

Love Your Silos

By Scott St. John

Get rid of the ominous swivel chair. Automate. Break down silos. Integrate.

We've all heard the story before. Service providers need to leverage a combination of both new and legacy resources from disparate silos to be competitive in today's marketplace and improve their customers' experience. But the reality is, many service providers are still struggling to evolve and our traditional thinking may be fundamentally flawed.

The emergence of new technologies and key technical trends such as the adoption of open source standards, big data analytics, and virtual networks and network functions (SDN and NFV) are changing the game. Perhaps, more importantly, the idea that most top-tier service providers can simply break down their silo walls is a bit of a myth.

Fact is, service providers need their silos. It would be practically impossible, and arguably irresponsible, for most service providers to rip and replace existing systems that fundamentally work and support key business and network functions. The idea that service providers can actually tear down their existing silos is more of a utopian notion that has been propagated by megalithic OSS/BSS companies and the pundits that cover this space than reality today.

"95 percent of the service providers I met within last year are still operating their network in series, by domain," said Marc Hayden, vice president of worldwide sales and marketing for gen-E. "Core network, transport network, access network, and data services are still dominant silos in the operational construct of service providers."

And gen-E has significant visibility into the subject. They have been helping some of the largest service providers transform their management systems and operational processes since 1999. The company is the world's biggest IBM middleware for ITSM partners and has developed a new solution called gen-E Ops Center designed to help service providers leverage network and service silos at the service layer to enable better, proactive customer experience management (CEM).

"Service providers are still tethered down by legacy networks and legacy operational constructs on how they manage the service," Hayden adds. "While the network is evolving and the access to data is growing, service providers ability to take action on that data has not kept pace. To do that, service providers have to fundamentally



redesign their policies, processes, and procedures around network operations. They have to start looking at management from the service perspective."

A domain-specific, best-of-breed approach with multiple integration points between silos may have worked for service providers in the past; but this has resulted in a rat's nest of complexity with limited depth of integration. This point-to-point integration approach typically provides access to domain-specific information and supports key operational processes, but doesn't provide the necessary breadth of visibility or control at the network level to take action across domains. The service layer, on the other hand, opens the door to a whole new range of possibilities. If we look at the traditional approach as "connecting" best-of-breed solutions across silos, the service layer has the potential to "cap" silos by residing on top of multiple domains to aggregate data and collectively leverage the resources within them down to the network layer.

Operational Readiness

The rate of change is also rapidly accelerating and this has led to an increased need for operational readiness. New services and devices are being brought online at an unprecedented rate and access to network and

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service data is becoming widely available in real-time. Virtual networking and related services require real-time management, billing, quality assurance (QoS) and analytics. In addition, business services, where service level agreements (SLAs) govern service parameters and SLA failure has significant monetary implications, is a hotly contested market with increasingly fierce competition. Lethargic operational speed and service failure can result in business-customer churn where the impact can be far greater than the consumer churn.

Even simple business services, such as providing real-time reporting about the status of enterprise network services and devices, requires the ability to aggregate data from multiple sources, look at the end-to-end service and dependencies, and quickly identify and address service issues down to the network level. The ability to present this information and provide in-depth control to a business customer's IT department in an intuitive portal can be a key competitive differentiator in a market where self-service is table stakes; and lack thereof is not only a customer deterrent, but can bloat inefficiencies and inhibit scalability. In a competitive climate where customer expectations are that issues will be addressed almost immediately, precious time can be quickly consumed by simply trying to identify which customers are impacted by a network issue, let alone resolving it.

The CEM Myth

We all may have presumed the CEM issue had been solved, but [poor customer experience](#) still runs rampant across the industry. [For several years](#), we have been talking about improving the customer experience and many various ways to improve it. But the reality is that for many service providers, customer experience management (CEM) has been relegated to up-sell and cross-sell solutions and enabling customer service representatives (CSRs) to better sell to customers or measure their perceptions. Other initiatives, such as [Net Promoter Score](#) and [network optimization](#) methodologies may improve network quality and planning. But in today's data-driven and increasingly virtual environment service providers must go beyond the traditional approach and leverage a dynamic, service-level architecture that leverages the collective strength of their legacy and next-generation resources and match those with key performance indicators (KPIs) that affect service quality and SLA requirements.

Each time a new service is introduced, the service assurance functions need to be established. KPIs and SLA requirements need to be configured and brought into the service provider toolset for monitoring. This is complex, time consuming and costly; and service providers must have visibility into the service to manage SLA commitments. The old swivel chair is now being replaced

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For example, service providers have been rushing to deploy fiber optic networks for some time, but real-time performance monitoring, service assurance and trouble resolution is still a significant issue for fiber deployments for both business and residential customers. In a residential fiber scenario video, internet and voice may be additional services running on top with their own set of QoS variables that need to be tested, monitored, and any issues must be resolved in near real-time to minimize the impact to customers. In a business scenario, service degradation may have significant operational consequences and SLA penalties to boot – and ultimately lead to the loss of large, enterprise customers where capital investments have been made to specifically connect their premises to the fiber network.

Gen-E is taking a unique approach to solving this problem by baking service-level KPIs and SLA management into its gen-E Ops Center, which resides at the service layer. Since there is an inherent relationship between the KPIs and SLA requirements, Ops Center provides separate visualization of each (KPI and SLA management) with underlying algorithms to perform the calculations and relationship determinations. These SLA templates can then be reused, particularly for any SLA criteria that fall outside of industry-standard KPIs.

“We look at KPIs by type of service and network. Those standards-based industry KPIs will be preconfigured in Ops Center so the deployment timeframe will be significantly reduced and a service provider that doesn't understand or be cognizant of the specific KPIs and can leverage the industry's best practices.”

Gen-E Ops Center is specifically designed to help service providers move up to the service layer and refine their operational process so they can have end-to-end visibility of the service and industry standard KPIs, and then push actions down to their existing silos for proactive remediation.

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What's old in new again

The silo-busting, CEM story is nothing new, but it might be fundamentally flawed. Service providers need their silos. What they have been lacking is the ability to harness their potential. This ability is the foundation for unlocking a vault of unique services and delivering a truly a superior customer experience.

Point-to-point integration doesn't scale and service providers need end-to-end service visibility and control to contend with today's environment. By moving up to the service layer, service providers can leverage the data and functions of each silo. Not only for CEM, but for tailoring offerings based on old and new service and network technologies.

Don't fear the silo. Embrace it.