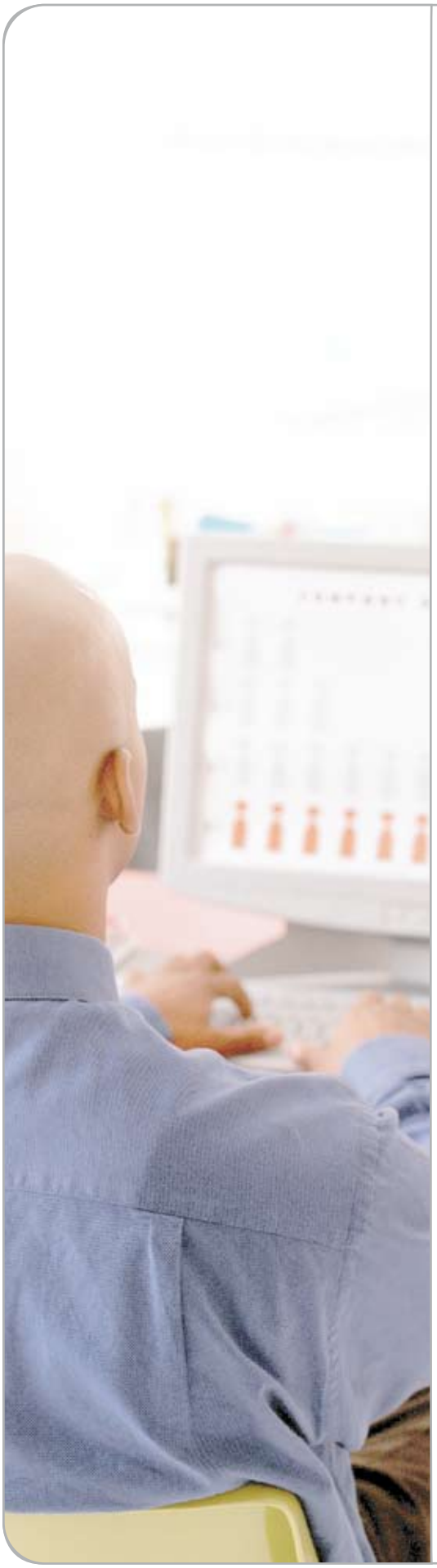

Planning for 10Gbps Ethernet over UTP

Questions to Ask When Planning the Cabling Plant

ADC KRONE

Planning a copper cabling plant to support 10Gbps transmission is complicated today by the absence of ratified standards. There are, however, some questions you can ask that can help navigate promises and claims in the market place and, ultimately, help you select the proper infrastructure to support future 10Gbps UTP applications.

Do you really need a cabling plant that can support 10Gbps Ethernet over UTP?

Historically speaking, cabling installed has always led the primary data rate. For example, over 90% of switch port sales in 1995 were for the 10Mbps Ethernet protocol. Yet in that same year, the primary UTP cabling installed was the 100Mbps Category 5, accounting for nearly 70% of UTP installed market share.

Similarly in 2001, about 70% of switch port sales were for 100Mbps. In the same year, Category 5e and Category 6, which both support 1000Mbps, accounted for over 80% of UTP cabling installed.

Of course, the next logical step in the data rate is another tenfold increase to 10Gbps. With 10Gbps copper transceivers in development today and expected to market in 2008, the cabling plant must be able to handle the new protocol.

Can Category 6 cabling support 10Gbps Ethernet over UTP?

Actually, Category 6 cabling can support 10Gbps transmission – but only to 35 metres, per TIA TR42.7, Cat 6–TSB155. However, this is a costly proposition. The added construction costs for more telecom rooms to accommodate 35 metres (vs. the standard 100 metres) are nominal compared to the added costs of purchasing additional Ethernet switches and other active equipment for each additional telecom room to support data, VoIP or other applications.

What draft standards are important?

Clearly, a 10Gbps UTP cabling solution should support the full 100 metres. From a standards perspective, TIA 568 B.2 Addendum 10 is the more advanced view to support 10Gbps transmission over UTP at 100 metres. Look for compliance with this standard as you shop for a solution. The draft standards also require full interoperability and backwards compatibility.

What about shielded solutions?

Space, time and cost constraints were the drivers that led to the development of UTP cabling in lieu of shielded twisted pair (STP) solutions. Those reasons are still prevalent today. Still there are manufacturers that do not yet have a UTP solution and are promoting STP shielded solutions for 10Gbps transmission over copper. However, shielded cabling typically requires more space in racks, cabinets, and raceways. Furthermore, grounding and bonding is a concern for shielded cable installations. Time to train and whether or not to ground at the station and the floor distributor varies geographically and by whom you ask. Shielded cable construction will continue to be more costly than UTP cable construction, as well as more expensive to install. In fact, a recent ADC KRONE study concluded that an STP network would typically cost 50% more than a UTP network.

Without TIA/EIA standards in place, what are good decision criteria for selecting a 10Gbps solution for UTP?

The cabling industry – TIA/EIA, does not drive the electrical parameters needed to run transmission protocols. It is the IEEE that develops proposed protocols, understands what is needed from an electrical perspective, and then gives TIA/EIA responsibility for developing measurable parameters for the cable and connectors.

When in doubt, follow the IEEE lead.

The IEEE 802.3an Committee was formed to discuss how best to approach running 10Gbps transmission over a copper infrastructure. This group is composed of representatives from chip manufacturers, switch manufacturers, and cabling and connectivity manufacturers. The IEEE has decided that 500 MHz is the bandwidth for 10 GBE transmission.

A key measurement established by this IEEE study group is Shannon's Capacity. Shannon's Capacity is a measure of how efficiently a cable can transmit data at different rates, expressed in bits per second. The IEEE 802.3an Committee concluded that achieving 10Gbps transmission at 100 metres requires at least 18Gbps from the cabling solution. The additional capacity is required to compensate for active hardware noise parameters such as jitter and quantisation. Realising that the cabling plant is designed to support the requirements of active electronics, a Shannon's Capacity of at least 18Gbps is a good measure to consider when evaluating 10Gbps UTP solutions. ADC KRONE's CopperTen™ 10Gbps UTP solution demonstrated 21Gbps over 100 metres for the IEEE 802.3 Study Group in August 2003, easily exceeding the Shannon's Capacity minimum requirement of 18Gbps for all pair combinations. Today, CopperTen has achieved greater than 31 Gbps over 100 metres, offering more than enough additional throughput to handle noise induced by active electronics.

Have vendors had a tough time achieving 10Gbps over UTP at 100 metres?

Yes. In August 2003, the IEEE 802.3an Committee had seen no vendor UTP solution that could deliver 18Gbps over UTP at 100 metres. In fact, the apparent lack of vendor solutions led the IEEE Committee to three possible recommendations: lower the data rate to 2.5Gbps for Category 6 UTP; reduce the length of the supported channel to 55 metres from the industry standard 100

metres for Category 6 UTP; and use shielded solutions and abandon UTP as a transport medium for 10Gbps over copper.

ADC KRONE took on the challenge and returned to the IEEE 802.3 Committee just weeks later to demonstrate CopperTen, the first augmented Category 6 cable capable of transmitting at least 18Gbps over 100 metres. After this demonstration, the IEEE 802.3 Committee voted 64 to 0 to move forward with a 10Gbps solution over UTP at 100 metres.

What is the biggest challenge to achieving a minimum of 18Gbps over UTP?

For Category 5e and Category 6 solutions, the pair-to-pair relationship is paramount to making good cable. While these electrical characteristics remain important, taming alien crosstalk remains the toughest hurdle for any 10Gbps UTP solution at 100 metres.

Alien crosstalk is the noise heard on a pair within a cable that is generated by another cable directly adjacent to it. Manufacturers of active equipment do not like random events such as alien crosstalk. While noise between pairs within a cable can be predicted and eliminated within the active hardware, unpredictable alien crosstalk cannot.

Crosstalk between pairs in a single UTP cable is often cancelled out by varying the twist rate between different pairs and increasing the distance between pairs. The often-used star filler of Category 6 cable creates separation by pushing pairs within the cable as close to the jacket as possible. While this design reduces crosstalk between pairs within the same cable, it leaves some pair combinations between cables in the bundle susceptible to high levels of crosstalk. This problem is magnified at the higher frequencies up to 500 MHz for 10Gbps transmission.

Instead of using the typical star filler, ADC KRONE's CopperTen™ uses an elliptical offset star filler that achieves a high degree of separation between pairs in adjacent cables in a bundle. The shape of the elongated star filler results in an oblique shape for each cable. Bundled cables now have sufficient separation between same lay length pairs to prevent alien crosstalk. In a bundle, the random separation of cables keeps cable pairs of the same twist rate within different cables at a greater distance from one another, reducing alien crosstalk. Because alien crosstalk presents the steepest challenge to 10Gbps over UTP, insist on seeing test results for the 6-around-1 cable configuration.

How should warranty promises be evaluated?

Until TIA/EIA 568B.2-10 is ratified, it is impossible for any vendor to guarantee full compliance to a standard that does not yet exist. Until standards are established, it is more important for a 10Gbps UTP solution to meet the throughput and capacity requirements established by the electronics industry – Shannon's Capacity of 18Gbps. As the standards evolve, manufacturers will continually tweak individual parameters such as NEXT and return loss, as we saw with Category 5e and Category 6. Still, the only hard design number for 10Gbps over UTP todays 18Gbps throughput as defined by IEEE.

ADC KRONE offers a warranty that backs 18Gbps channel capacity and supports the current draft of TIA/EIA 568B.2 Addendum 10.

Is cable diameter an issue with 10Gbps UTP solutions?

Larger cable diameters can affect not only density but also ease of installation and maintenance. To achieve the requirements of draft standards for 10Gbps transmission over UTP, some manufacturers today have 10Gbps UTP cable with outside diameters (OD) ranging from 8mm to 8.5mm – rather large in comparison to the nominal size for conduit fill of 7.5mm for the plenum CopperTen, which has a varying OD from 7mm to 8mm due to its elliptical shape.

Outside diameter is also a consideration for patch cords. ADC KRONE's CopperTen patch cord cable has an OD of 7.6mm, which is dramatically smaller when compared to the OD of the competitive cable which range from 8mm to 8.5mm.

While these differences seem small, they become significant installation and maintenance issues, especially in dense applications.

Are patch cords changing for 10Gbps transmission?

There is one change to look for when evaluating patch cords for use in a 10Gbps channel – stranded vs. solid wire. Some products have moved to solid wire patch cords to achieve 10Gbps performance. Yet solid wire patch cords present concerns. Patch cords that employ solid wire sacrifice flexibility and bend radii mechanics because solid wire is not as forgiving and easy to install or manage as stranded wire. Solid wire patch cord conductors are more prone to breakage when repeatedly flexed during normal lifetime usage.

In addition, solid wire patch cords often have reliability issues due to the difficultly of crimping RJ45 plugs on solid wire. As compared to stranded wire patch cords, solid wire patch cords also place unnecessary stress upon the connectors in NICs, patch panels and switches, because of their uncompromising stature.

It is evident that 10Gbps transmission over a copper cabling plant will soon become the common design specification. While lack of published standards today present some risk in the decision making process, other factors offer guidance when choosing cable, plugs and

connectors to support future 10Gbps applications Choosing a solution of the highest quality offers immediate evidence of superior performance. Solutions that can guarantee Shannon's Capacity of 18Gbps at 100 metres offer the best assurance that the channel will support 10Gbps transmission when standards are ratified next year.

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www.adckrone.com/au
AUSTRALIA 2 Hereford Street, Berkeley Vale NSW 2261
Mailing Address: PO Box 335, Wyong NSW 2259, Australia
TECH SUPPORT 1800 801 298 helpdesk.au@adckrone.com

www.adckrone.com/nz
NEW ZEALAND 2 Nevis Street, Petone, Wellington
Mailing Address: PO Box 38-177, Wellington Mail Centre 6008, New Zealand

ADC Telecommunications, Inc., P.O. Box 1101, Minneapolis, Minnesota USA 55440-1101