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2007 Next-Gen OSS Integration Summit: A Glimpse of the Future

by Alana Grelyak and Tim Young

Coming up in March, Service Providers and vendors alike will have something to look forward to with the 2007 Next Gen OSS Integration Summit, to be held in Boston from March 5-7. The brochure promises case-studies, speakers, and engaging conversation. Pipeline wanted to know something more in-depth about the summit, so we spoke with Naomi Secor, conference manager for IQPC (International Quality & Productivity Center), an international organization that provides conferences for many types of disciplines. Additionally, we took some time with Norman Rice, III and Venu Venugopal from CA, the Chair Sponsor for the event. Rice is the chairperson of the show, and Venugopal is also heavily involved in CA's presence at the forum. In an attempt to get the story straight from the ones making it happen, we give you a conversation between Pipeline and the people behind the 2007 Next Gen OSS Integration Summit.

First of all, we wanted to know how this event compares with other shows. "These events are a little bit more focused," Secor said. "We provide the attendees with case studies and presentations from our end users. We focus on the end users. And this attracts a really good audience... People really want to know who's at the forefront and they want to hear case studies." Secor estimated that the summit would attract approximately 250 attendees. When asked what the value of this show is to the industry, Secor replied, "the value is basically networking. Networking is very important to them. What they really want is a mix, a forum where everybody can come together from both the service provider side and the vendor provider side to learn about the new technologies that are at the forefront, and to hear about the people that have successfully done it...[the summit] offers both a networking mix, a vendor showcasing, a solution to any problems that they are having, and the most up to date information of topics of OSS, SOA, and implementation standards. It provides people with tons of information about current situations."

The summit's schedule is full, with plenty of speakers, networking lunches, and showcases. Secor said, "The speakers are the biggest highlight. Our supporters, meaning our vendors, are the second biggest. And I think the fact that we're working with TeleManagement Forum, and then just the topic and content. Overall, the topic itself is very hot." Confirmed speakers at this year's event will include Dan Druta, Sr. OSS Integration Architect, Cingular Wireless; Grant Schofield, Head of (Integration and Automation) Business Management, BT; Karl-Wilhelm Siebert, Director Quality Assurance Management, Vodafone D2; Massimo Albani, Vice President, Telecom Italia; Libbey Scheible, Senior Program Manager, TeleManagement Forum; Ziaur Rahman, Senior Manager of Network Management Systems, T-Mobile, USA; Harry Moen, Head Interconnect Billing, Telenor; and Clint Heckel, Enterprise Architect, Verizon Business IT.

According to Rice, it's just this sort of speaker lineup that makes the event special. "One of the most attractive things is the level of thought leader speakers at the event. It's great, and it's building,

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because of the panels. A lot of people are more comfortable speaking as a part of a panel than as a standalone speaker, so it's a great environment for drawing out raw thought. Sometimes their comments are more indicative of what's happening, because the speakers are going back to what they know best, rather than repeating sanitized, prepackaged, legal-and-financial-filtered document that goes out in a sanitized presentation. I think, altogether, it's going to be an interesting forum."

What is the focus of the topic at this summit? Secor said, "We're really focusing on business transformation and the need for telecom providers. We realize the competition is there, so we're focusing a lot of our sessions on the fact that competition is driving the need for the services. We focus a lot on implementing SOA tools in the OSS space. We're still focused on that because it's still a hot topic."

According to Rice, the theme of the show has a lot to do with convergence. CAs predisposition toward that as a central focus is an outgrowth of some of the company's recent meetings at other trade shows. "It's interesting," says Rice. "At TMW-Dallas, there was an informal poll taken where they were asking how many folks were involved in BSS vs OSS, were involved in internal IT vs. operations. The polling showed that just under 50 percent of the folks were from the internal IT, or BSS side. That was a marked difference from any previous event that TMF had run. Traditionally, it's always heavily OSS folks. According to some of CAs customers, a lot of these people were IT architects working for the CIO... Their role was to figure out how to start driving a couple of things. Speed of service, which makes total sense. There was also an underlying theme of efficiency. It was about better supporting the rollout of services, which is all about revenue uplift, increasing the number of customers and reducing churn. It was also about starting to plan for efficiencies like cost reduction... NGOSS is coming out with a positioning paper on convergence, and the idea is to flesh out what convergence really means. That's what we're going to speak about in our speaking portion and how we're going to tie a number of these panels together."

But lots of events and publications toss around the term 'convergence'. How is this event different? "I'm desensitized to all these terms that never really do anything," Rice said. "Terms get reduced to marketing slang. It's the same people saying the same stuff, and it's repackaged every few years. One of the things we hope to get into here is the impact of convergence... to really get into the teeth of the issue."

IQPC offered a similar show in October of 2006 that was successful in all areas. This 2007 show will build upon the previous one, but for the most part, things will remain the same. "The October show was great and our audience thought so, too, so we're doing it again. We're giving people more of an opportunity to network with their colleagues," Secor said. IQPC also feels that attendees of this show, and their customers, are looking for certain things, particularly in the area of longevity. "People really need to adapt some of their current capabilities that are going to satisfy their customers in the long term," Secor said. "People are really looking for long term commitments...They are still looking for solutions to help move them in the right direction and remain competitive so I think it's just adaptability right now in delivering services to really satisfy their customers. They really need to know how to continue to manage their network. A lot of them do need to know how to implement change, not temporary solutions...The telecom industry needs to be equipped, and the more information we can provide them on this topic, the better. They need to be more equipped with the new applications and services and they still need to learn how to streamline the back-office functions, which is the main focus of this program. I guess the three major things that they want to be able to do is they want to generate revenue, keep customers satisfied, and obviously keep anything they're doing long term."

Service Providers specifically should attend this show because, according to Secor, "they have a need to streamline their back-office functions and they need to be able to keep up with competitions. The

value of them coming to this is meeting vendors that can help them to provide solutions that get them to where they need to be. And it's also networking with others that were successful in business transformation and seeing how they were able to successfully do it. Basically, for these guys, it's all about having the right people there."

Rice focuses on a slightly different angle on the event. "I think it's very important for service providers to spend some time with their peers. A forum like this is less intrusive than a trade show. You aren't being bombarded by vendors all the time. Spending some time with representatives from peer companies from around the globe who are specifically in your area, and to be able to share your thoughts in an open forum is valuable. These folks can spend some time sharing ideas, expressing opinions, and finding out what's going on in the world. At the end of the day, I think the competitive pressures that a lot of these folks face is really at a corporate level. When it gets down to the folks doing the operations, they just care about doing their jobs, accomplishing their projects, and achieving their goals for the year. If you can pick up some traits and learn and benchmark from your peers, that's great. I think we'll see a spirit of openness at this event because of that."

Venugopal takes it one step farther. "Also, for representatives of North American companies involved with a lot of these next-generation technologies on the OSS side, their European counterparts are much farther ahead. For some companies like Sprint and AT&T, they should be motivated to see their counterparts, many of whom are speaking at this event."

As for vendors, "We're putting them in front of all the decision-makers in the industry. We have all the major carriers, both here and internationally. So, for them, it's a win-win situation. They are put in front of all the real end users. We attract a very high level audience to this." Selling products is a definite plus for vendors, but IQPC notes that vendors can learn from each other, also. "It's for them to meet the service providers but it's also for them to meet some of the other vendors, as well," Secor said. "A lot of them are speaking and this forum provides them with the opportunity to get in front of the group and showcase them with the technology, and, more importantly, bring their clients in side by side so they can really talk about 'this is what I've done for my customers and how was I able to do it.'" Secor feels that the 2007 Next Gen OSS Integration Summit stands out because not only do they showcase products, they also showcase certain problems and how they were solved using those products.

Rice notes that the biggest advantage of the event, for vendors, is really education. "I think the appropriate approach for vendors is to be supportive of NGOSS as a forum, and to be quietly supportive with sponsorships and business meetings, and to arrange meetings with their customers. Most importantly, it's a time to listen."

Venugopal continues this line of thought, noting that "That's what we [CA] had in mind when we moved into a sponsorship. We looked at this as an opportunity to look at what our customers are doing and what their pain points are. Most of the speakers are from the SP community, and that's a rare thing."

The summit is filled with three days worth of information, networking opportunities, and more. The event will conclude with a prize giveaway, though the nature of those prizes is being kept strictly confidential until conference time. Those interested in attending the conference should call Morsel Allison at 212 973 3308 for more information. "The NGOSS show is sort of a secret in the marketplace," Rice says. "We want to promote it, and support it, and help get additional service providers there, because at the end of the day, they're the folks that are going to benefit from it the most."