

Better Data, Better Decisions

By:

Big Data, BI, AI. These buzzwords seem to have been circulating in the industry for years now. They have been used as the battle cries for look-at-me technology companies who want to always appear on the edge of innovation. And, perhaps rightfully so. With the success of so many companies relying on their ability to leverage data, those that have tangible solutions *should* beat the drum often—and loudly.



Recognizing it can be difficult to sift the hype from actual technical progress, it's important to note that the technology companies are typically the ones who lead the market in leveraging new technology. They come from a different culture, after all. Risk versus reward. Fail fast. It should come as no surprise that many technology companies are often the hotbeds of innovation who strive to incorporate the latest and greatest technology into their solutions, as fast as possible.

The culture of service providers is drastically different. For many of them, their culture stems from a risk-averse, government-regulated utility environment. Tack on decades, if not a century's-worth of mission-critical legacy systems, and you're getting warmer. From there, all you need to do is add the daily pressure of an onslaught of new market entrants, webscale competitors breathing down your neck, and massive market-share risk if you get it wrong. But, it's not all doom and gloom.

Some service providers are rising to the challenge. They are shifting their culture and technology to become innovative digital service providers. This digital-transformation journey varies from service provider to service provider. But for those leading the way, they are embracing new technologies—such as artificial intelligence (AI), network functions virtualization (NFV) and software-defined networking (SDN)—within their own networks and passing innovative solutions through to their customers. Some have created their own innovation labs to stay on the forefront of technology advancements. They also are taking the time to meticulously sift through the hype to find innovative third-party solutions and technology companies to help them accelerate their digital transformation. Unfortunately, there are very few service providers—such as AT&T—who fall into this category today.

"It's not an even dispersion," John Abraham, a leading analyst at Analysys Mason, told *Pipeline*. "We have very few operators in the True Believer category (as it relates to digital transformation), and AT&T is one of them. Instead, we see the majority of service providers between the Hybrid and Skeptics category."

Analysys Mason has been tracking service provider transformation globally with its [Digital Experience Index \(DXi\)](#), or "dixie" for short. Looking at several key factors, Analysys Mason has grouped operators into three categories: Skeptics, Hybrid, and True Believers. Skeptics are those that are reluctant to transform, True Believers are fully embracing transformation, and Hybrids fall somewhere in between.

With the vast majority of service providers being either reluctant to change or somewhat open to the idea, and the vast majority of vendors touting the latest and greatest technology, it's no wonder that a rift exists between the two communities that can best help each other. But the one thing they seem to agree upon is the problems they are both trying to solve.

Mo' data, mo' problems

One of the biggest challenges facing service providers is contending with the seemingly insurmountable volume of data being generated by devices, networks, systems and users. Gen-E is a leading provider of solutions that help service providers and enterprises harness their data by simplifying data aggregation, visualization and management.

“There are massive amounts of data being generated daily. Service providers and enterprises can now better manage this data with new, innovative approaches,” says Rhett Williams, President of EMEA at gen-E. “But there is a plethora of solutions, techniques, tools, and technology companies—all vying for a piece of their budget—claiming they can solve these problems. What service providers should be asking is ‘what am I trying to achieve from a business-goal perspective,’ and [the answer to] that has to drive the set of tools that are chosen to deploy the next generation of services over the next five years.”

AT&T echoes the big data challenge, has embraced transformation early on, and understands the importance of accelerating transformation.

“We see 200-plus petabytes of data every single day on the network,” Rupesh Chokshi, Associate Vice President, Product Marketing Management at AT&T told *Pipeline*. “You can imagine the global scale we have. Getting ready for the future was very important for us, and we’re executing on it day-in and day-out. The strategy is right, the vision is right, we did it at the right time, and we’re reaping the benefits already.”

While it’s good to see an agreement between service providers and technology providers, big data and analytics are nothing new. In fact, we’ve been extensively writing about it in *Pipeline* for years (see: [2012](#), [2013](#), [2014](#), [2015](#), [2016](#), and [2017](#)). Solution providers, such as IBM, have been offering various forms of data solutions for even longer. The truth is that there has been an evolution of both technology and techniques that has led us on the journey to where we are today. The difference, however, between those that are succeeding now is their ability to see through the hype to deploy viable solutions that both enable and accelerate their specific business objectives.

“The real question for everyone as it relates to harnessing big data is ‘what am I trying to learn?’” adds Williams. “Each department has its own unique needs and approach to analyzing the data for different purposes.” He goes on to explain, “The needs of a marketing department vary from that of network operations, which varies from that of the C-suite.”

Let’s face it: Better access to data simply makes you better. Remember life before YouTube? Google? The Internet? Anything you could ever want to know is now just a couple of clicks away. Better data enables you to make faster, better decisions. It enables you to learn rapidly. Why doesn’t this exist within the environments of service providers and enterprises? Well, it does.

Solutions, such as gen-E’s OpCenter, allow data to be aggregated from multiple legacy, third-party and future systems and present that data in customizable, preconfigured dashboards tailored to each user’s unique needs. This empowers key stakeholders across the organizations with the information they need, when they need it.

Combined with advanced analytics, such as OpsCenter Analyze, (available in September 2018), it’s not unlike a time machine that enables you to look back, project forward, and make better decisions on what to do now. And leveraging machine learning, it will enable automated systems to make better decisions too.

The end of hype

Hype ends when reality takes over. Many of us have heard the hype come and go, and me maybe more than most. But, the important takeaway is that much of the hype has become reality. Remember all that hype around how broadband was going to change the world? That happened. 3G and 4G? Here. Cloud? Yep.

As we look to the horizon and listen to the constant drumbeat of hype, it’s important we listen. These new technologies—such as AI, machine learning, network virtualization, 5G, software-defined networking, and IoT—are becoming both a reality and a necessity.

Today's market rewards the intrepid. There is no place for fear. Organizations need to embrace transformation and sift through the hype to find future-proof solutions that can help accelerate their innovation to achieve their specific business objectives.

For more, Analysys Mason, AT&T, gen-E and a panel of other industry innovators will be featured on an upcoming [Pipeline webinar titled "The Impact of Transformation"](#) later this month, which you can register for [by clicking here](#).