The High-Quality Converged Experience:
Strategies & Tools for Becoming a Successful One-Stop Shop for Customers

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Many Communications Service Providers (CSPs) are becoming the central hub for consumers to get their voice, video, data and wireless from a single provider. As CSPs enter the race with Over-the-Top (OTT) players to provide content to consumers, they will become more entrenched in a consumer's life. This provides a significant opportunity for CSPs to increase loyalty, and ultimately, revenue.

Based on growth projections for bandwidth usage in the United States, the opportunity for operators is clear. Cisco Systems recently estimated that the average user in the U.S. currently consumes about 12GB of bandwidth per month (equal to about 32-40 DVDs). Cisco expects bandwidth usage to increase over the next few years to 15 Terabits per month—the equivalent of 3,750 DVDs per user, per month. This dramatic shift in the way consumers use voice, video and data services are creating new opportunities for growth.

This increase in bandwidth consumption, coupled with every device being connected, eventually leads to a world where all networks converge over a single IP service delivery system. That shift will dramatically impact how services are ordered, delivered, and billed across all providers. But, be careful what you wish for....

While the outcome of being a one-stop-shop for millions of consumers can start to feel like finding the end of the rainbow, the dark underbelly of what it takes to deliver and manage the consumer experience across services can be one of the biggest risks to unraveling the market share that any provider has gained.

Offering multiple lines of business often entails partnerships and many disparate systems working together to try to support a consumer experience across all services. This often ends up being less than seamless. The secret to success will be to eliminate "swivel chair" order processing

and also streamline systems to make it easier for customer service reps to upsell and offer products across all lines of business from one screen. It's easier said than done. So let's take a look at a few scenarios that illustrate best practices for beginning the journey.

Creating Centralized Product Catalog and Offer Management

As consumers increasingly expect seamless service delivery across all of their devices, they will also expect seamless quality of service and customer support. Future growth will come from 1) increased revenues through value-added services, and 2) building customer loyalty by giving subscribers what they want, when they want it.

For CSPs, the natural next step is to effectively target and market those offerings to the right customer at the right time. Comprehensive product catalog and offer management solutions will be a critical component to directly delivering offers to the customer's end device. They will also help marketers more precisely identify which tiered service is best for which customer and to upsell customers appropriately.

Offer management enables the selling channel application in the call center, or on the web, to conduct targeted selling to customers, which helps make the overall sales process more effective. It presents only the offers that are relevant, and takes the complexity and guesswork out of the hands of the end user (call center agent, or online web consumer). This lowers fallout, increases sales effectiveness and improves the customer experience. As a result,

the sales channels are able to make better targeted offers and tailor pitches based on customer-profile attributes (demographics, purchase patterns, credit history, etc.) to ensure the right offer is made to the right customer.

Underpinning this process is a product catalog, acting as the centralized source that brings together all the various products, service systems and databases. This master data source reduces time configuring products, implementing price changes and creating bundles. A catalog capability is particularly critical to manage price variability across rate plans as well as support new sales channels outside the call center.

With highly configurable product catalog and offer management systems in place, consumers might be interested in 40, 50 or even 100 new service offers a year, not counting the potentially hundreds of pricing plan options that could come out as part of other promotions and offerings. CSPs are further empowered to deliver a more personalized approach

to their customers to bolster loyalty and market share by extending affinity plans and delivering volume discounts and cross-product promotions.

Managing Bill Shock

When catalog and offer functions can be tied to billing, customer care and real-time network events, the operator begins to take the approach one step further to deploy a customer interaction management strategy that also personalizes and automates proactive communication with each customer as real-time events take place. This strategy makes real-time customer interaction a reality.

What makes this even more prescient is the recent FCC ruling that will require CSPs to alert customers when they are reaching their plan limits (and will be charged extra) for voice/text/data services.The goal is to help consumers avoid "bill shock," which happens when customers utilize services that go above and beyond what their specific plans allow for, and thus are charged additional fees. Bill shock is personal and has a bigger impact than providers might think; the negative experience causes consumers to refrain from using services and increases the likelihood that they will look for a new provider now, or in the future.

Thus, communication with customers is the single biggest factor to success. Providers can't wait to tell them it's too late–they must have the technology processes in place to be proactive, allowing customers to self-service their data needs and set limits via the web.

For example, a customer has a 30 GB data plan in their home and has streamed movies for most of the month, and is now 1GB away from the plan limit. Through the tie between product catalog, offer management and real-time network information, a message can be sent to the customer, based on his communication preferences, which notifies him of his usage cap, and makes an offer to buy additional GB or upgrade to a new comprehensive usage plan. This creates a more dynamic service experience for the customer, while also increasing revenue potential for the operator.

Integrating Mobile Customer Care

Mobile self-care empowers customers to pay their bills, access account information and even

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upgrade services with their smartphones. This new functionality creates dynamic and effective channels for customer interaction. Providers must think of the mobile phone as an extension of their brands, delivering a whole host of services and customer support options.

For example, a provider has created a mobile app that allows its subscribers to access features of their service, as well as options to pay their bills, ask for support or find account information. From the bill payment screen, mobile subscribers should be able to view their last payment, see the current balance and due date, and have the option to immediately make a payment. Should they need to, they can easily connect with a call center agent right from their current screen.

These customer care features are directly connected to the provider's existing billing and customer care systems, creating a real-time interaction. In addition, the mobile care platform is integrated with ordering and provisioning applications to support service upgrades and new connects as new service offerings are delivered to market.

With this type of integration, providers are assured that all changes subscribers make to their accounts via a mobile device are reflected immediately in their back office systems—just as when a subscriber pays a bill via the call center, through email, at kiosk locations or online.

As they consider systems that support mobile customer care, CSPs also need to consider the other types of integrations necessary to deliver the same kind of real-time customer care information that is available in the call center to the mobile phone, as customers expect seamless service, regardless of

communication channel. These integrations include:

- Customer care functions into their existing mobile applications. To further enhance the customer experience, providers should consider integrating customer preferences for paying their bill, accessing account information and even upgrading service all through their mobile device—just as they do on the PC.

- Mobile eCare functions with critical back office systems—including CRM, OSS and BSS systems. This integration is key in providing an enriched mobile customer care experience and maintaining a 360-degree view of the customer regardless of how they interact with you.

- Communication channels like QR Codes on printed statements and links on outbound email systems that link the print and electronic worlds in a more dynamic fashion—this strategy will also help drive adoption through 'scan to download' marketing campaigns.

- Any other mobile application initiatives underway so it becomes part of a larger ecosystem that your consumers are comfortable leveraging. Creating customer care channels in existing Manage My DVR apps, or other mobile strategies further strengthens brand presence on the mobile app ecosystem.

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From there, providers will be in a good position to see very real results. For example, they can leverage new mobile interactions with customers to drive new product sales, and present special promotions online to help drive adoption. Or, they can cross-sell advertising on their mobile platforms that are relevant and can generate revenue (HBO would likely pay for advertising, especially if providers could offer a fulfillment strategy.) Finally, providers can use the mobile communication channel as a means to create stickier relationships by tying in with other social media strategies to stay up-to-date on the tone of their customer base.

As renowned medical researcher Dr. Jonas Salk once said, "The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more." In this case, CSPs have significant work ahead to manage and respond to the massive changes that will be brought about by a converging network. But by creating a smart strategy and deploying the right technologies to manage this change, the reward will be increased loyalty, new revenue streams, and the opportunity to do more with customers.

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