

Improving Customer Experience With Operational Intelligence

By Jesse Cryderman

How intelligent are your business operations?

When a San Francisco Giant's game ends in the 94107 zip code, can you detect in real time, which of your customers will be affected by the inevitable post-game cellular traffic, alert them, and drive them to your local Wi-Fi hotspot? Can you proactively improve loyalty and offer up sell options with pre-emptive, real-time messaging to customers traveling by train through a known network problem zone in Edinburgh? No?

These examples highlight an increasingly critical problem: Communications Service Providers (CSPs) are very good at understanding the network from the inside—but what does it look like from the customers' perspective?

Like most service providers, chances are you are leveraging traditional service assurance (find faults by alarm, measure device performance, react to minimize downtime). Indeed, traditional service assurance enables CSPs to ensure quality of service, but by its nature, this network-centric approach is blind to the customers' point of view.

Put simply, smartphones, and their accompanying customer service expectations, call for smart



operations. And Operational Intelligence is poised to fill this need.

Benefits of Operational Intelligence vs. Traditional Service Assurance

A maxim of Operational Intelligence is: You can't fix what you can't see.

Traditional service assurance is largely a reactive affair; it relies on fault-detection, alarm analysis, and network-based responses. It can provide granular network and device analytics, but cannot correlate these data sets with equally valuable customer data. And without visibility into the myriad touch points along the customer experience continuum, and with no way of connecting the siloed data in a meaningful way, there's no way of knowing which network issues are affecting customer experience the most, nor the kinds of problems customers are seeing in the field.

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Operational Intelligence is primarily a proactive solution, analyzing real-time data, events, and the status business processes from multiple sources (network performance, service delivery, inventory, location, real-time user experience, payment, billing and usage) to create dynamic profiles of customer experience risks and opportunities. Operational Intelligence enables CSPs to view and analyze their operations from the outside in, and offers three key capabilities:

- Visibility of the customer experience in real time, by integrating both network and customer data.
- Insight into actual network performance versus the customers' expected performance.
- Action in the form of automated responses to error conditions and empowerment to resolve problems before they become visible to the customer.

Operational Intelligence taps into all of the fast-moving data, events and processes, aggregates and displays these metrics in real-time, analyzes problems, and identifies solutions. As a result, operators can initiate immediate action that has a significant impact on the customer experience. In short, service assurance optimizes network reliability; Operational Intelligence maximizes customer experience.

New Tools for a New Perspective

Ensuring network reliability is but one piece of the customer experience puzzle, a puzzle which must be solved in this era of communications commoditization. Just as moving from traditional service assurance to operational intelligence represents a shift from a network-centric system to a customer-centric system, CSPs must evolve to become customer-centric organizations. There are many reasons why this matters now, more than ever:

- Solving a problem for a customer is an opportunity to increase loyalty and revenue
- Acquiring customers is expensive. The lifetime value of the customer is great enough that costs to retain and delight customers are much less than the acquisition cost of new customers.
- The ability to sell add-on services increases with personalized service options
- Brand equity, references and good will all increase
- The opportunity to grow share of wallet increases

Smart phones and their concomitant customer service expectations call for smart operations-and Operational Intelligence is poised to fill this need.

To be sure, CSPs are increasingly aware of the need to become customer-centric organizations. According to a recent Ovum research report, Telco CIOs pegged customer experience improvement as the number one business goal over the next 12-24 months. And since traditional service assurance is blind to the network experience from the customers' perspective, it is no longer the best tool for the CSP of the future.

Convergence and Contextualization

At first glance, aggregating, correlating, and contextualizing data from multiple systems sounds like a steep challenge. Customer information is often fragmented across multiple systems in different business silos, such as CRM, provisioning, customer care and billing. To get a holistic view of the customer, CSPs have previously had to undertake major systems integration initiatives. These are time-consuming and costly.

Operational Intelligence deftly clears these hurdles, however. It is a modern, non-intrusive approach that enables CSPs to gain real-time visibility into all customer touch points and analyze the combined OSS/BSS data without undertaking painful integration projects. Armed with this converged and contextualized data, CSPs can take action to address potential problems, ameliorate error conditions, and move on newly exposed business opportunities.

To get a deeper understanding of the customer experience, additional external data sources can be mined as well. As a pioneer in Operational Intelligence, Vitria Technology Inc. has introduced the first, full-featured Operational Intelligence platform to the telecommunications industry. Vitria's Operational Intelligence platform correlates the high volume and variety of data in motion from social media activity streams, SMS messages, and other data sources, along with the contextualized network, customer, and device data, to develop a complete, real-time picture of the customer experience and the events that impact it. This fully informed view of the customer experience enables strategic action.

In short, Operational Intelligence makes it easy to aggregate and transform vast amounts of data from disparate sources into contextualized insight and actionable planning.

What's the ROI?

Even as CSPs are well aware they must evolve into customer-centric organizations, they are uncertain as to the best path. When faced with a CEM solution, an oft-heard question is: What's the ROI?

Operational Intelligence provides demonstrable improvements in customer experience, and has the added benefit of exposing new business opportunities, fast deployment, and lower cost.

For Telcos, the leading causes of churn are customer tickets and service issues. Service providers that have deployed Operational Intelligence have experienced up to 90 percent reductions in these issues. Further, since Operational Intelligence is non-intrusive, solutions cost less, are deployed faster and provide greater customer insight than traditional Service Assurance solutions.

End-To-End Results

Operational Intelligence fosters end-to-end improvements across the full customer lifecycle, from the initial interaction, to new service activation, to the bill at the end of the month.

The customers' first experience sets the tone for their relationship with the service provider. With Operational Intelligence, the service activation or provisioning process can be optimized in real time. Problems can immediately be visualized, identified and mitigated. Activation requests from preferred partners can be prioritized. Activation errors can be automatically detected and predictably resolved through automated exception management, providing customers with a smooth on-boarding process.

Once a customer is active, quality of service is essential. Operational Intelligence provides real-time analytics on network performance and operations data, enabling service providers to prevent problems before they impact the customer. Usage patterns and location data can be proactively correlated with problem cells in the network to ensure issues are resolved before they're ever evident to a customer.

As a cursory search for #cableguy on Twitter will reveal, more than anything, customers hate to wait. Billing issues are the number one source of customer calls and complaints. Billing systems typically touch the customer twelve times per year. Operational Intelligence combines historical data from BSS/OSS systems with the holistic view of the customer to more rapidly resolve billing issues.

Operational Intelligence is a proactive solution, combining real-time data, events, and business processes from multiple sources.

Summary

Operational Intelligence platforms enable CSPs to use the data generated on the network, in existing systems and from external channels, in exciting new ways to improve customer experience, reduce costs, and expose new revenue opportunities. A network-centric view afforded by traditional service assurance (standing by on alert for error alarms) might report a healthy network, but in the same instance, a customer-centric view delivered by Operational Intelligence can not only uncover customer experience problems, but also deliver the insight for the most appropriate course of action. As noted earlier, you can't fix what you can't see. To deliver a truly superlative customer experience, CSPs must look from the outside in, and Operational Intelligence is a cost-effective, quick-to-deploy solution.