

Selection Guide for Low-Loss Passive Optical Networks for Data Center Interconnects



Overview

Optical Interconnect Technology Analysis: LPO, NPO, CPO Exploring optical interconnects for AI data centers: LPO for low-power, short-distance links, NPO for high-power, long-distance links, CPO for high-power, short-distance links.

Key Takeaways

Low-loss Passive Optical Networks (PONs) offer scalable, energy-efficient, and space-saving solutions for data center interconnects, ideal for high-density and multi-tenant environments. Key Considerations for PON Selection in DCIs



1. **Optical Loss and Power Budget** When designing PONs for data centers, minimizing optical loss is critical. Losses occur at fiber splices, connectors, and splitters. Structured cabling with hierarchical distribution—connecting Optical Line Terminals (OLTs) to splitters and Optical Network Terminals (ONTs)—helps reduce insertion loss and maintain predictable power budgets across the network. Proper calculation of the PON power budget ensures that signal strength remains sufficient for all endpoints, even in high-density deployments.

2. **Structured Cabling and Fiber Management** Structured cabling standards (TIA-568/569, ISO/IEC 11801) are recommended over point-to-point cabling to improve flexibility, scalability, and maintainability. Use distribution areas and zone-based cabling to simplify future upgrades and reduce congestion. Fiber management tools, such as patch panels and organized routing, help minimize bend losses and maintain low insertion loss.

3. **Technology Choice and Reach** For intra-data center links, PONs can replace traditional copper or active optical solutions, offering low power consumption and reduced space requirements. PONs are particularly effective for out-of-band management (DCOM) and multi-tenant environments, where shared infrastructure and modular scaling are advantageous. For longer interconnects, coherent pluggable optics or AOCs may complement PONs, especially when distances exceed tens of meters or EMI immunity is required.

4. **Scalability and Modularity** Select PON solutions that allow modular expansion without overprovisioning. This reduces wasted fiber and energy consumption while enabling incremental growth as data center demands increase. Shared infrastructure usage maximizes efficiency in multi-tenant or high-density racks.

5. **Energy Efficiency and Sustainability** PONs consume less power than active optical or copper solutions, reducing cooling requirements and environmental footprint. Low-loss designs further enhance energy efficiency by minimizing the need for optical amplification or signal regeneration.

6. **Integration with Data Center Operations** Modern PONs support advanced telemetry and remote management, enabling smarter monitoring, troubleshooting, and lifecycle management of servers and network devices. This is particularly valuable for AI-driven or cloud-scale data centers where operational efficiency is critical.

7. **Comparison with Other Interconnects**

- **Direct Attach Copper (DAC):** Best for ultra-short links (

Article Content

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Passive optical devices, characterized by low cost, zero energy consumption, and high reliability, are essential building

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