OSS Leveraging the Cloud

By *Tim Young*

All of the swirling conversation about the possibilities associated with cloud computing (see any other article in this issue for an overview) has brought the possibilities of the cloud into sharp focus.

The cloud provides the promise of considerable cost savings in the enterprise space. In addition, while security is of constant concern, there is a possibility that a properly utilized cloud could be as secure as or more secure than non-cloud solutions, as information can be stored securely in a remote location rather than roaming around on hundreds of laptops and PDAs. (Which is analogous to the much publicized 60 Minutes report some years ago that, on the heels of the revelation of massive credit card fraud stemming from the hacking of TJ Maxx store networks, stated that online shopping may be, in fact, safer than shopping in stores, in terms of the threat of identity theft.)

In short, the cloud shows promise.

However, as OSS/BSS professionals, shouldn't we dig a little deeper than that? In our February

issue, Wedge Greene offered a piece about how service providers must "eat their own dog food" by "buying new OSS and BSS products that use the grid or leaning on their strategic OSS/BSS vendors to convert to the grid" (**http://www.pipelinepub. com/0210/AC2_1.html**).

By doing so, CSPs can demonstrate that they understand the cloud and its mission-critical nature. In addition, they would have the opportunity to get a fresh start, abandoning OSS/BSS investments that have long since outlived their usefulness. Furthermore, these CSPs could demonstrate that they are sold on the usefulness and beneficial nature of the cloud.

Of course there are obstacles for the adoption of cloud-based OSS/BSS. Wedge goes on to outline a number of obstacles for this shift into the cloud

for OSS/BSS vendors, including the sort of price transparency that would accompany such a move (a boon for CSPs!).

However, there are also technical concerns that may be holding up the move to cloud-based OSS/BSS.

About a year ago, the TM Forum got into the cloud fray, and Forum president Martin Creaner blogged about the possibilities of the cloud, noting that truly ambitious service providers could reach out through the cloud and establish the very "two-sided" business model that everyone's been crowing about for ages. Creaner mentioned the possibility of CSPs exposing their billing systems to third parties in the cloud with either a per-transaction fee or a revenue sharing model.

This is a brilliant notion, as it allows a CSP to leverage a core competency to create new revenue.

However, there are plenty of skeptics of the extent to which complex OSS and BSS offerings could be extended over the cloud at this time.

At least one blogger (at James Pullen's "OSS Line") pointed out that OSS and BSS applications are exceedingly complex, relying on workflow engines

and business logic that are not easily transferred into the cloud. The level of penetration that an OSS/BSS application requires, and the level of customization it necessitates to deal with a particular users business composition makes the idea of extending these systems across the cloud a tall order.

But that's not to say it can't be done.

In talking to vendors, especially, over the past few months, a number of them are convinced that, especially in smaller markets, emerging markets, or other Greenfield settings, there's no reason that the cloud can't work as a tool for extending

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OSS and BSS solutions. It will take some work, but the distributed nature of many modern operators, combined with the cost pressures of smaller carriers, mean that there is a vast amount of potential.

And so I turn it to you, CSPs and vendors.

Service providers: Are you amenable to the idea of cloud-based OSS/BSS? Do you think that would improve your understanding of and comfort with the idea of cloud computing and, in turn, make you a more effective provider of cloud solutions to external customers?

Vendors: Are you prepared to publish into the cloud and offer your products to providers as a SaaS or PaaS solution? Is this something you're doing already?

I encourage you to give it some thought and contact me at **tim@pipelinepub.com** to let me know where you are and where you're headed.

There's no question that the cloud contains potential. However, I, like many, am trying to understand how deep the potential is and how direct the benefit could be for the OSS/BSS crowd and the service provider community, as a whole.

Is this the sort of thing the telecom set is just enabling, or can it really be a game-changer in the way we all do business?