



Learning product development from the auto industry

What are the challenges and opportunities for carriers in deploying service fulfilment systems for the 21st Century? Mark Dye reports



The author, Mark Dye is a freelance telecoms journalist.



Right now carriers have a problem. Years of deploying piecemeal solutions have created data silos and bottlenecks that simply aren't conducive to doing today's business efficiently.

The sheer pace and volume of evolving markets have overtaken many service delivery architectures, meaning some are struggling with increasingly complex service ecosystems. So when subscribers start demanding new more innovative services on the device of their choice things can get tricky.

However, according to Robert Machin, product marketing director, **Axiom Systems**, deploying products and services fast enough to capitalise on good ideas coming out of marketing departments – while being able to respond to competitors' initiatives – is key.

"In a cut-throat environment, this kind of responsiveness and agility is essential to maximise their own window of revenue opportunity while minimising that of the competition," he explains.

"The telecom industry has reached a new paradigm that forces carriers to plan and deploy for the future at a much quicker pace, because of the speed at which technology is evolving," adds Rodney Sands, senior manager, Product Marketing, **Oracle**.

No supply chain

Michael Anderson, president, Global Solutions, **Telcordia**, agrees, pointing out that the main challenge faced by operators today is speed to market. "Time and again, the systems that operators have in place are not geared to powering the new services that subscribers demand, and are not themselves synchronised to form an efficient and effective 'services supply chain' at all," he says.

"Systems in place today are characterised by manual activities, a lack of system integration or process standardisation and multiple systems and databases," adds Sebastian Toke-Nichols, senior product marketing manager, **Amdocs** OSS Division. Indeed, he believes that this inevitably creates inefficiencies, 'bottlenecks' and dated procedures.

As such, supporting today's innovative 'blended' services in which voice, TV, mobile and data services all interact with each other requires a diverse mix of networks, technologies and equipment.



Robert Machin, product marketing director, Axiom Systems

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Steve Hateley: Evolve from a silo-build.



Sergio Pellizzari, chief solutions architect, **Nakina Systems**, says this means that service providers are then presented with the new problem and resource-intensive task of having to quickly deploy and manage various technologies and devices from different vendors.

Key challenges, he says, include creating and maintaining a disciplined process for service fulfilment and activation that supports integrated, flow-through provisioning to bring up the service, and monitoring that service once it is running to ensure service level agreements are met.

"Arming already overloaded operations staff with manual processes, simple work flows, scripts and or single vendor solutions is both impractical and costly," Pellizzari adds.

He believes that Tier One service providers already estimate several months and costs of between US\$1-3 million to integrate new network element types into back office systems.

"The reality," says Nakina's chief architect, "is that having separate 'stove-piped' management systems for each service and network element is no longer financially viable, and may not even be technically possible to continue."

"The challenge is to consolidate their existing inventory, provisioning and activation tools and to evolve from a silo-build OSS environment to a cross-domain solution that brings operational and CAPEX savings," says Stephen Hateley, senior product manager, **InfoVista**.

Hateley believes there are a number of options including a complete OSS transformation project; consolidation of the key fulfilment components such as inventory, provisioning, process management, activation and work flow; or buying and running a new solution targeted specifically at the new services they wish to deploy.

"The **TeleManagement Forum** recommendations for New Generation Operations Systems and Software (NGOSS) and process alignment are a useful tool in defining the processes needed," he adds.

Least efficient solution?

Of course, service-specific solutions may ultimately be the least efficient way to go, but potentially the fastest way to get a service live, according to Doug Zone, CTO, **MetraTech**. "But if a vendor with a new service wants that service to roll out quickly he may bundle in his own user interfaces and customer store. Yet there is a way for vendors of services to deliver time to market as well – bundle in Business Process Execution

Language (BEPL) and Web Portlets so that the service can be quickly integrated into a existing enterprise service bus," he says.

Axiom's Machin feels that remedying operational problems is vital in maintaining customer satisfaction – a key factor in customer retention – but says product innovation is critical to attracting new customers and maintaining market credibility. "Carriers need to be looking at the rapid product development and launch approaches which have been proven by other competitive industries such as automotive and consumer electronics and asking to what extent those approaches can be carried over into the telecoms business," he says.

Considering those vendors who provide holistic and end-to-end service fulfilment across all provisioning layers is one way of obtaining this, according to Preston Gilmer, VP, Product Marketing, **Sigma Systems**.

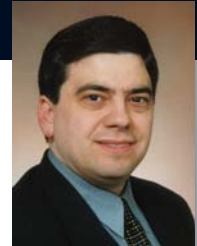
"OSS vendors that offer an end-to-end J2EE architecture, BPEL-based business process management, standards-based protocol frameworks and open, OSS/J-based APIs are best supporting the IT needs and requirements of leading services providers worldwide," Gilmer adds.

And with telco competition increasing, customer churn more common and brand loyalty diminishing, it appears operators can't afford to get service fulfilment wrong.

Besides adding add dramatically new levels of responsiveness to a business, Toke-Nichols says it also provides more visibility into the process for stakeholders. "They also ensure dramatically new levels of data integrity while processes become automated and integrated," he explains.

"The opportunities for carriers lie in bringing order to threatened chaos and introducing common understanding across business domains," adds Machin. "This 'lubricates' product lifecycle processes, making the business much more responsive and shortening time to market for new and variant products."

Toke-Nichols offers a note of caution though. "It's critical to remember that any solution you deploy is not going to be a panacea," he says. "Vendors need to work with their service provider customers to provide, as near as possible, a solution that meets their requirements in a given market. Above all though, success relies on making sure that data is accurate, especially when it comes to service and customer-based inventories. If this is in place, then everything else should fall in line and operators will be able to get it right every time." 🐼



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