

**A CONVERSATION WITH
NABIL BUKHARI
OF EXTREME NETWORKS**

How to redefine enterprise
value beyond networking
in the age of AI

Part 1 - Understanding Platforms

Interviewed by
Sanjay Verma and Yale Kwon

As the software-as-a-service (SaaS) industry wrestles with slow growth and declining profitability, one company stands out for turning platform innovation into enterprise value:

Extreme Networks.

Although many technology players focus on incremental improvements, Extreme Networks has bet big on business model transformation anchored by artificial intelligence (AI) and a unified platform strategy. Through its Extreme Platform ONE, it is not only redefining networking, security, and software delivery; it's also reshaping the ways value gets created and scaled across an enterprise. We sat down with Extreme Networks' Nabil Bukhari, Chief Technology and Product Officer and General Manager, Subscription Business, to explore the vision behind Extreme Platform ONE, the evolution of secure connectivity, and why open, AI-powered platforms—not stand-alone applications—will define the next wave of enterprise value creation. It's a bold vision; not all companies will agree with it or want to follow it, but all will have to deal with the underlying forces Nabil cites. This is an edited version of the conversation.

The industry doesn't suffer from lack of technology; it suffers from a structural problem consisting of too many disconnected tools, too much operational fragmentation, and too little delivered customer value. Extreme Platform ONE was purpose-built to meet that challenge by unifying networking, security, and AI into a single, cohesive platform that breaks down silos, streamlines operations, and drives measurable enterprise impact.



Nabil Bukhari

Chief Technology and Product Officer and
General Manager, Subscription Business

Extreme Networks

What was the genesis of Extreme Platform ONE?

Even though Extreme Networks' subscription business had grown consistently in the past three or four years and has become more than a quarter of our business, it was time for a change. Platform ONE is our new software-as-a-service model that is going to be not only the future of the *company* but also a model for the future of the *industry*.

When we started this work, people didn't think about platforms in the network security business. If you said 'platform,' people thought of Amazon Web Services or Azure—commercial platforms that hosted services that in turn sold to end users.

The idea of creating a platform for network services—networking, security, and analytics—was based on three things.

1 Customer value

The realization that security services were becoming pervasive, affecting every aspect of a company's infrastructure—from payments to payroll—and there was value in connecting them.

2 Connectivity

Connectivity itself could become the primary mechanism for delivering value to customers, improving their experience, and enabling them to do new things for themselves and their customers.

3 Secure connectivity

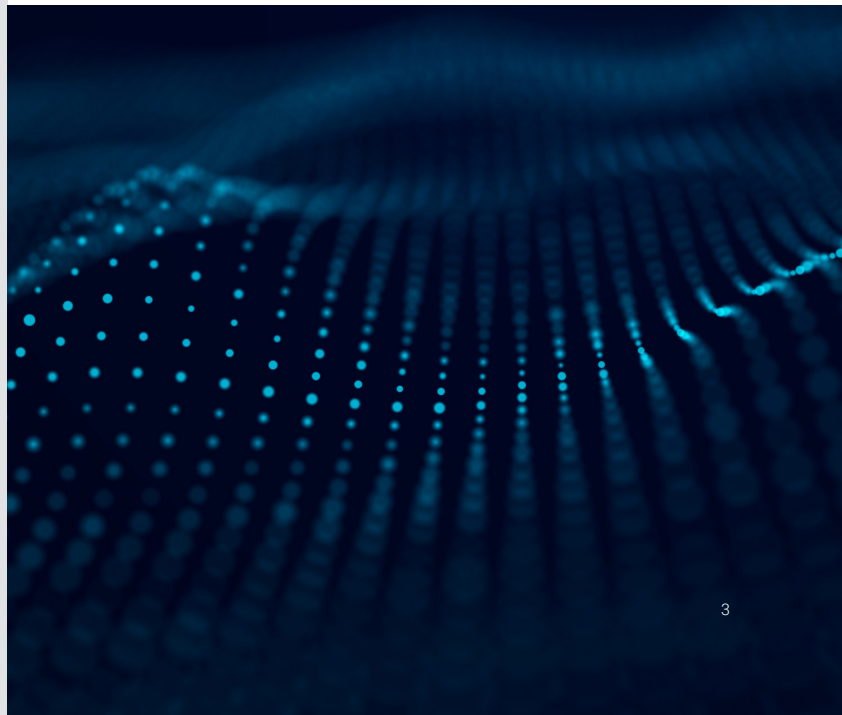
It's not just connectivity; it's connectivity plus something else—like security. Security and connectivity were becoming solidly interconnected.

Customer value, connectivity, security: If you put those things together, you realize that it no longer makes sense to think of different networks separately—like data center networks, branch networks, and so on. You have to think of them as one network that goes anywhere to connect people, applications, devices, and data and then to provide security along all of those connections. We started thinking of connectivity as an organic thing. It's like watching algae grow in a petri dish in biology class: At first, you see little islands—separate networks—and then suddenly it's growing everywhere. It becomes pervasive. That's what connectivity must be: not separate places in a network; it's all one network.

Also, if connectivity is pervasive, there should be one place to design and manage and deploy and troubleshoot and analyze it—not a lot of different applications in different locations. As we developed Platform ONE, we asked,

"Why can't we do these things in one place?"

That was the genesis of Platform ONE: The idea that a client should be able to go to just one place to find all the capabilities required to provide connectivity, secure it, and enable it to deliver value. Platforms are places where you're not thinking about applications; you're thinking about capabilities and deliverables. And platforms are the places where all the capabilities are present in that platform.



How does this create value for your customers?

Our customers get value in three ways:



We **simplify** the options and choices in front of them



We become **easy** to use



We help them quickly create **value** for their own customers

If we take away their pain and give them value quickly, they will pay for that. Think of Apple in the consumer world. I started with the Mac, because I used Mac back in school. Then they came out with the iPhone. And then my iPhone and my Mac started working together, and I thought,

“This is really easy.”

Then, every time they bring out a new thing, it's not necessarily the best in the world—and it's never the cheapest. But it simply works, and it works with the other things that I already have, so that everything I buy makes each other thing more valuable. When I put them together, I can do things I couldn't do if I had unconnected devices.

It's not the quality. It's not the price. It's the connection and simplicity. I'm willing to pay for that—and that consumer behavior is what is coming into enterprises. The shift to a platform-based, AI-enabled solution simplifies both deployment and management, thereby increasing customer value.

How do you see platforms changing the way the SaaS industry operates?

It's going to be the future of the industry because it also changes the economics of the industry.

The whole age of best-of-breed is over. Until recently, a corporate customer would assemble best-of-breed applications from dozens of companies, write its own management layer, and hire a couple of hundred people to manage and coordinate the applications. Those days are absolutely over.

Any company that says, “We're going to build a point product that will be the best in that point product,” has no future.

That may sound blunt, but I believe it's true. There are a lot of great applications and a lot of great SaaS companies, but they will become absorbed onto platforms or disappear. In the world of networking, security, and analytics, we'll end up with two or three major platforms, not tens of thousands of applications like we have today.

Can you say more about how standalone SaaS companies face a threat?

There are two big reasons why standalone SaaS companies will disappear in the face of AI-driven platforms: platforms create more value for customers—and more value for us, the seller.

Start with the customer. Customers benefit from a kind of network effect: The more you have on the platform, the more value you can get. It's like with Apple products. If you use one, you are likely to use all the others.

That happens with Platform One. When all of a client's networks are on the same platform, there's seamless connection between one and the other. You can set up one set of security policies and roll them out to everyone instantly. You can bring in data from different parts of the network and analyze it together. You can find and fix problems faster. The dozens of people you used to employ to coordinate your networks?—You don't need them. Response to a cybersecurity threat?—You can roll it out enterprise-wide much faster. So the customer gets more value.

But we get more value, too. When you have a platform, you can sell anything on it to your current customers, so it becomes much easier and less expensive to find customers for a new application or service. With a platform, you can easily recruit customers to test new offerings. Licensing is a snap. Think about it: If you develop great best-of-breed applications—the best in the world—you start with a customer base of essentially zero. But if you put that application on a platform, half the work of finding customers is already done. You can increase average revenue per account without raising prices—which is a win for customers, too. And you get lock-in: Customers are less likely to leave. This means that we, on a platform, can charge less for each new application—a lot less—than a standalone best-of-breed application, while still retaining profitability.

The only way for a new product to win in this situation—even if it's a highly innovative breakthrough—is to align with a platform. The days of creating a SaaS application and then having millions of users on it are gone.

Disclaimer: This article is based on an interview conducted by AlixPartners. The content is intended solely for knowledge insight purposes and does not constitute an endorsement or promotion of any specific products or services.

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ABOUT US

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These are the moments when everything is on the line—a sudden shift in the market, an unexpected performance decline, a time-sensitive deal, a fork-in-the-road decision. But it's not what we do that makes a difference, it's how we do it.

Tackling situations when time is of the essence is part of our DNA—so we adopt an action-oriented approach at all times. We work in small, highly qualified teams with specific industry and functional expertise, and we operate at pace, moving quickly from analysis to implementation. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our clients until the job is done, and only measure our success in terms of the results we deliver.

Our approach enables us to help our clients confront and overcome truly future-defining challenges. We partner with you to make the right decisions and take the right actions. And we are right by your side. When it really matters.

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