

TeleManagement World Americas Show - Dallas, Texas

By Tim Young

The TeleManagement Forum has developed something of a reputation for putting on some of the most focused and relevant trade shows in the OSS world. Over the last few years, a spate of trade shows has emerged in response to a perceived need in the industry, host organization schisms, an ever-shifting business climate, and, no doubt, a desire on the part of hosting bodies to get a piece of as many events budgets as possible. While some are driven to go bigger and broader, others choose to opt for tiny and ultra-focused. In the middle of all of that is TMW-Americas, and the show has once again hit its stride.

This year's event had around 1500 attendees, up from last year, and north of 8-exhibitors. The expo floor was generally bustling from prior to the official floor opening to well into the nightly cocktail hour. Exhibitors expressed a moderately high level of satisfaction with booth traffic, though most had their hands full with prearranged meetings. Especially busy were those vendors that had opted for TMF's optional appointment-setting service, which served as a sort of matchmaker between vendors and potential customers. Apart from the main expo floor, there were a wide range of meeting rooms, hospitality suites, and, perhaps most notably, the Catalyst Showcase expo.

One of the event's most heavily touted and frequently referenced aspects, the Catalyst Showcase was a live demonstration of the Catalyst Program, which is, in the words of the TM Forum itself, "TM Forum's living lab, enabling service providers, systems integrators, and hardware/software vendors to work together to solve common, critical industry challenges." Some of the specific projects highlighted in the showcase included AVIS, Product and Service Assembly Catalyst, and Single Sign On.

qAVIS, (Accelerating VoIP and IMS-based Services), is sponsored by BSB and CANTV.NET and focuses on how OSS solutions can enhance VoIP business models. The participants in the project-- Lucent, CA-Wily, BEA, Cognizant, Progress, and Metasolv-- look for ways to lower the bottom line by streamlining operations costs for converged networks.

- From a security standpoint, the Single Sign On (SSO) project, sponsored by

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Telefonica Moviles España, COOP Program Council and featuring work by Alcatel, Ericsson, Nokia, Siemens, Wipro, Evidian, and Sun, is a project aimed at tackling real-world implications of Sarbanes Oxley compliance and reducing overall financial risk. The goal is to adopt open standards for SSO so that companies can increase security while lowering costs.

- The Product & Service Assembly Catalyst, meanwhile, focuses on dynamic product and service creation that goes on behind the scenes, limiting its impact on customer-facing systems. Costs are reduced. Time to market is reduced. Not a bad deal. The project was sponsored by BT Group, Cable & Wireless, and TeliaSonera, and featured work by ATOS Origin, Axiom Systems, Celona, Huawei, and Oracle Corp.



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The other projects were also quite interesting, and the overall mood and climate of the Catalyst showcase was academic rather than as overtly sales-focused and exposure-driven as much of the rest of the Expo. The project booths were manned by personnel from all companies involved in the projects, and there were regular and informative presentations on the topics at hand. The event was half trade show, half science fair, and a nice break from the constant barrage of targeted marketing.

The shadow of the merger.

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One element that was quite definitely evident on the expo floor of the TMW-Americas show was the spirit of the ever-looming merger. There were more than a few hyphens floating around, and this affected the careful phraseology of PR personnel, the statements that could be made publicly, and the general climate of the event. One company representative, when asked what made their firm different, quipped that they were one of the few companies at the event who aren't for sale.

Whether it was the "Alcatel-Lucent" logo decal applied over the now-outdated Alcatel logos in the Catalyst Showcase or the change of an email address from @cramer.com to @amdocs.com, the signs were everywhere. In some cases, that meant limited access to the press. One particular company, in the process of being acquired, told us that no editorial content could be submitted or quotes given about any aspect of the show or the company without going through the new parent company first.

One major company was at the show, in part, to make sure that the industry was aware of the new spaces that they have only recently moved into as a result of acquisitions. CA, as the largest management software vendor in the world, got to play the role of the giant moving steadily into the telecom space. CA entered into the telecommunications when it bought Concord Communications well over a year ago, along with its subsidiary, Aprisma. Combine with that the acquisition of Wily in the early part of 2006 and you have a major software vendor with the tools it needs to excel in the telecom space.

Expanding Markets

While this is hardly a rarity in the modern world market, the event was also marked by companies looking to expand into new regions of the world, as well as move into new technology spaces. Some of these companies, like FTS, are traveling all over the world to engage in client meetings. Yair Sakov, from Israel's FTS, mentioned in our meeting that after this event, he's off to Bangalore.

InfoVista was at the show taking an active role in moving into the Latin American market by sponsoring the Latin American luncheon. InfoVista contacts expressed that the event was highly successful, and that the attendance was substantial.

Key Technology Issues

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Some issues came to light as part of the event that made things particularly interesting from a journalistic standpoint. Nakina Systems was on hand, and along with announcements about their new executives and their partnership with HP, they noted their work in the area of stranded bandwidth. Their Network OS 6 will include a stranded bandwidth locator, which allows customers to locate and recover potentially significant amounts of unused bandwidth before going through the costly process of rolling out additional bandwidth.

Tonia Graham, CEO of e*Tezeract and the program manager for Business Transformation Benchmarking was around to talk a bit about the importance of benchmarking in measuring areas of strength and weakness to obtain a balanced scorecard for all elements of the business.

Additionally, SOA was oft-mentioned by many companies, as well as IMS and converged services maintaining a hold on the imaginations of SP and vendor alike.

Other news of note.

- Syndesis touted its Adaptive Resource Management solution, which they are hailing as the industry's only "live" management solution.
- Tribold announced a version of its Product Management Application specifically built for CSPs. The product is SOA enabled, which further cements the headway that SOA has gained in the CSP marketplace.
- Sigma Systems was celebrating their rapid growth, which has taken the company from 15 customers to 50, worldwide, in the last fiscal year. Specifically, the company put out a press release on a deal with Portugal's TV Cabo. Their growth, according to Sigma's Preston Gilmer, has been fueled primarily by acquisition.
- Visionael was present at the event as they further expand their footprint. President and CEO Craig Nichols asserted an easy confidence as he proclaimed the virtues of the company, which he asserted was likely the most profitable in the space.
- NetScout was at the event marking their official transition into the OSS space. Jim Frey of NetScout talked up the company's high-end performance monitoring and their transition into IP-based services.

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- Cramer/Amdocs actually released most of their most recent news, including their KPN customer announcement, at a customer meeting in Monte Carlo. Are small meetings of focused current and potential clients an alternative to trade shows?
- Digital Fuel had a lot to crow about in its partnership with O2. The UK mobile SP presented a case study, and Digital Fuel released news that they had been recognized by O2 for their work on a 3G KPI (Key Performance Indicator) project which was launched last year.
- Ceon was on hand touting its product lifecycle management and multi-play service fulfillment solutions, as well as heavily promoting its involvement in the Catalyst program.
- Best attention-getting booth award goes to Nexagent, whose reps were calling attention to their very interesting Solution Delivery Automation system with juggling lessons and jesters on stilts. Their flair was exceeded, however, by their enthusiasm for their product, which they consider truly unique in the industry.

Overall:

The TMW-Americas show is a solid event. Did we have complaints about the show? Sure. Downtown Dallas becomes a ghost town on weeknights and there could have been more opportunities for the media to interact with service providers. The way this show is growing, a venue change will likely be inevitable, anyway, and the thrust of the show is clearly not designed around arranging a media rendezvous with the SP elite. Still, the show is somewhat lacking in comparison to its springtime, global counterpart in Nice. Many of the participants in the Dallas show will also be in Nice in May, and many mentioned the comparison between the two, often noting that while the Nice show is often more productive, both shows are worth attending.

In an era of a lack of balance between supershows and tiny niche meetings, TMW shows play an important part in allowing focus and wider relevance to coexist. We hope that the show continues to grow and reaches its “bubble days” level of attendance and pertinence.