

Postcards

From Nice



TM Forum Live!

As communication service providers, vendors, analysts, and press returned to Nice, France for their annual review of all things operational we observed, as we usually do, a few innovations, a few trends and more than a few awards. Themes emerge and they are not always what the TM Forum intended, but they are the result of the industry getting together and sharing strategies, ideas, and success stories. This year, as communication service providers wrestle with the transition to digital service providers, conversations focused on foundational requirements. Operational process optimization and definition of a data-driven real time OSS architecture that is inclusive of all we have and all that is coming at an unprecedented scale.

Security was also part of many conversations and is something that service providers have correctly been focused on all along, but must now emphasize as part of every service offering and system decision.

OSS Will Never Be the Same

As with any new network development, the next step for network function virtualization (NFV) and software defined networking (SDN) is management. The foundational management functions - fulfillment, assurance, and billing - haven't changed. What's changing is how we accomplish those functions in a network and operational environment that is an amalgam of network, IT, and partner solutions that have to securely and reliably interoperate. The complexity of services and the volume of data required to be collected, correlated, distributed, and processed are beyond anything that the industry has ever faced and require a new approach to OSS.

I saw lightweight assurance clients for handsets and devices of all types designed to capture better metrics and deliver them more quickly to management systems. There are flexible monitoring solutions that adjust to business processes and data values to deliver accurate information when and where it's needed to automate important functions and reduce the burden on existing OSS/BSS solutions. I saw mediation that is less about billing and more about making the best and most efficient use of data from any source to better serve customers. There were several versions of impact analysis that help operators understand the impact of network and service changes to adjust and optimize network assets.

Envy the Analysts

I have to admit that analysts are treated very well at these events. Lavish dinners, fine wine, and the company of friends, colleagues and customers is a delightful respite from four days of meetings and technical discourse.

Thank you to all who organized, hosted, and made us feel welcome!



What's News?

- *Etiya, an established regional provider of customer-facing, catalog-driven BSS; has a new CEO!*

Chun Ling Woon has been tapped to help the company become a global player in catalog-driven order management, CRM, and integrated B/OSS.

- *LogiSense presented a rating engine that takes billing from a subscription model to a consumption model to better support cloud and managed services.*

And the solution is not limited to telecom. Multiple industries are interested as they look to replace ERP solutions.



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Scale is Scary

Now that the network engineers have given the thumbs up to virtualized functionality, the solution gets thrown over the wall to operations. It now becomes the problem of IT and others to manage these new components. From configuration to billing, care, product development, fulfillment and assurance; the rest of the business is now tasked to make this work. And as operators begin to scale NFV and SDN to meet the needs of full-time services for millions of customers, there will be a lot to overcome.

Beyond the obvious organizational and systems integration hurdles, there are a number of problems that only scale will reveal. From basic things like the limits of server speed and processing power to harder things like ensuring the security of a transaction as it navigates multiple virtual firewalls in multiple locations; the list is long and far from complete. Scale has always been the hard part of delivering connected services and as service providers begin to operationalize NFV and SDN, scale doesn't get any easier.

No Time For Wait-and-See

Service providers tend to like the reliable wait-and-see approach to new technologies and solutions. Yet customers aren't waiting and even though they want to buy from service providers, they won't wait too long. And OTT players aren't the only ones to worry about. Software vendors, systems integrators, and managed services providers are all gearing up to deliver digital B2B services. Even though commercial services are at the top of most digital service providers' priorities, the demand is high and choices are few. The providers that can effectively meet this demand first - win.

Service providers have the opportunity to step up and lead, not just play catch-up to OTT players. Find partners, do deals, create alliances and deliver eHealth and smart cities and important connected foundational services that change entire industries and make us wonder how we ever got along without them.

95% of businesses would partner with CSPs to deliver connected products...yet only 14% do

Source: ICT Intuition, LLC "What Do Enterprises Want?"