Pipeline
Knowledge Is Power

Billing & OSS World 2007

by Alana Grelyak and Tim Young

The Telestrategies' Billing & OSS World 2007 conference, the organization's fifteenth conference to date, took place fairly smoothly at Chicago's McCormick Place convention center. The days were rainy and attendees not from Chicago may have been disappointed by the lack of visible skyline that is normally so readily apparent. Instead, they got storm clouds, nagging rainfall, and several lackluster days without sunshine.

The gray feeling outside, however, didn't necessarily intrude on the flurry of activity that was going on inside the convention. A maze of booths was set up in the long convention hall. Colorful displays, full candy dishes, and samples and goodies abounded. It had all the makings of a successful event, and depending on who you speak to, the event was just that. In our estimation, there was an undeniable correlation between the space in which a company operates (billing vs. OSS) and the perception of the show, but more on that later.

As can be expected, representatives of companies from all sectors were eager to speak to the press about their latest accomplishments and new releases.

Netcracker, for instance, was proud of its growth. They currently employ over one thousand people and expect the number to double each year. Wipro was pleased to say that they'd won the award for most friendly company for BSS/OSS integration. They also plan to formally launch their new active catalogue product at the convention in Nice.

Convergys and Tribold have formed a partnership that was well-researched and that they feel will help address some of the many challenges that are facing their respective entities. They hope to eventually become the "Wal-mart of telecommunications." Their Infinys Product Portfolio Management solution was clearly the cornerstone of their Billing World appearance, and we look forward to hearing more about it.

JacobsRimell chiefly promoted its Quickstart VoIP solution, which has moved into both the business and residential space. According to JR's Joe Frost, the solution is hugely scalable and, while generally aimed at and used by Tier 2 and 3 operators, it has been adopted by the digital voice division of a major North American cable operator. Frost asserted that, especially with voice service on that scale, just one percent failure is an absolute disaster, so the stakes are undeniable.

Openet was at the show, where the CTO and Founder, the amiable Joe Hogan, was chairing a panel on real-time rating and billing. He had a great deal to say, beyond that panel, on network intelligence, building OSS that works close to the network, IMS, lawful intercept, and the growth of Openet, which has recently has a major win with a large cable provider in the US. It would seem as if his central tenets are serving Openet well.

CSG Systems, a billing and customer care provider, was at the show displaying their very cool customer self-service kiosks, which can be used to allow satellite and cable customers to pay in person at payment centers without actually ever paying a person. The kiosk is considered a line-buster, rather than a replacement for payment agents. While some might consider heading to a payment center only to use a computer interface extraneous, the same could be said about going into payment centers at all. The kiosks seem to fill a valid space in the market.... and, to be less journalistic about it, are just plain neat.

You Need Single-Sign-On.
You Need a Network OS.

Nakina Systems

FTS was at the show and looking sharp and optimistic. The Business Control, Billing and CRM solutions provider has partnered with Sandvine Incorporated, which specializes in Deep-Packet Inspection (DPI) based policy management solutions to offer a solution that is a combination of FTS' Leap™ Business Control Engine (Leap BCE) and Sandvine's DPI-based policy solution. The goal is to enable higher broadband provider revenues and customer satisfaction by maximizing broadband access into a medium for new revenue-generating services. The effort sounds worthy and the goal valid, so we should all keep an eye on that project.

Oracle announced new capabilities for Oracle Communications Billing and Revenue Management Release 7.3. The enhancements build upon 7.3, which was released in September of '06, and include 'best pricing' features that allow providers to provide the best prices to subscribers based on usage in a particular billing cycle, and a 'dropped call' feature that identifies dropped calls and assigns credits or discounts accordingly.

Subex-Azure was present, complete with its fully-merged Syndesis arm. The company touted its position as an industry leader with 150 installations in 63 countries, and its Rocware revenue maximization solutions. The presence of several other India-based companies was particularly evident at this show, with Tech Mahindra, WiPro, and others making their presence felt to a greater degree than we've seen at some other trade events.

Besides some of our favorite OSS companies, there were billing firms... and a lot of them. What's an OSS vendor (or an OSS-exclusive publication, for that matter) to do? A representative from a US OSS company remarked that the show was really focused on billing, and the OSS component seemed less focused with fewer attendees interested in OSS products. When we mentioned hearing a sentiment to

that effect to executive staff from a Canadian OSS firm, the staff laughed aloud and replied, "You think?!" The sarcasm was not lost on us.

Neither lost on us was the fact that Billing World is a successful billing show. The expo floor was active, and while some OSS companies expressed that the only real reason for attending the show was to meet with existing clients or to have a venue to execute prearranged meetings, no one could claim that the show was unsuccessful by any stretch of the imagination. However, with the field of trade shows being as crowded as it is, belts are being tightened and companies have to make tough calls. For the moment, many top OSS firms still head to Billing & OSS World. If the show continues to come across as a billing show with a splash of OSS, however, the obsolescence of a show fighting to find relevance is inevitable.

If you have news you'd like to share with Pipeline, contact us at editor@pipelinepub.com.