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Enhancing the Customer Experience Through Network Traffic Transparency

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For decades, carriers have maintained the status quo of keeping their customers in the dark regarding real-time network traffic data and other metrics. It's easy to understand why: allowing clients to see every little statistic or inefficiency in network operations, as well as customers' exact usage compared to what they paid for, has its drawbacks.

Sure, there are carriers that allow customers to see snapshots of their traffic data, and customers can request particular call and messaging metrics, but it's a cumbersome process — and it feels like they're not receiving all the necessary information about their own company communications, leaving their team to do the legwork. If they want to see details — such as where calls are originating from and terminating to, broken down by geography, carrier and type, and all real-time traffic data in and out of the carrier's network (plus minute-by-minute costs) with current stats compared to historical data — they might just be out of luck or need to do some serious digging.

Let's take a look at how powerful this information can be to service providers and enterprise clients alike.

Why the Need for Transparency?

First of all, transparency about voice quality metrics and other customer experience-related statistics is important because dropped calls, static- or delay-laden connections and other concerns are still a problem with many IP phone systems. When businesses first moved from landlines supported by traditional PBXs to IP telephony, the quality of calls delivered over the Internet earned a subpar reputation. Though VoIP call quality has improved drastically over the years and now rivals that of physical connections (with a host of new features and reduced costs to boot!), problems do sometimes persist as a result of poor network setup and other causes.

As this TechTarget article outlines, VoIP quality problems are probably related to the network, but they could also be caused by a lack of required capacity, an inefficient codec configuration, packet loss due to too much voice payload, or simply a computer issue, among other reasons. Clearly, the fix is not always simple. Comprehensive monitoring is needed to ensure that everyone tapping into the network, regardless of whether they're mobile or working from the office, experiences reliable quality across UC applications and services, TechTarget points out. But the monitoring contained within enterprise applications "may miss data, overlook poor performance or ignore key information," the article states, referencing a Frost & Sullivan white paper.

On a more high-level note, transparency is becoming more appreciated and expected in business interactions in general. A study by Label Insight found that 94 percent of consumers reported that they're likely to be loyal to a brand providing complete transparency. Additionally, roughly three-fourths of respondents said they'd spend more for a product offering the same, this Entrepreneur article explains. Transparency has become increasingly important in the business world due to a combination of the Information Age, social media, corporate distrust and websites offering business reviews, the article says.

And of course, customer experience is the number one priority for most, if not all, companies, though the telecom industry as a whole is struggling to deliver on that front. As of February 2018, the Net Promoter Score® (NPS) of the telecom industry is 31, NPSBenchmarks.com reports,

making it one of the lowest-ranked industries the website is tracking. Net Promoter Score measures customer loyalty by providing a metric to show how likely clients are to recommend a company.

In a recent Telecoms Tech survey, telco companies ranked last when respondents were asked which of seven industries is best at delivering a service addressing their needs. Nine out of ten of those surveyed view their telecom provider as a utility. Telcos need to differentiate and focus on customer-centric approaches, just as OTT providers have delivered free, user-friendly services that mobile customers have demanded, Telecoms Tech explains, adding that "those who build new services around the customer, unlocking data to provide seamless, personalised experiences, will find themselves best positioned for success."

A survey from Matrixx Software found that 64 percent of respondents said they would turn to another carrier if it offered a better customer experience.

At Channel Partners Evolution in September, speaker Tiffani Bova from Salesforce discussed the concept that the customer is the biggest disruptor in business today, not technology, according to this wrap-up in Channel Partners Online. Many partners have the right services, products, knowledge and talent, Bova explained, but they need to focus on customer experience.

Transparency and customer experience are more important than ever in the business world at large, and the telecom industry needs to act accordingly and evolve to meet demands.

For Service Providers: *Concerns, and the Benefits that Outweigh Them*

It's clear that transparency, detail and deep insight surrounding real-time network traffic data is an area of concern for customers. So why aren't all carriers providing this information?

Most bandwidth providers avoid letting customers know how much bandwidth they're using minute by minute, hour by hour, because they don't want them to realize when they're overprovisioned. This knowledge could cause clients to cut back on contract terms; maybe they notice that they only need 750mb commitment next year instead of 1gb, for instance. Too much information can take money off the table for these providers. If, however, they provide that detail in a useful way and overdeliver on service quality and customer experience, their transparency can help to build the trust that will keep clients loyal in the long term.

And for carriers, it's a simple question of whether they want to point out their mistakes in real time. Though it seems a bit counterintuitive to do so, being transparent allows carriers to fix small issues more quickly and earlier in the process, keeping those issues from escalating. This way, customers essentially become part of carriers' network monitoring teams, alerting them as soon as issues arise. Carriers that offer transparency *and* own their own network are in an especially good position to help customers, as they can address concerns immediately without needing to open trouble tickets with various other providers. (Unfortunately, aggregators and resellers still would need to elevate the issue to several other companies to find resolution).

For Customers: *The Upsides of Carrier Transparency*

For a carrier's customers, robust, real-time network traffic data can help them to save money — not only by keeping billing agreements on track but also by avoiding paying for outside monitoring tools. Indeed, many businesses look elsewhere for monitoring platforms that will go above and beyond the network traffic insight carriers have traditionally offered. This incurs additional, unnecessary costs and adds yet another disconnected platform, billing cycle and support team that companies have to deal with.

Another huge benefit to transparency is being able to quickly narrow down the source of a network hiccup. When a problem arises, a client can open up the monitoring dashboard and easily see whether the fault lies with the carrier or their own systems; if neither, they can move on to other potential causes. No more waves of blind trouble tickets to everyone involved in your network! This more tactical approach skips an entire layer of effort and complexity (and helps to reduce trouble tickets for service providers).

Robust network metrics can also allow carriers' customers to have full insight into their entire communications platform, end to end, even if it's a bit of a patchwork setup. How many carriers have no real visibility into the legacy side of their network? Far too many, and who they are would surprise you! Being able to see all calls and messages with the same level of detail across the entirety of the network, all on one pane of glass, is a true game-changer.