

What We Learned From TM Forum Management World Americas 2009

By Tim Young, Phillip J. Britt, and Paula Zimmerman

In early December, OSS/BSS vendors converged on Orlando for the TM Forum's Management World-Americas 2009. The event, which has seen varied success levels over the years, has continued to attempt to solidify its market niche as an OSS/BSS event for not only North America, but Latin America, as well. In addition, the event is, at the very least, an interesting precursor for what we might be able to expect from the Forum's flagship event in Nice. So, after having attended the event once again, here are a few things we learned from Management World Americas, 2009.



industry types to gather and give/receive updates on the growing demand for varied services at home and on the go, and how OSS and BSS companies can help CSPs to maintain and grow ARPU and customer base in the face of a still-struggling economy, increased threat from over-the-top providers, and a widespread desire among

An advertisement for ConceptWave. It features a cheetah running across a grassy field. The text 'Let us accelerate your time to market' is at the top. Below the cheetah is the ConceptWave logo. To the right of the cheetah is a list of services: 'ASK CONCEPTWAVE ABOUT ...', '• multi-play orders', '• exception order handling', '• centralized dynamic catalog', and '• processing millions of orders'. At the bottom right is the website 'www.conceptwave.com'. At the bottom is the text 'Empowering Service Orders' and 'Proven, high performance order and catalog management solutions.'

If You Build It?

For the most part, people are willing to attend events that they care about. And, people told us in Orlando that they care about the work (especially in the realm of standards) of the TM Forum. An event like this one provided an opportunity for

subscribers to have unfettered access to unlimited bandwidth for a low fixed cost.

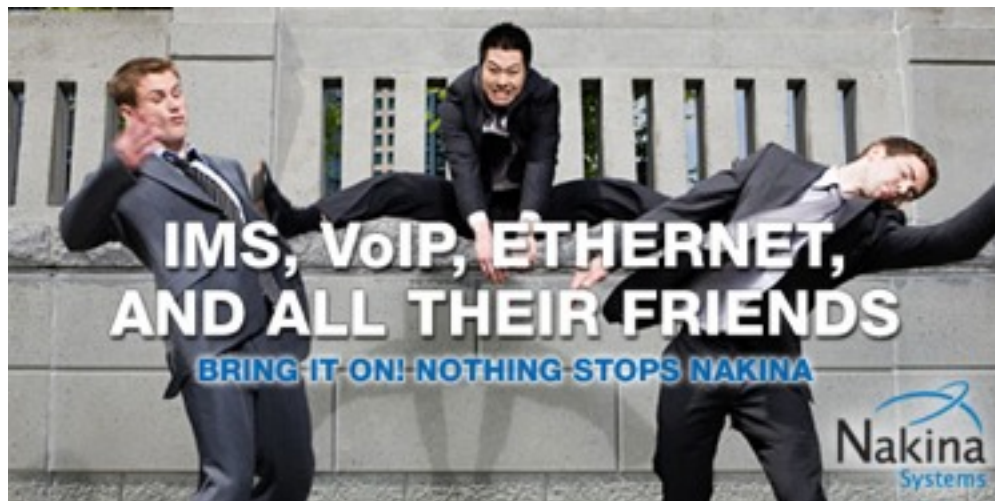
How many people attended the event, exactly? Total registrations for the event came in at 1160. We understand from the TM Forum that

conference registrations were slightly up on last year's Orlando event, and that training attendance was down. Still, in this economic climate and in the midst of an industry trend away from conference participation, it seems like we have all conditioned ourselves to be happy with less, and therefore, most would agree that the Orlando event did not fare too badly. How many times in the last year have you heard or said something like this: "Flat is the new growth"? The danger here, of course, is that if you lower your expectations far enough, sooner or later they will be met. Is that what we've done? Have we resigned ourselves to accept the notions that no one can grow their revenue in this economy, and no one can deliver a homerun of a trade show, so we'll just be satisfied or even happy to come out neutral? Perhaps that thinking is necessary right

meet service providers by paying the premium for the event's match-making executive appointment service. While a handful of exhibiting companies told us they were very pleased with the general booth traffic, the majority of vendors exhibiting on the show floor told us they were unhappy with the turnout.

The Exhibitor's Dilemma

However, vendor disappointment notwithstanding, we saw an overall reluctance from some vendors to back out of future exhibition on the show floor. Granted, any sane vendor is spending its marketing money with some caution these days, so the decision to exhibit or not to exhibit can be a heavy one. Some vendors told us that, in spite of lackluster booth traffic, if they were not to exhibit others in the industry might think they've gone out



now. We heard it in abundance in Orlando.

CSP Attendance

As for service providers in attendance at the event, it seemed that if you wanted to see or hear a service provider, your best bet was to attend a keynote or one of the sessions, as we heard that not many of the operators in attendance spent significant time on the expo floor. You could also

of business.

If that's the case, did Oracle close up shop and not tell anyone? The BSS/OSS giant was noticeably absent from the expo floor and told Pipeline they were not planning to have a whole lot going on at the event. However, the firm did sponsor the Revenue Management & Billing summit, illustrating that when seeking maximum bang for their buck,

vendors may opt to participate in ways other than the expo.

CSP/Vendor Presentations

And, once again, the event taught us that when service providers talk, people (service providers and vendors alike) are inclined to listen. From what we saw, the sessions were quite well attended, with most rooms at about 80% of capacity. In the sessions, service providers came out to present alongside their vendors.

Pairings included:

- Nakina and Alcatel-Lucent presenting alongside AT&T,
- ConceptWave presenting with Comcast,
- Intelliden presenting alongside Cbeyond,
- Amdocs speaking with MetroPCS,
- Convergys presenting with Cavalier,
- Oracle speaking alongside Telecom Italia,
- Celona presenting with BT,
- Sigma Systems speaking with Charter,
- Progress in a session alongside Telus and AT&T
- IBM presenting separately with both Telefonica and Qwest,

- HP addressing the conference alongside China Unicom,
- CA presenting with Covad,
- JDSU presenting with Time Warner Cable,
- NetCracker and Qwest/Romtelecom SA,
- cVidya presenting with Vodafone,
- Subex presenting with Verizon, Qwest,
- CenturyLink and Level3.

Further Vendor News

Among those who said booth traffic was good were InfoVista's Stephen Hateley and Natalie Salser. They were demonstrating the company's latest real-time performance tool, Vista360, which they said drew interest from a couple of smaller service providers. That was good for InfoVista, which has cut its trade show plans from a handful of shows a year to just two, the just-completed TM Forum Americas event and TM Forum Management World 2010 in Nice, France in May.

The new performance tool, which enables different people within an organization to gain insights into the portions of the network for which they are responsible, was one of a few solutions that the company launched in 2009. Hateley expects those



solutions to gain some traction and contribute to company profits in 2010.

Several executives at the show said they expect analytics to be stressed more in the future as service providers attempt to maximize revenues and develop newer pricing plans.

Nigel Upton, HP customer intelligence and billing director, was one of several experts at the conference to point out that service providers need to “escape the flat rate trap.”

The issue is particularly critical for data usage as smartphones become more popular, pushing network limits for data traffic while the monthly flat rate bills remain low in the midst of aggressive competition between major carriers like AT&T and

The Verizon move is an attempt to help ward off customer churn. The argument is that the carriers need to ensure that consumers stay with their contracts long enough to pay for the carrier-subsidized portion of smartphone purchases.

Even with the termination fees, customer churn still remains a big issue in the telecom industry, an issue for which many vendors at the TM Forum’s Management World Americas conference were offering solutions.

New Solutions Offered for Data Migration

Another daunting issue for data is migration said Tony Sceales, founder and CTO of Celona. About half of the businesses that Celona surveyed have six major data migration projects every year, with



Verizon.

Verizon is attacking the revenue issue from another angle, by doubling its early termination fee for its smartphone products. The doubled fee, however, has caught the attention of the U.S. Senate, where Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) introduced a bill to limit early termination fees wireless carriers charge consumers.

half of those spending 15 percent of their IT budgets on these projects. Yet most rely on technology not designed to handle migration issues. And most can’t afford downtime for large-scale migration projects.

A way to solve this, according to Sceales, is incremental migration, which enables the movement of data without taking systems offline

and also provides a manageable way to cleanse data so that bad information gets purged rather than migrating from one system to the next. Using incremental migration enables firms to cleanse data before, during or after the migration without losing any time during the migration process.

Progressive migration enables early awareness of migration issues, according to Scealess. By detecting issues early in the process, firms can help reduce the project overruns that often remain undiscovered until well into the project, said Scealess, citing Bloor Research information.

Ontology Systems, London, also cited the need for improved data migration strategies in its launch of OSS/CAD 2.5, announced at the conference. OSS/CAD is designed to provide a visual, unified model of OSS/BSS data sources. The newest version includes a new integrated workbench for building OntoPacks, the firm's functionality "bundles" that can be deployed to a running OSS/CAD installation to extend the runtime capabilities. The newest release also features Cisco router configurations and direct import of complex Excel spreadsheets.

Ontology's OSS/CAD 2.5 is in use at South African-based converged services provider Internet Solutions and at other yet-to-be disclosed service providers.

Catalog Initiative Discussed

Service providers are actively deploying centralized product and service catalog solutions, including Cavalier Telephone's catalog initiative, which was discussed during one of the conference session. According to Convergys Corp., the industry is looking at these solutions to address real business issues such as order fall-out, high cancellation rates and long delivery intervals. During the presentation, Christoph Casati of Cavalier Telephone discussed how his organization is bringing sense to the 'product data chaos' by using

the TMF SID and a centralized product catalog application.

Cavalier Telephone currently lacks a standardized representation of products across channels (inbound, agent, online, direct), and at the point of ordering, there is limited enforcement of business rules and incomplete capture of the data that is required for accurate quoting and error-free fulfillment. So Cavalier is implementing Convergys' Product Control Manager to streamline ordering processes and bring new offers to market more rapidly. The system is designed to enforce commercial and technical rules in real time, enables quick modeling of commercial product offerings, integrates via the TMF SID data model, and serves as the single product catalog across all channels.

Silver Sponsor ConceptWave was rather underwhelmed with the Orlando event, and their VP of Marketing and Business Development, Chun-Ling Woon, was candid in telling us that the "exhibit hall looked depressed," noting that there were "no new players on the show floor" this time around. ConceptWave is one of the vendors who routinely opt not to join the woeful crowd on the expo floor. Mr. Woon also critiqued the timing of the show for being much too late in the year, and opined that the TM Forum has "become self-serving." So why participate at all? "The show offers a central local to set up meetings once a year" according to Mr. Woon.

Comptel, who were energized by their recent Superstar Mobile Star Award from MobileVillage for Comptel Policy Control, told us in Orlando that they were seeing a great deal of interest in the cloud-based services demo inside the Service Model Catalyst project Getting the Telecom to Cloud 9. Comptel participated in this catalyst with Qwest, BT, Progress Software and Network Cadence.

Nakina Systems was on hand, and presented alongside Alcatel Lucent and AT&T on the challenges of parameter management in complex next-gen networks. Nakina's Solutions Architect Dean Mechlowitz and Alcatel-Lucent's Principal Consultant Morgan Stern unpacked some of the challenges of managing large scale IMS and VoIP deployments as AT&T Director of VoIP Integration Chris Phelan related ways in which the telco was working with these vendors to overcome some of these complex issues.

Accanto Systems was having a much better year than most of the companies we encountered in Orlando. Excited about their October OEM agreement with network assurance vendor Tollgrade, and expansion with new offices in Malaysia and Singapore, things at Accanto were "going really well!" according to CEO, Michele Campriani. (Accanto released a statement later in December reporting a record year for orders of its intelligent Customer Service Assurance solution, with a growth rate of 59% over 2008.) And if you need a job, Campriani also told us Accanto is "hiring like crazy" to keep pace with demand for their solutions.

Grant Lenahan, vice president and strategist for Telcordia's service delivery solutions, expressed concerns that service providers are heading toward a dangerous cliff and that there will be casualties impacting all of us unless we (the media, analysts, and organizations like the TM Forum), and they (the vendors) can convince service providers to change their course. Indeed, there may be worse problems than the recession facing the communications industry. Telcordia to the rescue? In Orlando, Tom Forsyth emphasized the ways that Telcordia is doing their part to help service providers generate new and more revenue with solutions for monetizing bandwidth usage via real-time charging engine, the next generation of pre-paid services, and new advertising and policy

products coming in 2010.

With more grim news of service provider struggles, Amdocs' vice president of products and solutions, Seth Nesbitt, and Analysys Mason's senior technical analyst, Mark Mortenson, were on hand to discuss the findings of a recent global survey exploring the challenges of network planning and rollout for next-gen services. The global survey found that the biggest obstacles for CSPs were managing change and adapting quickly to new circumstances; prolonged service creation and service delivery; lack of an adequate link between marketing and network planning to ensure that service expectations are met, and lack of a consolidate view of network usage trends.

Looking Forward

In summary, Management World Americas is an event that faced multiple challenges for 2009, and saw results that were mixed. That's the short story. The long story will be told as vendors and attendees make decisions about their participation in the Forum's flagship show in Nice, and in future Management World Americas events. Times are still rocky. Travel bans are on. How the show fares as things improve, however, will be the indicator of whether Management World Americas will weather the current economic slump and come out on the other side as a stronger event, or languish like so many other events have in recent years.