

## Unifying the digital lifestyle

by Dan Ford, Vice President, Product Marketing, Oracle Communications

Digital life is now in full swing and with it, the transformation from traditional media into the new, social-based, cloud-based mobile and interactive style. Communications service providers (CSPs) are now engaged in a “battle for a place in the social cloud”. They must differentiate to boost shrinking revenues while optimising their networks to ensure quality delivery. Major CSPs, like Verizon and Orange, begin to offer combined means of messaging by opening APIs and encouraging partners, in an effort to grab a share of this landslide towards unified digital life.



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We live in an ever-changing, digitally connected world. We create and consume an increasing volume of content on a daily basis and have a strong desire to share that content with friends, family, colleagues, customers, and others. On any given day, millions of photographs and videos are taken and shared via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and iCloud, among others. This content is in turn consumed, and often redistributed, on an assortment of always-connected mobile devices, connected televisions and connected gaming platforms that make up the fabric of our evolving digital lifestyle.

This evolution is further reflected in how quickly and completely we have converted to the digital medium. Music is primarily

consumed in digital format - so much so that CDs and the cassette tapes and vinyl records before them have essentially disappeared - and DVDs for video are soon to follow. More and more written pages are turned digitally. Public libraries now offer digital lending for an increasing number of titles, and the digital transformation of the newspaper and magazine industries is well underway.

This transition of content into bits and bytes has had a profound effect in shaping consumer expectations around the immediate and pervasive access to content. Such expectations have spread into the tools we use to communicate. Take for example the impact of mobile instant messaging services - such as iMessage, Facebook Messenger,

and BlackBerry Messenger, to name a few - that are challenging the primacy of SMS. At the same time, users want the ability to communicate across different channels in mid-conversation - changing tools and/or medium as they choose.

Social networks are spearheading this drive towards convergence, unifying how communications in all its forms are made available by combining the various communication methods into a single service, thereby becoming a comprehensive communication platform. In all this - where is the communications service provider? While many CSPs trail behind over-the-top innovators, there's still time to close the gap. However, CSPs must quickly innovate and

evolve their platforms such that they reduce the friction inherent in multi-network, multi-system and multi-faceted communication and collaboration.

CSPs face several imperatives in this changing landscape:

- 1) *Delivering a differentiated customer experience* - Provide services that are innovative and relevant to their user base; give customers control over how they manage, access and pay for their service and application portfolio; and understand better customer usage behaviour (e.g. apply business analytics) to support real-time actions to prevent churn and grow revenue.
- 2) *Increasing revenue* - Rapidly create and deliver new services to remain competitive and bridge the demands of the marketing department with the delivery capabilities of the network.
- 3) *Developing new partnering models* - develop how to sell to, and sell through partners, as competing and partnering with over-the-top (OTT) providers, providing relevant APIs for application developers and supporting multiple business models become critical.
- 4) *Optimizing networks* - Ensure that network resources are fairly allocated, such that consumers receive the quality of service they expect while paying for what they use.

CSPs must improve their ability to innovate and differentiate, and can do so by simplifying life for their customers and giving them increased choice and control over the services they use. These service attributes must also transcend the cloud as consumers and businesses alike are leveraging both private and public clouds at an increasing rate. The ability to innovate and differentiate cannot be made in isolation or without protecting the network,

We're increasingly seeing operators letting their customers manage all communication from one platform and aggregate their existing social communications into one service. This service synchronizes messages and contacts from multiple sources so all devices are kept in sync across their multiple access points, websites and applications. This has proven to be a valuable tool creating a stronghold for the CSP to provide a differentiated and valuable service to their customers.

We are also seeing an increased investment from CSPs in partner ecosystems where developing partner relationships, providing

partner self-servicing and exposing core communications assets are the focus. Better terms and streamlined approval process have been critical to engaging developers' interest. Exposure of communication assets is being accomplished through APIs. Orange, for example, is implementing strategies that offer core communication APIs for click to call, SMS, MMS, voicemail, location, email and more. These APIs are the interfaces that allow web or mobile applications to be enriched with communication services for both business and consumer applications. Not only does this create a more seamless environment, but it is creating new business opportunity for Orange. The company now offers an SMS campaign capability which lets businesses of all sizes target and deliver tailored offers to subscribers across the network.

Verizon Wireless has a similar approach with Verizon APIs called my-VoIP, my-presence, my-Location, and my-compute. Verizon is pushing forward to present these APIs via the cloud as a Platform as a Service (PaaS) and then deliver the resulting applications to end-users as Software as a Service (SaaS). This will be a critical area for CSPs as they need to move quickly to ensure their core communication assets don't get left behind in the cloud. It is apparent that Apple, Google, Microsoft and others are already deploying their own platforms and communication assets to create their own sticky services and brand loyalty. We will be watching as CSPs battle for a place in the 'social cloud'.

As cable operators deliver triple and quadruple play offerings, more are unifying and differentiating their subscribers' communications experience to limit churn. Messaging in the form of email, SMS, voice mail, etc., are made available on all end points: TV set-top-box, web and mobile. Calendaring services extend the DVR scheduler from the confines of the set-top-box, in essence mobilizing it. Presence-based rules guide the delivery of important messages such as alerts on the TV screen. CSPs who already provide these types of services will soon unify them with social networks, so that viewers can share their opinions with their friends online while watching live television. This is just another extension of the digital lifestyle, as we routinely engage in interactive socialisation during live broadcasts. We already see Tweets being read by broadcasters on shows like CNBC and Sports Halftime, but the next step is the automatic posting of such feeds with the option for viewers to filter them

based on individual preferences. Services like these can help operators retain and grow their subscriber base, and create new revenue opportunities.

Social networks and the integrated experience they provide are here to stay. CSPs must push ahead with differentiated services that leverage their extensive networks, broad customer base, and emerging cloud services. CSPs have the ability to deliver a more unified experience and play a more significant role in the revenue chain. For CSPs to avoid a future as a dumb pipe, inaction is no longer an option. ●



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