

Customer Centricity

Composite desktop applications like the Microsoft Customer Care Framework can help operators by increasing speed time-to-market, reducing churn and enabling a 360-degree view of the customer.

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For telecommunications companies, the world is increasingly complex. The reverberations of the broadband explosion and the widespread of adoption of 3G have continued with wave after wave of new technical requirements. New service offerings evolve with alarming speed, enabling the growth of new markets, new strategies, and new capabilities. Competition for market share is reaching fever pitch.

However, as technologies have evolved, so have customers' expectations. Subscribers want high quality services activated and delivered at rapid speed. Add to this the fast-changing industry dynamics dotted with mega-mergers and acquisitions, and the increasing use of outsourced call centres. Service providers therefore need to be agile enough to adapt and respond quickly to these changing demands while dealing with the technical complexity of new offerings, retaining existing customers and winning new ones.

Customer loyalty needs to be earned through a consistently positive experience, which means satisfying customer demands in real time whatever their point of contact with the operator. This interaction could be by voice or email to a call centre or via a self-service online portal. To meet this challenge, service providers are increasingly turning towards an automated end-to-end process which cross departmental, organizational and technology boundaries. As a result, operators are seeing a positive impact on business agility, time to market and operational expenses.

A 360-degree vision

As competition intensifies, providers need to deliver high quality, 'sticky' services, often at low prices, and to make sure that the customer experience is both consistent and rewarding across all channels. A 360-degree view of the customer is crucial to this dynamic. The contact centre is therefore the most important point for responding to customer needs. As customers' expectations change, the contact centre must become more agile if it is to provide a consistent customer experience and improved performance across all channels.

Typical new offerings include video conferencing, web meetings, telemedicine, interactive television and instant messaging. All of these enable collaboration between end users, and each of them opens up opportunities for telcos to surge ahead of the competition – as long as they can integrate all applications to work efficiently. Fixed-mobile

convergence packages, like family plans or individually tailored service packages, complicate the matter still further:

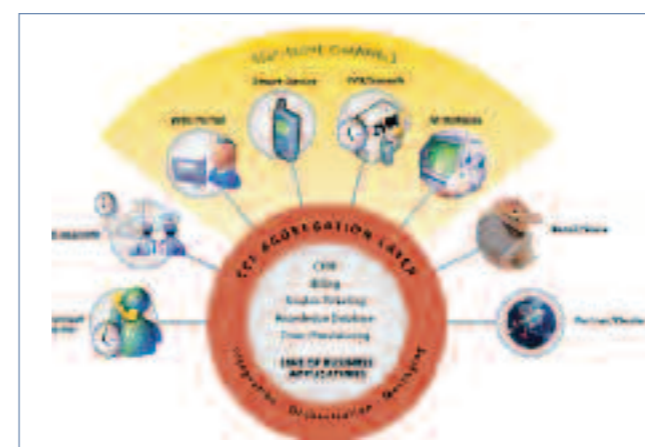
In the fulfilment process, for example, customer orders made through an interactive channel must be managed through network management, service management, and even suppliers' systems before the product is delivered to the customer. At any point during the process, the customer might ask for an update on the status of the order. Managers need to obtain the real-time status of key performance indicators, and the customer care manager needs a real-time view of the status of all running processes.

Many providers are looking to achieve this by enabling seamless interaction with customers and partners, whether by voice, e-mail, or self-service online portal, and by implementing automated processes to speed up the pace of business. They need to transition from a multi-channel customer care system to a self-service one that enables continuity through all channels. However, many are still struggling to achieve this vision, because they don't have end-to-end business processes that can cross departmental, organisational and technological boundaries. Without these, business agility, time-to-market and operational expenses will be negatively impacted.

Many service providers are looking at Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) as the answer to crossing boundaries by separating business processes from the underlying technology. The goal of an SOA is to create a mesh of collaborating services, which are available on a service bus or from a client user interface. The SOA is aimed at establishing a more agile IT infrastructure as a way of aligning this technology-independent blueprint with business strategies. In turn, companies reap the benefits of decreased OPEX, increased revenue and improved customer loyalty.

A practical application of eTOM

Adopting a process-driven framework like the enhanced Telecom Operation Map (eTOM) can help to deliver the infrastructure needed to achieve these goals. eTOM is the ongoing TeleManagement Forum initiative, positioned within the NGOSS program, to deliver a business process model for use by the telecoms industry. The eTOM approach helps to classify all the enterprise processes required by a service provider and its suppliers. It helps to understand boundaries of



Multiple-channel alternatives such as interactive voice response/speech, instant messaging (IM)/chat, Web, kiosk, e-mail, and retail, all on a single platform using Windows Server System, provide you with opportunities to expand your offers and service larger markets.

varying software components and to better organise the flow of information between systems and departments.

The way service providers manage the flow of information to customer service representatives' desktops is critical to optimising the flow of information at user interface level, and providing a consistent customer experience. While the SOA does simplify processes, it does not completely address this issue. However, help is at hand. The Microsoft Customer Care Framework, when combined with the eTOM model, speeds up the development, integration and rollout of customer care solutions and follows the principles of an SOA.

Microsoft Customer Care Framework gives call centre agents a 360-degree vision of customer data thanks to a mid-tier integration layer based on Web services standards. The solution uses smart client technology to leverage local resources (i.e. the processing power of the desktop rather than the server), and intelligently connects to distributed data sources. In doing so, it avoids the expensive and time-consuming process of bespoke integration with existing systems.

Based on Microsoft .NET Framework and Microsoft Windows Server System™ integrated server software, the Microsoft Customer Care Framework blends object-oriented architecture and SOA methods, creating an infrastructure that readily accommodates continuous change and growth. Its flexible architecture supports both front and back-end integration approaches, and unlike other Enterprise Application Integration (EAI) projects that require extensive middle-tier business logic and data integration, it can be implemented in a relatively short period of time using front-end integration techniques and leveraging back-end systems.

By leveraging existing IT investments with minimal disruption, Microsoft Customer Care Framework can integrate legacy technology and automate front-end applications, enabling a rapid return on investment. As a composite desktop application, it uses smart client technology to consume services, aggregate data, manage information

flow and provide a Web services user interface. Smart clients provide an adaptive and interactive user experience by leveraging local resources. In the fulfilment scenario, interaction with customers is represented by a front-end workflow or script that can guide the call centre agent, while services are orchestrated at the back end. Interactive tasks like order handling, service activation and configuration, and resource provisioning can be managed in the back end through a Web service layer.

Increased speed, reduced cost

Using an application like Microsoft Customer Care Framework, service providers can accelerate time-to-market for new services and create an integrated agent desktop in the minimum time, with a lower total cost of ownership. Because the customised user interface accesses multiple data sources, it also drives improvements in call centre efficiency and lowers average handling time (AHT). The improved flow of information between applications yields a 15-25 per cent reduction in AHT and a reduction in training time of 25-40 per cent.

In addition, up-sell and cross-selling opportunities are increased because Microsoft Customer Care Framework pre-fetches customer information and shares it in intelligent ways between different applications, eliminating redundancy and dramatically cutting the time spent by agents searching for and entering data to complete a call. Single sign-on for agents speeds up information retrieval, while Microsoft Customer Care Framework provides immediate visibility of the customer portfolio to facilitate targeted selling efforts. This combined approach of an SOA architecture and eTOM principles enables the continuous streamlining of operations by analysing customer service representatives' usage patterns and workflow.

By focusing on the key objectives of improved quality of service and reduced call duration, Microsoft Customer Care Framework enables contact centre operators to improve customer satisfaction and to realise the potential revenue opportunities offered through additional products and services. This is crucial in the fiercely competitive service provision environment: improved up-sell and cross-sell opportunities necessitate improved customer retention. If customers can choose when and how to have their needs met and can count on a high quality, consistent experience every time, regardless of the channel they use, they are more likely to remain loyal to the service provider.

As the broadband explosion continues and other new technologies loom on the horizon, the increasingly competitive environment demands ever more agility and speed from suppliers. Those who get to market first with sophisticated offerings already have a head start, but the key differentiator lies in providing a proactive, seamless customer service network. By enabling the integration of SOA and eTOM, Microsoft Customer Care delivers a 360-degree view of the customer that can give businesses the agility to stay ahead of the game in terms of cost, time and customer service.

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