

Looking beyond smartphones; Qualcomm launches new tech for 5G network gear

October 21 2020, by Mike Freeman



Qualcomm is best known for making processors that power the cellular connection in smartphones. But with the emergence of faster 5G technologies, the company now plans to broaden its reach with a new lineup of chips and software for 5G network gear.

At its 5G Summit event on Tuesday, Qualcomm announced that it would offer technologies for virtualized and interoperable [network](#)

architectures that are expected to take hold with the continued rollout of 5G.

While Qualcomm used to build network gear, it sold that business years ago to focus on [mobile devices](#). Today, European firms Ericsson and Nokia, as well as Huawei and other Chinese firms, are the top makers of wireless infrastructure equipment installed at [base stations](#) and elsewhere in the network. No American companies are prominent players, which has been a sore spot for some U.S. officials.

With 5G, however, new types of network designs are popping up, including some that use cloud-based software virtualization and modular network gear with open, interoperable interfaces rather than standalone, proprietary designs.

These new network architectures are where Qualcomm hopes to make inroads with its lineup of Radio Access Network chips and software, selling to existing mobile network firms as well as potentially new players entering the market.

This summer, for example, Rakuten Mobile built a greenfield 4G network in Japan based on software virtualization with the help of Qualcomm.

Qualcomm's 5G infrastructure platforms are expected to be available for sampling by network engineers in 2022.

"Our 5G expertise and global technology leadership uniquely positions Qualcomm Technologies to provide a comprehensive horizontal infrastructure platform to enable the deployment of innovative, high-performance, virtualized, and modular 5G networks at scale," said Cristiano Amon, president of Qualcomm. "We are working closely with mobile operators, network equipment vendors, standards bodies and

other key stakeholders to make the deployments of these networks a reality."

Amon said 90 cellular operators in 40 countries have launched 5G networks, with more than 300 others investing in the technology. The company predicts that there will be 750 million 5G cellular devices by the end of 2022, swelling to 3 billion by 2025.

About a dozen [mobile operators](#) globally supported Qualcomm's efforts to supply chips and software for emerging 5G network architectures, including AT&T, Telefonica, Vodafone, Softbank and Deutsche Telekom.

"Verizon has been at the forefront of developing a differentiated 5G network that will serve as the foundation for the 21st-century infrastructure that will shape the future," said Kyle Malady, [chief technical officer](#) for Verizon, in a statement. "Virtualization plays a key role in our new architecture, and we are very pleased to see Qualcomm Technologies step into this space."

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