by Paula Bernier

CSPs Leverage Cloud Services Inside and Out

Over the years telephone companies have held events at which they proudly ushered media, analysts, politicians and others through their network operations centers – the nerve centers or brains of their networks, as they sometimes referred to them. Looking back, these events were a good barometer of where the telco focus used to be, which is on the network.

Today, although back office systems remain a key part of many communications service providers' businesses, it's the business itself – and customers and services that drive it – that have moved front and center for the telcos and their communications service provider peers.

This shift in focus, and the ongoing move to cut capital and operational expenditures, is leading more service providers to consider and adopt cloud-based application testing, billing, revenue assurance and other back office solutions. Of course, this is happening at the same time that these service providers are delivering cloud-based services to their customers.

So, as they say, CSPs are drinking the Kool-Aid.

Purchasing back office solutions on demand can help a service provider eliminate, or at least delay, the upfront costs of buying and integrating, and the ongoing costs of managing and updating, in-house systems. That can allow a CSP to dedicate more of its resources to the core goal of bringing to market, selling and supporting services and applications that customers want and will pay for.

Among the back office companies offering service providers on-demand back office services is cVidya, which late last year launch its first software-as-a-service solution.

The new offer, called cVidyaCloud, is a collection of on-demand revenue intelligence solutions for service providers of all sizes. It addresses such billing and operational support applications as clearinghouse services and inter-carrier cost management, dealer management, fraud and risk management, revenue assurance, and margin analytics.

So optimistic is cVidya that its software-as-a-service and cloud computing offers will take off that it recently brought Nava Levy into the organization specifically to head up the effort. Levy previously led the SaaS/Cloud computing program at Amdocs.

Another company offering service providers hosted back office solutions is Cycle30.

The Seattle-based company provides hosted order-to-cash billing services for cable, telecommunication and utility operators in North America. That includes solutions for billing and revenue management, business intelligence, customer management, integration, service assurance, and service fulfillment.

Recently Alaska's largest telecommunications and cable provider, General Communication Inc., converted all of its cable TV services to the Cycle30 platform. GCI's move to put its cable TV, pay-per-view and video-on-demand services – which had been supported by a legacy cable billing solution – onto the Cycle30 platform completed the cableco's effort to migrate all its consumer services onto the same billing engine. Cycle30 also provides billing and management for the wireless, wireline, and Internet services that GCI offers. Cycle30's solution is expected to help GCI bundle and cross sell its services more easily, and to better enforce business rules.

"By managing its services with a modern, hosted order-to-cash platform, GCI is better prepared for future growth," says Jim Dunlap, president of Cycle30. "A converged billing platform will empower GCI to bring new products to market in record time and deliver even greater levels of personalized service to customers."

Cloud communications/hosted services also can help the application developer part of the communications ecosystem less expensively and more efficiently bring new offers to market.

To address this opportunity, Aculab recently launched a hosted test and evaluation platform targeted at developers that want to verify applications based on the Aculab AMS Server development platform. The solution enables evaluation tests to be done remotely and without the time or expense that would be involved in setting up a local test platform.


Jim Dunlap

As discussed in the November issue of INTERNET TELEPHONY, a sister magazine to NGN, working with the large and varied application developer community is a whole new ballgame for service providers, some of which don't have the assets to create and support developer programs on their own. That's why KPI Consulting launched its DeveloperPrograms.com division. Service providers pay a one-time subscription fee for DeveloperPrograms.com, which can be for a one- or two-year term. For those that want to include developer recruitment in their service package, there's an additional per developer fee.

Kenneth Plunk, CEO of DeveloperPrograms.com, explains that KPI was involved in helping several tier 1 wireless operators, including Orange, Sprint and T-Mobile USA, launch their developer programs. Now DeveloperPrograms.com aims to help tier 2 and 3 wireless service providers (as well as customers in the automotive and health care verticals) recruit, educate and support application developers.

"We love it when we get the opportunity to demonstrate to people how much they can actually save by outsourcing their developer support program, and the benefits it brings to have the applications and content that developers bring to the fold," says Plunk. "With the economy the way it is right now, it just makes good business sense to outsource, rather than add so much to your overhead by bringing people aboard full time."

DeveloperPrograms.com delivers a completely outsourced, branded, turnkey service. That offering includes the development of a website through which a service provider can invite developers to register to develop applications and access APIs; a means through which to communicate its needs to the developer community; qualifications of application submissions from the developer community; cataloging of accepted applications; and, if desired, settlements with developer partners.

That gets to a key theme that Adan Pope, chief technology and strategy officer at Telcordia, says he and other keynoters at the TM Forum's recent Management World Americas event late last year discussed: That is will take a village for service providers to deliver cloud-based services.

Service providers like Qwest have built strong relationships with their customers over the years, and trust is a big reason why some customers will entrust IT operations to Qwest and others offering cloud-based services, Pope tells NGN magazine. But delivering cloud-based services will require a different level of operations within service providers, he adds, because it's likely that anyone a customer buys cloud services from will have a broad supply chain behind it.

That's why Telcordia is focused on providing software and services to enable CSPs to collaborate and provide a service factory so electronic bonding between various ecosystem partners can occur and allow for new efficiencies, he says.

Pope goes on to say that just before Telcordia announced its new service catalog it did a survey on what it takes to order a VPN. He says it typically takes four phone calls. That won't cut it with cloud services, he says, indicating that service provider back office operations are going to have to become more efficient to accommodate the interactions required between multiple ecosystem partners to launch and provide ongoing support for cloud-based services.

Richard Arthur, director of business transformation marketing for HP Communications & Media Solutions, also believes that service providers will not have all the cloud-based services, but rather will broker some services. As a result, HP has a practice focused on helping CSPs launch and support cloud services.

Its portfolio on this front includes an infrastructure as a service offer. HP also provides a portal through which service provider customers can place their orders, and HP activates what needs to be done in network. It also can bring in third-party capabilities if needed. And HP takes care of the end-to-end SLA management and things like fault management, performance management and mediation. **NGN**