Pipeline

Knowledge Is Power

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Forging Ahead Through Transformation
By Tim Young

There's nothing *wrong* with a legacy network. It's reliable. There are ways to make it fairly fast and efficient. Most importantly, it's out there already. So, in the strictest sense, there's nothing *wrong* with it.

Only... there is a great deal more possible from a network, and a great deal more possible from the processes that support it. In an age of increased consumer expectation, a network is needed that's smart, capable, and flexible. A transformed network.

"Underneath all the technical jargon... there is something fundamental changing that will profoundly affect the life of every person and every business on the face of the planet over the next two decades," said Dr. Hossein Eslambolchi, CEO of Divvio, former AT&T visionary, and harbinger of transformation. "We are right in the middle of the transformations of the legacy systems, processes, networks, and applications into one global, seamless, virtual MPLS-IP-Wireless world."

The process is arduous, and the umbrella topic of "transformation" consists of a few components that should work in concert: Transformation of the network and transformation of the OSS and BSS underlying that network. The former is well-underway, with working examples in existence already. The latter is a longer and more difficult process.

Up and Running

Several all-IP networks from major telcos are already out there, in the marketplace. (AT&T's U-Verse, BT's 21CN, and Verizon's FiOS are probably the most familiar examples.) This has been no small task. AT&T has called their rollout the largest 40-gigabit OC-768 deployment the world has ever seen, and U-Verse now boasts over a million subs (as of the end of 2008). Verizon announced that it added some 330,000 subs to its FiOS network in the 4th quarter of 2008 as well, giving them over a million new subs in 2008 as well.

Similar numbers are being reported by other telcos who've made the leap. More subs. Faster service. What could stop this juggernaut?

Unfortunately, the worldwide economic slowdown threatens to slow down the expansion of some existing next-gen networks, and hamper the creation of new ones by companies who've yet to make the actual leap towards service rollouts.

It's the unstoppable force of transformation and expansion meeting the immovable object of the slow economy, and it's not good for anyone.

AT&T, for example, has announced that it will make cuts in the rollout budget to the tune of $2 Billion, which slows their rollout by 10-15%, causing them to push their

U-Verse goal of passing 30 million homes to 2011, a year later than previously stated.

However, there's an even more difficult area of transformation

OSS/BSS Transformation

The key to OSS/BSS transformation is streamlining everything. Eliminating unnecessary processes. Running leaner. The challenges and rewards of doing so are highlighted in our conversation with Kevin Hart, CIO of Level3, which you can read in this issue of Pipeline.

What approaches to systems transformation are there?

Cassandra Millhouse and David James of Amdocs sum up the types of OSS/BSS transformation very well when they break up strategy into the five subheadings. The first is "Complete BSS and OSS transformation – A complete overhaul and replacement of all support systems, business and operational. A good example of this is the Telstra transformation, which made headlines for the vast scale and scope of the project."

Indeed, Telstra has made headlines for its project, because it's a bold, future-proof move... and one that's been very difficult and time-consuming. In November of 2005, Telstra had some 1500 systems, and seeks to pare that number down to 300 by the end of 2010. A year into the project, Telstra announced that it was 15% done, having eliminated 115 applications. A hallmark of 500 decommissioned systems was scheduled for the end of 2008. Due to the time-consuming nature of the project, that figure was adjusted to fewer than 450 systems decommissioned by June of 2009.

It takes a great deal of time. However, Telstra is showing a great deal of commitment by going this route.

The second strategy, according to the Amdocs team, is "Complete OSS transformation – A complete replacement of all operational support systems for a more unified platform, such as the project at Telekom Austria."

One aspect of the Telekom Austria transformation process has been the selection of a central product catalog (which was discussed in some depth in the EPM roundtable we covered earlier this year), opting for Tribold's solution in that area.

Millhouse and James continue, noting that a third strategy would be "Service

transformation – Initiation of a new OSS from order to activation for one service, and then extended in a phased approach to all services. TDC underwent this sort of transformation."

The fourth strategy they note is "Process consolidation –Unification of existing OSS with orchestration and then extending this transformation across the organization, as recently illustrated at BT."

Finally, the Millhouse and James mention "Inventory consolidation - Unify existing OSS with one common inventory and then extend across the rest," noting KPN as an example of a company that's done just that.
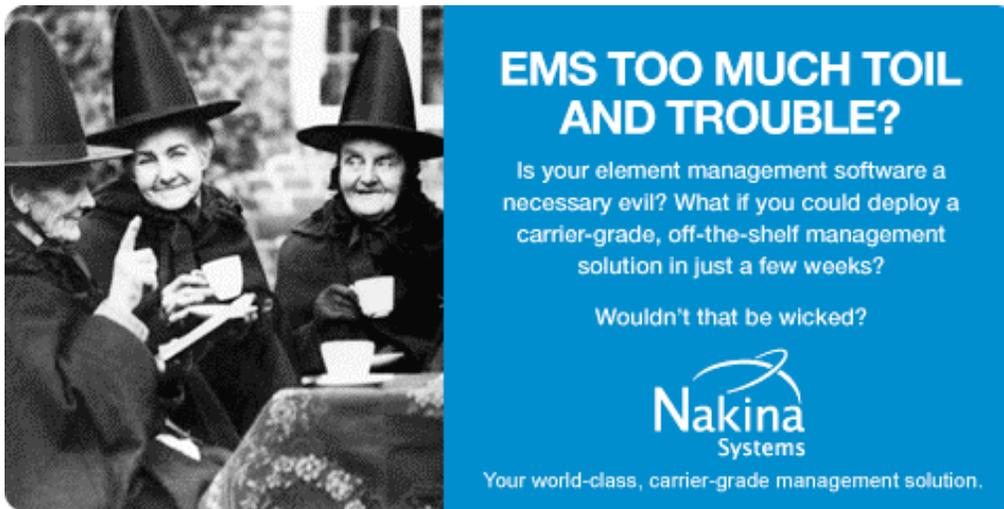
The Bigger Picture

Telecommunications does not exist in a vacuum. It is a business driver, and a tool of personal connection and, as much as anything else in the economic landscape, requires continued growth in the world-at-large to enjoy growth and change within the space.

That's a hard thing to promise in the current landscape.

How can CSPs continue existing, or pursue new, transformation projects in such an unsure environment? The short answer is that they *must*.

Non-traditional telecommunications players are knocking at the door, with Google voice, for example, threatening to be truly disruptive. In an economy that's seen better days, CSPs are doing whatever they can to retain subs... and no one can promise that it will be a winning battle. Many analysts in the space point to the fact

that CSPs have undergone their apocalypse back in the early 2000s, and many companies lived to tell the tale. In our current economic situation, communications stocks are faring better than average. Still, the future is uncertain, and it is only through advancement that CSPs can weather the storm.

And so, if your transformation project is in full swing, best of luck, and keep digging. As Winston Churchill famously said, "If you're going through hell... keep going."

And if you have yet to begin the journey toward transformation... it's hard to say. It doesn't seem like now's the moment to begin, but it's probably now or never. So far, however, the track record on moving backwards in technology isn't very strong. Ask anyone who still owns a Betamax. It's a long road, but a necessary one. I hope you're all packed.