

Pipeline

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Can You Manage? Performance Management Essentials

by Tim Young

So you've built a network. You've rounded up subscribers to use that network. You have all of the elements in place to be a successful CSP. So you're all done, right? What could be left to do? Well, as we all know, it's not the *getting* that's essential (though it's sure a big part of the game). It's the *keeping*.

That's where performance management comes in. End-users *must* receive the experience they expect. If not, they'll churn. Choices exist, and while loyalty is a virtue, it's generally one reserved for family, God, and country.

And it isn't just about avoiding customer (read: revenue) loss. It's about maximizing profit, heading off major network failures, and generally maintaining a strong and profitable network.

So how can performance be adequately managed, customers kept happy, and profit maximized?

To answer that question, we spoke to a couple of companies that are behind the efforts of major CSPs to do just that.



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HP and CA are both companies that we (and millions of others) are familiar with. They're sizable and relatively broad in focus. However, in approaching the topic of performance management, we took a look at a couple of case studies that involved these giants zooming in on the specific topic at hand. We took a look at HP's work with Korea's SK Telecom, and CA's work with Verizon Business.

Norm Kincl, Solutions Manager, with HP Communications, Media & Entertainment, has this to say about where performance management fits into the wider OSS/BSS landscape: "We consider the responsibility of the entire Assurance space as ensuring that the services and resources are working as they should and the business and customer expectations are being met. Performance management fits within this context and provides necessary support." That is to say, performance management can work hand-in-hand with fault management to identify degradations and root problems. In addition, according to Kincl, performance management can provide trending reports that can predict capacity needs and allow CSPs to prepare accordingly. Performance management systems can collect KPIs to help CSPs understand customer QoS. Such systems can even help providers understand the effectiveness of a marketing campaign (which is a bit of a stretch, perhaps, but theoretically promotions like free airtime at a certain time of day could place certain strains on the system that would be picked up by performance management solutions, allowing marketing personnel to get a feel for the effectiveness of the overall campaign).



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Steve Guthrie, Director of Product Marketing with CA, agrees that performance management is essential, and states that the nature of the game is changing. Expectations are different. There was a time when network quality boiled down to availability. That's no longer the key issue. "Availability isn't so much a problem anymore. CSPs have redundant routes and reliable equipment. That can get service to the user." The real issue, Guthrie says, is "the performance of that network. Although availability is not assured, more important KPIs are jitter, delay, packet loss." These metrics roll up to QoS. According to Guthrie, "The two are intertwined."

Cost is an issue as well. “[Performance Management] can help reduce OpEx and CapEx,” says Kincl, and it can also “help validate the level of service being provided, and help planning new Services.”

In its case study with SK Telecom, HP explores how SK Telecom was able to successfully launch its Next-Generation Marketing system, and use HP’s performance management solutions to help it meet its goals. Kelly Jeong, Manager of the IT Infrastructure Management Team for the Information Technology R&D Center of SK Telecom, had this to say about the success of the endeavor:

“We could achieve the same level of stability as that of the mainframe we had been using for the past decade after the NGM system was opened. As for the NGM system, we can now accommodate more than 1,800 transactions per second. SK Telecom aims to exceed even this rate of transaction. SK Telecom has been able to maintain the stability of its IT systems by adapting to business changes through performance testing, although we have carried out many additional projects in the year since the system had been launched.”

There are specific pain points CSPs have with regard to performance management:

According to Kincl:

- “By nature, performance management is highly tied to the infrastructure it is monitoring. It needs to have a solid understanding of the models (both resource and service) to be able to make meaningful analysis. As new technologies are introduced, existing systems may not have the flexibility to incorporate the new technologies. There is also a need to understand implications of performance characteristics of new technologies—this can only happen with time and good analysis.
- Translating from the performance of the resources and the resource-facing services to the quality of service delivered to customers.
- Performance management data is often kept within operations or network engineering, and not utilized to capture its fullest benefit.”

So what’s the future? Guthrie says it lies in performance management solutions, like the one offered by CA, becoming a software that CSPs use as the foundation of their services. Software-as-a-Service is impacting all levels of IT, so why not performance management? It’s a definite possibility as a trend for tomorrow.

Guthrie also makes mention of the possibilities for in-depth monitoring as a tiered service.

Kincl sees the industry moving in this direction: “Performance management information needs to be able to be collected from new types of technologies, and it needs to be consolidated across technologies. The mapping between the resource-facing services and the customer services needs to be flexible. Performance management should not be pushed to try and do everything, but it should do what

it needs to very well. For example, rather than trying to get performance management to cover everything from the resources to the end user experience, it should focus on resource and resource-facing services. A service level management solution can focus on customer-facing services and everything else that is required to adequately monitor customer expectations.”

In the end, performance management is a major part of the expectation that CSPs have of telecoms providers. It must be proactive and it must be cutting edge.

So the question for CSPs is: What’s your performance management solution doing for you?

If you have news you’d like to share with Pipeline, contact us at editor@pipelinepub.com.