

By combining OSS and BSS data effectively operators can gain deeper customer and service performance insight from the wealth of data available from the networks, writes Douglas Gilstrap, senior vice president and head of Group Function Strategy at Ericsson

Elevated customer experience with integrated OSS/BSS

We have reached a turning point. Breathtaking progress in digital technologies and connectivity has expanded into more areas of society and business. Over the coming years, this rate of expansion will continue to increase and create innovation opportunities across industries, public services and in private life. We call this emerging era the networked society. To get there, Ericsson is working with telecom operators, selected industry verticals and other players across the M2M value chain using mobile broadband capabilities and assets with innovative technology to deliver sustainable business models.

Connectivity and wide coverage has enabled people to communicate in ways we hadn't envisioned. It has also created the demand for elevated customer experience through personalised, high quality services that enable not only work but also social networking — anywhere, anytime.

The prices of smartphones, laptops and all other types of

connected devices are declining, making them affordable for more people around the world and enabling them to participate in the networked society. The network that once was used for mobile phones communicating via voice and text messages is now being used for multimedia streaming, new services and expanding M2M technology, all of which create a lot more data traffic in the networks.

Customer centric mode of operation

When you take all of this into account it becomes clear that the user experience including quality of connectivity and differentiated services become key. Service providers will gain advantages by transforming from network centric to customer centric operations. Mobile broadband coverage itself will not be the differentiator but the combination of superior performance networks and the understanding of the targeted customers' behavior, demand and experience will.

The customer experience is by its nature a personal one that includes the many ways people communicate with the world around them. Managing this experience includes how the operators handle the services value chain — from finding a service to using it and, at the end, paying for it. Having a customer experience management framework and its adherent customer lifecycle helps operators to better understand and meet user needs at each customer touch point. At the highest level, the lifecycle consists of:

- Find — enhancing market awareness, proposition targeting and promotion relevance
- Get — making purchases smooth and enjoyable
- Setup — efficient and seamless provisioning of the purchased service
- Use — ensuring that the offering needs in terms of functionality and quality are met and that the customers are fully using the services available to them
- Pay for — providing simple, clear and convenient means to balance the customer's account
- Get Help — enhancing the experience customers receive when using customer care channels
- Modify — flexibility to easily modify the contract and service levels as a consequence of changed customer need or churn management activity

For operators it can be difficult to know where to get started and what to prioritise since each operator as well as customer has different needs and market conditions that require an individually

Douglas Gilstrap:
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adapted change process. Since there are many ways to address the different parts of the customer lifecycle, service providers should define a customer experience management strategy based on business objectives and customer understanding, that can justify the business value of the investments before investing.

At Ericsson, a key lesson we have learnt is that the tools and the architecture, including required data models, come last after the operational process and organisational aspects are defined. By taking a holistic approach starting with the business objectives, turning it into a customer management strategy and mapping that against processes and organisation, we ensure we have, from day one, customer touch points and operational aspects as the drivers. Using this method we do not have limitations embedded in the transformational thinking, limitations based on lack of functionality or other limitations in various tools that define the processes and the organisation.

When defining the customer experience management strategy, key target areas, segments and offerings must be identified together with the customer lifecycle needs across customer channels for the key target segments. Which of those needs are the ones that should be prioritised and which levers can be used to improve the customer experience?

Key questions to consider are:

Where and how do you consolidate the single customer view to achieve improved customer experience?

What order of priority do you give to different opportunities and threats, or both?

Analytics of combined network and BSS customer data

Effective data management designed to support customer experience management is a key factor for success. For all parts of the customer lifecycle Ericsson believes there is huge value in combining network data, such as customer's resource utilisation and patterns together with end-to-end service performance data with the rate plans, spending, complaints and other BSS customer data to provide a 360-degree view of the customer profile and behaviour. The potential to significantly elevate the customer experience by bringing these two data sources into the same customer view is probably highest in the touch points that relates to the Use, Get help and Modify areas. By doing that, it is possible to put the customer's present and past experience in the centre of the interaction, understanding what actions could be made to retain the customer and increase their spend.

An example that relates to Get help and Modify

As soon as a customer contacts the call centre, data such as historical and real-time throughput, capacity limits and customer activities is aggregated in the call centre's customer care system. The system structures and analyses the data, which means that the customer can be provided with quick and customised feedback. The operator can then use this data to understand the underlying mechanisms of customer issues and take pre-emptive action in order to reduce churners and minimise future problems.

“We understand how to combine IT and telecom networks’ data sources to create a better managed customer experience. The holistic approach provides value to your customers that can set you apart from competitors.”

Classical offline analytics can be complemented by real-time feeds from the network. The ability to do analytics in near-real time creates the capability to respond in an agile and proactive way to changing network conditions and service usage patterns, as well as creating a customer care environment where customers feel truly taken care of. The increased use of mobile broadband means the demand for real time solutions will only increase, both for managing the user experience and to ensure that operators receive payment for services provided.

Shifting from a network-centric to a customer-centric business, which requires deep understanding of the customers and their preferences to improve the customer experience and create customer loyalty is a transformation in general and in the area of OSS and BSS particularly. Change in the BSS has to be driven from the customer's point of view to achieve those goals while, in the OSS operation, the focus is on assuring the right end-to-end service performance from a business perspective as well as addressing technology and service demands.

Every time that Ericsson takes on a new IT and network operation or performs a transformation programme together with a customer, a stepwise methodology is followed to transform the operations towards the target architecture. To achieve this, the three cornerstones of general transformation — organisation, processes, and systems — are always taken into consideration.

Each of these steps is equally important for reaching the transformation goals set without risking day-to-day operation. Ericsson has the advantage of understanding the whole customer lifecycle; we understand that merging traditional and non-traditional data sources creates a better-managed customer experience. This holistic approach provides value to customer care that can set you apart from competitors.

Users of the network today expect their connected lifestyle to be uninterrupted as they work or socialise. Of course if something does go wrong customers want to have personal and quick care. By being able to use your existing data more completely you can effectively and efficiently handle customer problems when they occur. With the many years of experience Ericsson has gained providing OSS and BSS solutions as well as from operating OSS and BSS environments on behalf of our customers, Ericsson has developed a library of in-house experience in many different markets across the world. Ericsson has the capabilities and experience needed to achieve the steps needed for success, let us be your partner on this journey. ■