UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

uvNIC: Rapidily Prototyping Network Devices

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Network hardware isn't what it used to be

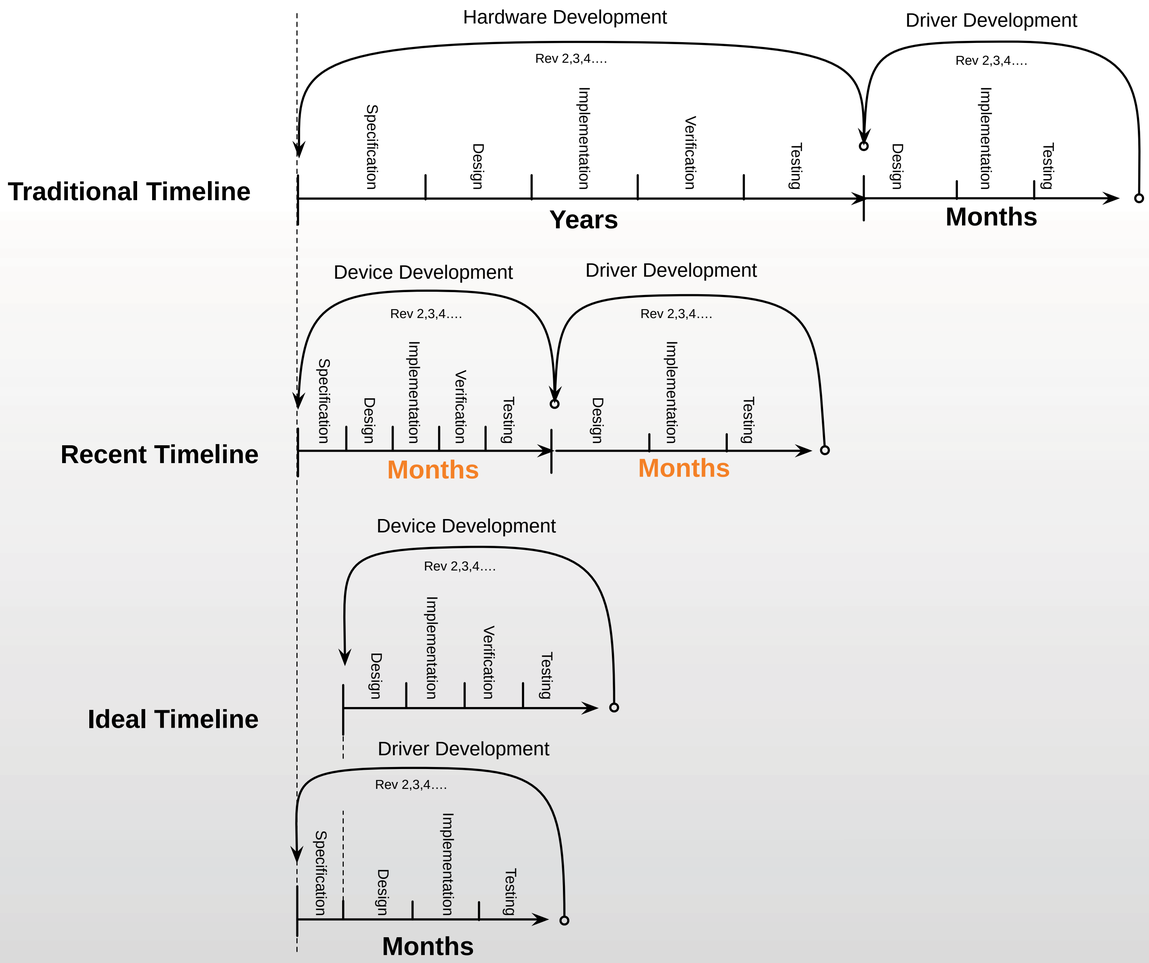
Traditional network interface controllers (NICs) underwent hardware interface revisions over a timespan of years. New programable fabric network cards can be reimplemented in months or even weeks.

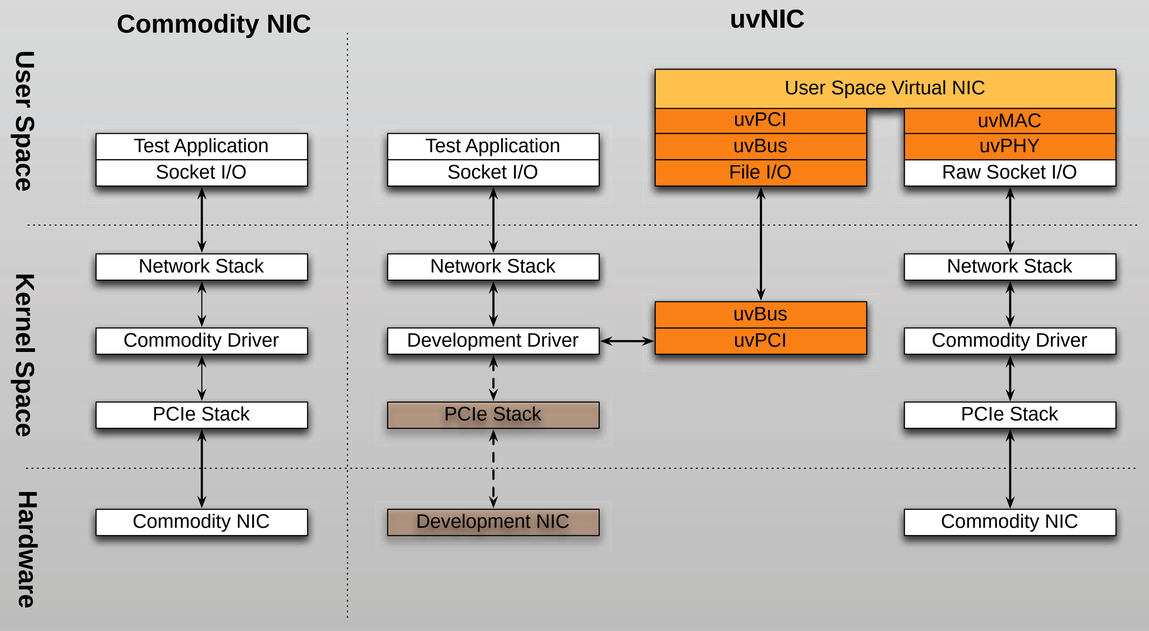
Driver developers can't keep up

Driver development does not usually begin until hardware is available to test against, but hardware can now be developed so quickly that driver development must take place simultaneously with hardware development.

What if driver developers could write the hardware?

To the driver developer we could present the functional equivalent of a physical device. To the hardware designer we could present a fully functional model against which the hardware can be tested and verified.





uvNIC: Making software look like hardware.

The user space virtual NIC is a standalone, userspace software application which is developed as a functional specification of a new NIC that is under development.

Key to uvNIC is the ability to augment an existing network interface card with new features and then write a functional device driver for the new virtual network interface.

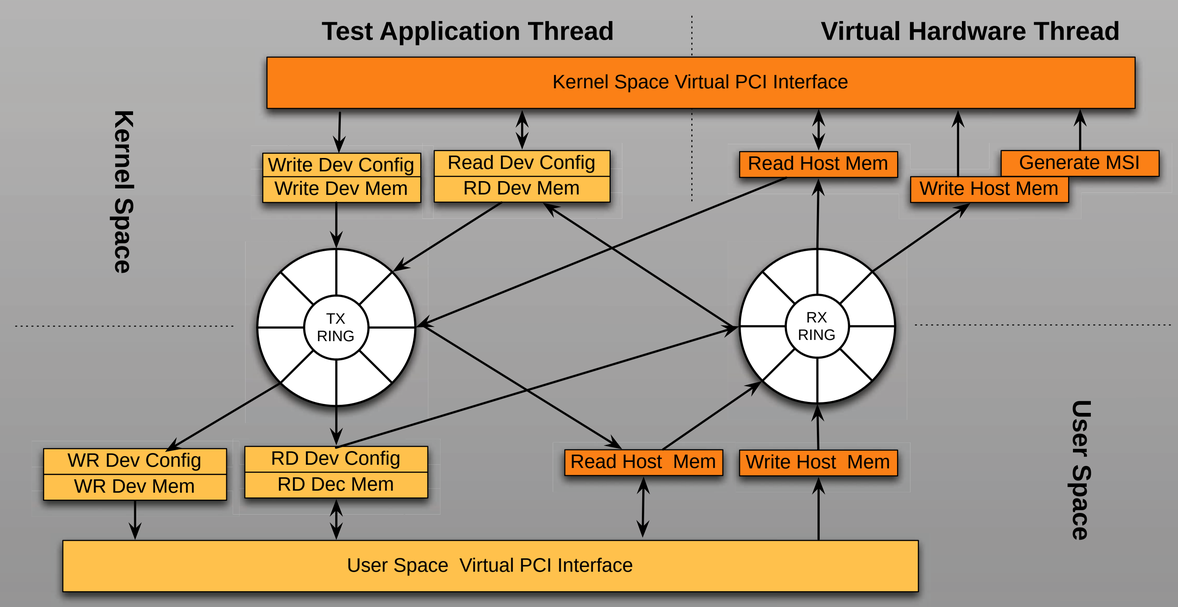
The uvNIC device driver builds against a parallel implementation of the PCI kernel interface. Switching over to real hardware operation involves little more than a search/replace and a recompilation.

How do you make software look like hardware?

The user space virtual NIC is implemented on top of the user space virtual PCI (uvPCI) implementation, which itself is implemented on top of the user space virtual bus (uvBus) implementation.

The user space virtual bus makes the kernel dependent on user space in the same way that the kernel is dependent on hardware. This is kept safe by appropriate use of yield() and spinning timeouts.

By using a message passing transport layer, similar in design to hardware implementations of PCIe, important properties such as blocking reads and read/write/interrupt message ordering is maintained and consistent with reality.



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