

QLogic Bets on InfiniBand

By acquiring PathScale, QLogic has placed a \$109 million bet that InfiniBand can move beyond high-performance computing deeper into the data center. (See [QLogic to Buy PathScale](#).)

“InfiniBand has the potential to penetrate the enterprise data center,” QLogic CEO H.K. Desai said Wednesday night after announcing the deal. “We’re targeting this technology for the future to see if we can drive into the enterprise data center.”

Startup PathScale sells host channel adapters (HCAs), which are the InfiniBand equivalent of the Fibre Channel host bus adapters (HBAs) that make up most of QLogic’s business. But while HBAs connect servers to external storage, HCAs connect servers to servers.

Indeed, QLogic doesn't intend to use InfiniBand as a SAN technology, despite the fact that other companies are doing so. “We don’t expect to have InfiniBand technology in storage,” Desai admitted. “Storage already has Fibre Channel technology and iSCSI technology. I think there’s enough technology there, and I don’t think we expect InfiniBand to penetrate storage. At least, not in the near future.”

QLogic isn’t the only company that sees the scope of InfiniBand widening. While it gained a foothold in high performance computing (HPC) because of its high speed and low latency, InfiniBand has grown beyond its established base in universities, research labs, and federal agencies -- and developers see its potential in other markets. Cisco acquired InfiniBand startup Topspin for \$250 million last April and considers the technology a major piece of its virtualization push. (See [Cisco Topspins Into Virtualization](#) and [SonicWall Joins VOIPSA](#).)

PathScale is the second acquisition in four months to bring QLogic technology outside of its core HBA business. It continues a trend toward branching out into areas QLogic execs deem emerging technologies. QLogic paid \$36.5 million for intelligent switch startup Troika Networks in October to move into storage virtualization. (See [QLogic Picks Up Troika](#).)

But in PathScale, QLogic is acquiring a relative newcomer to InfiniBand. Desai noted that PathScale has OEM deals with server companies for its HCAs, but they won’t hit the market until the second half of the year.

PathScale's main competitor is Mellanox, which provides most of the InfiniBand vendors

with chips for HCAs. However, Mellanox uses standard PCI Express and PCI-X cards while PathScale uses proprietary ASICs on its HCA motherboard. Also, Mellanox has double data rate (DDR) chips that support 20-Gbit/s bandwidth while PathScale is still at 10 Gbit/s.

According to Desai, PathScale's technology can support PCI-X and PCI Express, although he did not mention whether or not QLogic would go that way. He expects QLogic's OEM relationship with leading server vendors Dell, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, and Sun to bring its InfiniBand HCAs to market.

Desai won't divulge how many employees Mountain View, Calif.-based PathScale has -- or QLogic's plans for integrating them -- until the deal closes in April. He does intend to keep its key engineers, though.

"In the past, we've acquired four or five companies and we haven't lost a key engineer or key employee in any of the acquisitions," he said. "Not even a one."

Since its founding in 2001, PathScale has raised \$29 million in three funding rounds, with \$15 million in its third round in May 2004.

— Dave Raffo, Senior Editor, [*Byte and Switch*](#)