

Drawing New Circles Around B/OSS Software

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By: Dan Baker

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The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul. For it is the inert effort of each thought ... to heap itself on that ridge and to solidify and hem in the life. But if the soul is quick and strong it bursts over that boundary on all sides and expands another orbit on the great deep...

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, Circles

People in the B/OSS business constantly ask the same key question: Where is the next software opportunity? More often than not, great product ideas are right under your nose — so close you can't even see them.

Yet for most of us, the mind calcifies around yesterday's successes and thought patterns to the point where we're blind to big opportunities that a mere juggling of company skill sets could unleash.

The depth or shallowness of BSS/OSS innovation is reflected in the number of software companies that are forced out of business or get sold at a low price. And sadly, over the last few years we've seen plenty of company failures that can't be blamed on a poor economy. Most follow a familiar cycle: a startup succeeds with its first product, then sputters out because people at the firm didn't learn how to draw new circles.



Isle of Man

Yet over the years, the BSS/OSS business has remained remarkably true to Emerson's observation. Twenty years ago the term "billing" didn't exist as an industry buzzword. Sure, plenty of bills were being mailed, but it was considered "accounting", not billing. Then someone at MCI figured out that a sophisticated bill could be a great marketing tool and launched the famous Friends and Family plan. From that creative spark, the billing bubble grew.

A decade ago, the TM Forum's eTOM framework was touted as the comprehensive guide to BSS/OSS functions. But today, the eTom has been largely superseded by the forum's Telecom Application MAP or TAM. And the number of function boxes in the TAM has expanded way beyond eTOM's original vision.

But where did all those new BSS/OSS functions come from? Most of them already existed, of course, but were implicit to the business and not sufficiently systemized to be called standalone functions. They became explicit only when an innovative carrier and software developer united to break through the thought barrier.

Case in point: [Vodafone](#) Germany and [cVidya](#) recently created a new B/OSS function, dealer management.

And what is a dealer management system? Merely a new recipe made with old ingredients. Mix one cup of contract management with a heaping teaspoon of billing. Add a pinch of point-of-sale and a dash of analytics and you have it.

The result is a management tool that tells you which wireless dealers are most profitable and which are gaming the system to line their own pockets. And how significant could Dealer Management become? Well, Vodafone estimates that dealer commissions make up a whopping 15 percent of total expenses at an average mobile operator.

It's an incredible untapped BSS/OSS opportunity. And it begs the question: Why wasn't such a solution available five, 10, even 15 years ago? After all, the industry need, the technology and the knowledge all existed.

The solution wasn't discovered for one reason alone: sharp minds hadn't applied themselves to the problem long enough to draw a new circle.