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## Unified BSS Convergence: The Right Approach Now and Into the Future

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### Convergence Considerations

In today's evolving telecom landscape - new networks, new market entrants, new services and new subscriber expectations - the ability to quickly create and drive usage of multi-service offerings, while providing a personalized and consistent next generation user experience, in an efficient and cost-effective way are paramount to future-success.

The term 'convergence' and the associated supporting technologies are irrelevant to consumers. However if one looks at some consumer demands: payment flexibility and seamless access to multiple services across various devices (mobile, PC/laptop etc.), these need to be supported by the different aspects of convergence (e.g. network, device, payment, service). Add into the mix consumers' increasing expectations for always-on access to advanced services; account choice and control; and the convenience of personalized customer care, and it is very clear that convergence now more than ever is a necessity.

These issues are driving many operators to address BSS/OSS limitations, with more and more operators acknowledging that BSS/OSS convergence needs to be at the core of their strategy. Many BSS/OSS limitations exist due to the existence of service-specific or function-specific silos, each with their own way of describing the customer. Customer Care, sales, marketing and BSS/OSS systems have traditionally been discrete 'point solutions'. They all speak different 'languages'. When you have so many disparate systems, each with their own language - even if they have been integrated or connected onto a bus - disconnects are almost unavoidable, and these disconnects will lead to gaps in customer management capabilities. Obviously, this complexity will lead to a sub-par customer experience, while full service monetization will be difficult and expensive.

To ensure a high-quality and seamless user experience, BSS/OSS capabilities - from marketing, sales and customer management through to charging and billing - need to be provided as a unified whole. This means a single code base, with all functionality built around a single data model, supported by a



single product catalog and with a single operations, maintenance and security approach across the whole solution. In a world requiring real-time usage monitoring, real-time marketing and real-time policy management, clearly this unified approach to BSS must also sit firmly in the network – to the level of call/session control. Only this approach delivers the keys to future-proof success:

- One complete real-time subscriber view
- Multi-dimensional policy management
- Financial control
- Marketing agility

### **One complete real-time subscriber view**

A single, complete real-time subscriber view is the foundation for delivery of a consistent customer experience. Such a view can be accomplished only if there is unification of all customer, product and order information across an operator's ecosystem. All pieces must speak the 'same language' and describe the customer in the same manner. Customers expect consistency regardless of access point: IVR, Web, call center or device. Operators might miss sales opportunities if all packages and services are not available for sale through all channels.

In addition, operators must genuinely empower customers, putting full control of the customer relationship in their hands and actively encouraging them to take charge, and providing them with total transparency that will prevent those surprises that too often negatively impact the customer's perception of the operator. Building a sense of community among customers by enabling them to help each other with advice, techniques, former experiences, and the like can be a real differentiator. Again, a single real-time view of the customer is the only foundation on which this customer-centric approach can be built.



### **Multi-dimensional policy management**

Policy management is a hot discussion topic these days and rightfully so. However, it is a broad topic that can be looked at too narrowly – just quality of service or network resource allocation, for example. Policy management is a multi-dimensional topic covering not only network and allocation,

but also authorization, rating and charging, identity (enterprise and personal) management, and financial liability management. All of these should ideally blend network information with subscriber information for maximum effectiveness.

As the number of services consumed expands, authorization is not just about available funds in the subscriber balances, but also about subscriber control over spending and setting of preferences such as spending limits on specific services. Additionally, in a next-generation environment, operators will need to create pricing strategies that charge relative to consumers' perceived value, making rating and charging 'policy' engines in effect. In regards to subscribers' various identities, the enterprise segment is an important source of revenue for operators. And yet employees' personal consumption remains an untapped revenue stream. Thus policy management around consumer versus enterprise identities should be explored. Finally, as the overall financial exposure of an operator increases with the addition of more 3<sup>rd</sup> party services, policy management around credit and financial exposure is becoming a prerequisite for running a healthy and growing business.

Embracing this wider definition of "policy management" is a key enabler for an operator seeking to deliver a converged next generation user experience. For true convergence, the network and billing have to work as one unified system. In this way customer profile information can be blended with network knowledge to optimize the customer experience.

For example, if a customer subscribes to a premium video package, he assumes that he will enjoy video streaming with sufficient bandwidth. What if the subscriber is in an area with insufficient bandwidth? If billing and the network worked as a unified system, then the system would know that the quality of service would not be met and could react by providing the subscriber with options such as: watch the video at a lower quality, buffer the video or wait to view the video until there is greater bandwidth available. In this way, the operator offers choice to the customer, avoiding what could have been a bad customer experience.

### **Financial control**

With the increase in third party content and application providers in the service mix, operators face increased financial exposure and need to manage this risk without diminishing the end-user experience. One effective way is by mixing prepaid and postpaid concepts. There may be some services that operators prefer to offer on a prepaid basis (e.g. our premium video example from above) even if the customer's account is postpaid. Another approach to managing the risk of financial exposure is to monitor usage for certain activities or the reaching of set thresholds. If a subscriber, even if on a postpaid account, hits a certain threshold of data or content usage, operators may want to take some action such as alerting the customer of the usage.

The flip-side of this is that end-customers also sense a financial risk of their own. The fear of bill shock - most often related to the inability to manage accounts - may prevent end-customers from signing on to new services. Offering an all-you-can-eat unlimited plan is not the only way of handling this situation. A more effective way is to allow subscribers to set their own spending controls. This may sound counter-intuitive to the business need to grow revenues, however if the alternatives are 'some money' versus 'no money' (i.e. a cancelled service), 'some money' usually wins.

A unified approach to BSS convergence – including in-network capabilities – enables this level of control: operator control and customer control.

### **Marketing Agility**

There is a school of thought that Marketing will be the ultimate key to operator success. Whether that proves true or not, it does seem indisputable that more agility in marketing will serve any operator well. In converged environments this type of agility is only possible when there is a single service creation and provisioning point for the configuration, testing and roll out of new services, applications and promotions across various product families. This single product catalog needs to be tightly coupled with the system's in-network capabilities to enable real-time marketing and also with sales and marketing capabilities to streamline campaign management.

With a unified approach to convergence that starts with campaign management, operators can increase marketing velocity and in turn tighten their prospect-to-cash cycles. Furthermore, marketing analytics and campaign management as part of the unified BSS solution give the ability to anticipate customer needs as well as make relevant recommendations that should drive service adoption and usage. With better targeting – supported by a unified subscriber view - operators can act on real-time behavior to capture the moment of opportunity with the right offer at the right time.

### **Unify to Succeed**

An operator's service offerings and business models – both today's and tomorrow's - must be backed by a BSS ecosystem that is a strategic enabler. Only a unified approach to BSS is such a strategic enabler, delivering compelling benefits:-

- An excellent user experience allowing personalization, freedom of choice and financial control of accounts and subscriptions.
- Increased marketing velocity and improved targeting – of both offers and customer segments – leading to increase service uptake and usage.
- Fast time-to-market through ease-of-use and streamlined business processes.
- The ability to monetize every service/transaction regardless of payment type or network type – including IMS/4G/LTE.
- Efficiencies from elimination of redundancies and data duplication needs.

Operators who embrace a unified approach to convergence today will reap many benefits today – and tomorrow.

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