

Proactive Network Issue Resolution is the Key to a Great Customer Experience

By: Wojciech Dziunikowski

The telecommunications landscape is becoming increasingly competitive, forcing CSPs to find ways of improving their market position. Originating mainly from the IT world, OTT players are the main opponents, with light, easy-to-use mobile applications from companies such as Facebook, Uber and Spotify forcing customers to interact constantly with the service provider.



Because they provide access to the network powering the circulatory system of today's economy, however, telecoms companies are well positioned to compete with OTT providers in the realm of customer experience.

It may seem obvious, but when looking to optimize customer engagement touchpoints to improve the overall experience, the most important touchpoint of all is the network itself. But a customer's day-to-day experience of the network is like the 90 percent of an iceberg that lies below the surface of the water. Their level of satisfaction related to a CSP's service is largely hidden from view.

Only when a major problem—such as a network outage—occurs will a customer be likely to consider a secondary touchpoint such as calling a CSR or making their feelings known on social media. By this time, though, it's too late: the customer's experience has been sufficiently frustrating to spur him or her to take action, and the CSP must undo any damage done.

Prevention is better than cure, of course but, technically and commercially, most CSPs tend not to have invested resources in preventative measures, a situation which, viewed objectively, appears counter-intuitive.

CSPs must therefore become proactive in finding and addressing issues before they become real problems that can have a negative impact on the all-important customer experience.

The most important touchpoint

To fully optimize the customer experience, it is important to first understand the customer journey, during which time a customer will interact with a CSP via several touchpoints. These include first contact through the decision to order a service; the service set-up, service delivery and strengthening the relationship; to service termination, and possible repurchasing of the same or different service.

Quality of experience has been [defined](#) as “the overall acceptability of an application or service, as perceived subjectively by the end-user, and includes the complete end-to-end system effects (client, terminal, network, services, infrastructure, etc.).”

This definition requires CSPs to constantly monitor the complete effects of all touchpoints to ensure that the failure of one component doesn't negatively impact the overall experience. If it does, the CSP must react quickly to solve the problem and minimize its ultimate impact on the customer.

But while many projects have been launched with a view to optimizing each of these touchpoints, when it comes to managing customer experience, the key asset in any CSP's arsenal is actually its network. The network will always be the first touchpoint for any subscriber using a service based on mobile connectivity. And, as owners of telecom networks, operators will have valuable detailed

insight into customer use of the network, their behavior patterns, their location at any given time, and their needs.

Many initiatives aimed at improving customer experience “across all touchpoints” will address only sales or marketing touchpoints, however, without taking the network into account. Under-investing in this crucial touchpoint—and failing to properly manage any network failure—can severely impact the overall end-to-end service and, of course, the customer experience.

The weakest link

If CSPs neglect the fact that the network is their key asset, and focus only on sales touchpoints instead, they will paint an incomplete picture of the overall customer experience.

Indeed, a customer will visit a sales touchpoint in order to access the network, from wherever they are, whenever they choose, in whichever way they choose, with the highest quality service and at the lowest possible price. The network is therefore the first and most important touchpoint a CSP can use in improving customer satisfaction. Customers require continuous access to the network and the services it provides, and so the network must always work smoothly, wherever it is accessed. If this fundamental component is not assured, initiatives focused on improving any other touchpoints are redundant.

Unfortunately, however—whether due to human error, software glitches, or hardware outages—failures happen all the time. Customers, though, aren’t interested in the cause of failures. They just want to know how quickly such failures will be remedied.

An outage in any one service component can color a customer’s view of an entire service. A customer who has purchased a triple-play service, for example, will perceive it as a whole package. But if problems with the fixed network lead to delays in accessing a movie on Netflix, their perception of the service will be average at best, and open the CSP up to the real risk of that weakness being exploited by a competitor. Consumers are notoriously fickle, after all, and will often take their money to the operator that provides the better service.

The next evolutionary step

In an environment in which customers expect operators to react in real time—and are not afraid to voice their dissatisfaction if they don’t—the proactive detection of network issues is essential. Achieving this proactivity requires the comprehensive, real-time analysis of data originating from the network.

CSPs recently began investing in migrating from traditional network operation centers (NOCs), focused on specific network technologies, to service operation centers (SOCs), focused on end-to-end services. Despite successful implementations of the SOC concept, however, telecoms’ IT environments tend still to be organized in silos, each focused on different technologies such as mobile network, fixed network, or IPTV. This siloed approach makes it impossible to monitor customer experience holistically regarding all services in use. And, as the Netflix example illustrates, failure in one service can affect a customer’s perception of an entire package.

The next step in the organizational evolution of CSPs is likely to be the establishment of service excellence centers (SECs), gathering experts from different domains to collect, interpret and efficiently utilize broader information from a range of sources. Doing so will support every interaction a customer has with the network, from service activation through delivery to termination.

This next iteration should also take into account information related to customer segmentation, such as high ARPU customers and heavy roamers, to allow CSPs to prioritize network incidents and their resolution accordingly, and to provide more consistent input that will allow network planning departments to prioritize spending according to expected ROI.

Integrated assurance

Key to achieving these goals is the implementation of a comprehensive assurance platform, a modern OSS/BSS solution that provides an integration point between data coming in from traditional assurance domains such as performance, service quality and fault management, and enriching it with data from BSS domains, such as customer care and CRM.

By correlating data from both network and other OSS/BSS sources, such a data analytics solution can produce a comprehensive real-time analysis that will provide invaluable insight into a customer's experience of the provided services, including their current location, and early detection of problems accessing basic services such as voice and SMS, OTT services, and others such as VoD.

Not only can this data be used to generate summary reports, enabling CSPs to prioritize network planning, and identify and solve hidden problems on the network, it can also trigger marketing actions such as sending vouchers to compensate for network problems as soon as they arise, or sending information to customers via SMS or an app, thus keeping the customer satisfied.

Together, this integrated assurance approach—supported by an OSS/BSS data analytics solution—gives CSPs the ability to proactively improve customer experience by addressing potential issues in the network, their primary touchpoint, before the customer contacts one of the other, secondary touchpoints to voice their displeasure about the network quality.

Customer experience is one of the main battlefields in the ongoing competition between CSPs and OTTs. The use of real-time data that takes into account the real experience of customers when using a given service provided by their networks will enable CSPs to reclaim important ground.