OSS: Getting Fit For the Mobile Race

Gareth Senior, CEO of Axiom, discusses why OSS vendors should be limbering up to crack the mobile market, and what strategies they might adopt to stay ahead of the competition.

Climate

The growth of mobile is a key area for OSS vendors to target; its potential for service rollout is immense, but it is currently shrouded in mystery on the part of both Service Providers and the OSS vendors when it comes to their needs.

Most mobile operators, (unlike Service Providers in the fixed market) do not know what challenges and problems lie ahead. Therefore they require a solution, defined by OSS vendors to suit their needs, which they can then fit around.

At present, because of the lack of existing systems to work around there are few home-grown legacy systems, so operators are open to off-the-shelf software which are fixed rather then flexible. Unlike fixed telecom operators, mobile operators do not see flexibility as a key requirement, as they are willing to bend processes around the systems and build in solutions to problems ahead that have not been seen before.
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The operators themselves have a highly flexible infrastructure and are looking for rapid introduction of new services with fast reactions so they can outsmart the competition, which are low cost and highly automated with low manpower levels.

As many vertical sectors converge, i.e. broadcast, fixed telecom, mobile, Internet, they are forming a new infocomms industry which will have many implications for OSS. In the new mobile marketplace there will be a demand for new types of OSS products, an increase in the number of potential customers and OSS will become even more of a crucial success factor in the mobile telecommunications business.

The most successful OSS technology will have the power to deliver rapid ROI by enabling telcos to rollout their offerings at an accelerated rate, and be able to keep mobile Service Providers ahead of the competition by delivering innovative solutions that let customers self-serve and provision, cheaply and efficiently.

Challenges

There are a number of challenges that OSS vendors and mobile service vendors will face, one of the biggest of these is bandwidth control. The operators and the radio planners are unable to predict how much is needed and when. This in turn affects service levels, which is an area that they will have to focus on.

OSS vendors need to be able to implement systems quickly in order to face the stiff competition, and also do it in a cost effective manner, which will provide the operators with a fast ROI.

Further down the line, vendors face issues of how to manage the orders, automate and bill them.

Overall the increased complexity will raise issues of efficiency that OSS vendors will have to counteract. For instance, there are many different bandwidth layers for which vendors will have to provide increased scope in terms of network inventory.

In addition to potential bandwidth problems, there is also a gap between radio planning and network engineering for which a solution has to be found.

OSS vendors need to start implementing new strategies as early as possible – as 3G is slow to develop. Analysts Ovum believes organisations should not wait for it, and instead formulate strategies for 2.5G networks.

New strategies

The key issues that OSS vendors need to address are those outlined below:

- Firstly vendors need to ensure there is a central point for all layers of transport network. They need to have a coherent view of bandwidth and utilization across all layers of transmission network. OSS vendors should look to reduce Operational expenditure (OPEX) by asset management, and also reduce staffing by providing an accurate repository through inventory management, with no need for complicated paper trails and human error.
- By automating network activation and configuration management for Asynchrous Transfer Mode (ATM), vendors can fill the gap between radio planning and transmission. This network provisioning system will reduce staff re-skilling requirements to manage ATM over IP based transport network. Vendors need to enable the configuration changes being done on the radio side and ensure the new packet-based transmission network works in a seamless and automated manner. Manual actions slow down the process and lead to increased errors.

- Another challenge for OSS vendors and mobile service providers is managing Corporate Service Delivery. The market is growing for services such as VPNs, which can improve efficiency in the work place at a lower cost. For OSS vendors to tap into this they must manage complex service delivery processes for corporate service orders in addition to enabling consistent corporate voice and data VPN service delivery, revenue generation. Corporates in particular, require services on demand, on time every time and to a high standard. The OSS vendor must ensure SLA levels meet their needs, through dynamic network activation with performance management integration
- Subscriber activation is also set to be a key issue. This involves introducing the flexible activation tool for 2.5G and 3G based services in addition to managing content, MultiMedia Messaging (MMS), m-commerce, etc.

In Conclusion

At present the mobile market is wide open; this is because it is at an early stage, and the needs are unclear. Therefore for an OSS provider to gain a strong position in this environment they will have to have a very clear and focussed proposition that can convey what value they will bring to the mobile operator, including a high return on investment.

The key to this is using modular, entry-level products and by partnering with selected Telecom Equipment Manufacturers (TEMS)

It is important than vendors have a strong core service, but this can be supplemented by add-on solutions such as corporate service and SLA management, to enable them to target niche areas, in the face of strong competition.

The main advantages OSS vendors can offer mobile operators are ROI, operational productivity and cost reduction; they can influence expenses by 60%, which makes them an integral part of the current market.

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