

The 2019 Pipeline Innovation Awards

By: Scott St. John

Once again the town of Nice, France on the flowery fringe of the French Riviera played host to the annual *Pipeline* Innovation Awards. Nice rarely disappoints, and this year was no exception.

I started my trip with a quaint stroll to stave off the impending jet lag. Weaving through the parks adorned with tasteful pieces of art nouveau, winding down through the cobblestone pedestrian streets of Old Town — everything seemed to slip away. Nice truly embodies the spirit of the *Pipeline* Innovation Awards. An ever-blooming marriage between the new and old. The promise what can be nestled in the comfort of antiquity. A prolific union between what was and what will become.

Browsing through the bursting blooms of color at the Flower Market, one could almost forget the reason for being there. For me, the feeling was fleeting. I was there to recognize and appreciate a select group of innovators who had traveled from around the world to Nice and through the rigorous evaluation process of the *Pipeline* Innovation Awards.

The 2019 *Pipeline* Innovation Awards were fueled by the advancement and combination of technologies to create something new, awesome, and inspiring. *Pipeline* received [hundreds of nominations](#) this year—more than any other and a 225 percent increase over the previous year. Competition in the much-coveted Most Innovative Technology Provider category, which also boasts a prize valued at over fifty thousand dollars, was up 30 percent. Both are positive signs for the industry, as innovation appears to be a key industry trend and is taking root on a global scale.

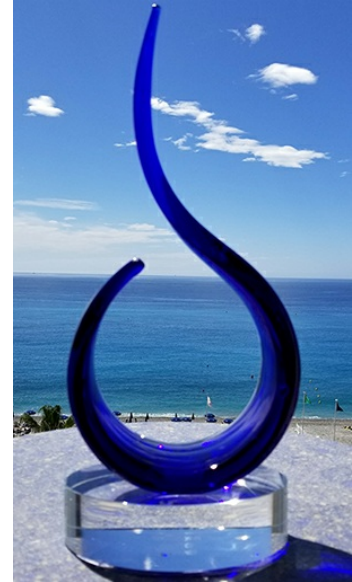


Figure 1 - The Flower Market in the Old Town of Nice, France

[Nominations are open all year](#) to anyone who has innovation to showcase, and are received from companies—large and small—as well as by customers, partners, suppliers, and *Pipeline*. Contestants were able to select from [more than 10 categories](#) of technical innovation, in which they competed to be the most innovative. Contestants could even submit new categories for emerging areas of innovation. This year's categories spanned key technical areas such as Analytics, Assurance, BSS, Cloud, Customer Experience, Data Aggregation, OSS, Network Technology, and other timely topics.

From the hundreds of nominations *Pipeline* accepted this year, 48 moved forward to the semi-finalist stage of the competition. Semi-finalists completed extensive submission questionnaires for each category they entered and provided gigabytes of supporting material to illustrate their innovation. The completed questionnaires were mathematically scored based on over 30 different facets of innovation to objectively identify the top two innovators within each category. These top two finalists in each category were presented to [the esteemed judging panel](#), comprising service providers, analysts, and other key industry stakeholders who buy, recommend, and invest in innovative technologies. The 2019 judging panel included key executives from CenturyLink, MTN, Telenor, Telstra, WOW! and the principal analyst from ICT Intuition. The *Pipeline* Innovation Awards judges participate each year to stay abreast of the latest technical innovations, and even routinely buy the products entered by the contestants. This year, the judges had their work cut out for them: only a fraction of a point separated a finalist from the next semi-finalist, and one vote separated the winner from the runner-up in several categories.

This year's Finalists included some of the most notable industry innovators, all of which are advancing the industry and technology, ultimately changing the way we connect as a global society.

A complete list of all 2019 nominees, semi-finalists, finalists, winners and runners-up can be viewed within [the Innovation Awards section of the Pipeline website](#), under Contestants. This year's Finalists are listed below:

<u>2019 Pipeline Innovation Awards Finalists</u>	
CloudSmartz	Comarch
ETIYA	Inflect
Intersec	Intraway
LightRiver	Netcracker Technology
PacketFabric	Radisys
Synchronoss	Sigma Systems
Unitas Global	Ziotis

Table 1 - The 2019 *Pipeline* Innovation Awards Finalists.

The competition was especially fierce within each of the categories of the 2019 Innovation Awards. Each submission represented a significant advancement in technology—and every competitor is worth noting—but only one could win in each category. At seven o'clock on Monday, May 13th, the 2019 Innovation Awards participants gathered at Le Siècle on the Promenade des Anglais to rub shoulders with some of the greatest industry innovators, enjoy drinks, dine on an amazing meal—and to find out who had won.



Figure 2 - Le Siècle in Nice, France

The 2019 *Pipeline* Innovation Awards

Competition

The evening began with mingling and drinks, as the crowd gathered and settled in, and the talk and anticipation of the awards grew. Those who had worked painstakingly on their submissions for over a month—some entering as many as six different categories—began to show an air of relief now that the program was coming to fruition. The innovators discussed their submissions, and conversations around some of the most sophisticated technology in the world could be heard as the murmur amplified. Just as in the awards program itself, the application and evolution of such topics as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, advanced customer experience management, data aggregation and visualization, operational and business support systems, and virtual and cloud network technologies wove their way through the conversation. Everyone took their seats as the four-course meal service began, anxiously awaiting the results.

Editor's Choice

The Editor's Choice is a unique category which gives us at *Pipeline* the ability to recognize the most interesting innovations across all of the Innovation Awards categories. This was not an easy task.

All of this year's competitors showed a high degree of innovation and finding just a few for the Editor's Choice category was daunting. In the end, however, several stood out from the rest; and CloudSmartz, ETIYA, Inflect, Netcracker and Ziotis topped our list.

CloudSmartz was selected for its Acumen360 solution for digital customer experience management and automation for customer, product and network innovation. Acumen360 provides a solution that works as an overlay to existing legacy environments that helps mitigate legacy operations support system (OSS), business support system (BSS), and CRM investments, yet also provides critical capabilities to monetize new digital infrastructure technology investments to take advantage of digital revenue streams, such as augmented reality, low latency video and IoT.

ETIYA was picked for its Digital Business Platform, which was submitted in the Innovations in BSS category. ETIYA's Digital Business Platform packages innovative AI technology into a predefined offering and delivers it on a cloud infrastructure. The platform can be implemented within months, with minimal CAPEX and with the scalability required for rapid, profitable subscriber growth. ETIYA deployed its Digital Business Platform to enable Videotron to create Canada's first all-digital mobile and internet provider, called Fizz.

Inflect was selected from the Data Aggregation category for its Global Marketplace solution. Inflect's Global Marketplace and patent-pending Routefinder application is built upon a proprietary data service called Vinyl. The Global Marketplace allows both buyers and sellers of data center, network and cloud services to find routes between endpoints using a browser-based portal—and with the ease of booking a flight online.

Netcracker was picked from the many competitors in the OSS category for its Hybrid Operations Management (HOM) solution, which Communications Service Providers (CSPs) can use to provide convergent services quickly and cost-efficiently, while delivering an excellent digital customer experience and successfully competing with digital market players. HOM operates across complex hybrid environments and helps CSPs capitalize on new market and transformation technologies such as virtual networking, 5G, cloud and IoT services.

And finally, Ziotis made our list for its innovative approach to cross-domain hyper-automation across complex hybrid telecom and enterprise environments. The company's comprehensive Zen product portfolio leverages machine learning and AI, blockchain, OSS and BSS, and robotics process automation (RPA) to provide zero touch automation across silos, organizations and departments, and even with third-party partners. Zen can be used by CSPs and enterprises to fully automate complex and time-consuming manual processes across disparate networks and systems, enable new business models, monetize third-party relationships, move vast amounts of both

structured and unstructured data between systems, and enable webscale-like agility.

Picking a winner wasn't easy. But, in the end Inflect was selected as the winner and ETIYA as the runner-up. Inflect showed a masterful application of the underlying technology leveraging patent-pending innovations to create a seamless and effortless user experience. Similarly, ETIYA's innovation illustrated the power of its proprietary technology to launch a successful MVNO business in record time.

For the rest of the winners all we could do was wait, as it was up to the [Innovation Award judges](#) to select the most innovative submission for each of the remaining categories.

Innovations in Customer Experience

It came down to just two finalists in Innovations in Customer Experience: Netcracker and Synchronoss. Netcracker, an experienced Innovation Awards veteran, submitted its Digital Customer Experience Solution. The Digital Customer Experience Solution determines which new offers are relevant based on factors like spend; lifetime value; eligibility for promotions or upgrades; recent transactions; existing equipment; or changes the customer might have made to his or her profile in the course of a live customer interaction. Synchronoss entered its Digital Experience Platform (DXP). The Synchronoss Digital Experience Platform is essentially a tool kit of capabilities that developers can use to simply and quickly design, deploy, manage and optimize customer journeys across multiple channels from one platform, ensuring a consistent and seamless single or omni-channel experience. Just one and a half points separated them as finalists, and it was now up to the judges to pick the most innovative between them. Ultimately, the judges selected Netcracker as the winner, making Synchronoss the runner-up in the Innovation in Customer Experience category.

Innovations in Operational Support Systems (OSS)

The Innovations in OSS category was hotly contested, with only one quarter of a point separating the finalists from the next semi-finalist, Netcracker; and a tenth of a point separating Netcracker from the next semi-finalist, CloudSmartz. Ultimately, Sigma Systems and Intraway rose to the top as the finalists in this category.

Sigma Systems entered its SigmaPortfolio Inventory solution, which centralizes the product-service-resource portfolio inventory data into a single master file and makes that data widely available for access by any external system. Intraway submitted its Symphonica OSS Service Orchestration and Provisioning product, a highly interoperable solution which manages complex orchestration processes for a variety of services and supports high-volume transactions efficiently with zero-touch service order management and open APIs. Intraway's impressive submission package illustrated extensive interoperability and superior support of multiple industry standards, hybrid network technologies, distilled multiple protocols into a no-code user interface, and demonstrated significant return on investment (ROI) for its customers in several active deployments. This led, at least in part, to why Intraway was selected by the judges as the winner in this category, making its notable contender Sigma Systems the runner-up.

Innovations in Business Support Systems (BSS)

In the Innovations in BSS category, it came down to two leading innovators: ETIYA and Netcracker, with Netcracker pulling out the win by a single vote. ETIYA submitted its Digital Business Platform, which is a gamechanger for rapid launch and support of Virtual Digital Service Providers (VDSPs). Netcracker entered its Netcracker Cloud BSS Solution, which is a cloud-native BSS solution that helps service providers—such as MSOs and MVNOs—achieve digital transformation objectives, accelerate time-to-market and shift to new commercial models, while avoiding the high costs and long timelines associated with traditional transformation initiatives.

Innovations in Network Technology

The Innovations in Networking category was another category in which it came down to a single judge's vote between the two finalists, Uitas Global and PacketFabric. PacketFabric submitted its PacketFabric Network-as-a-service Platform, which enables users to create custom, private networks; instantly connect to cloud service providers; reach XaaS providers; extend carrier network reach; and enable convenient, private interconnection. Uitas Global entered its Cloud Connectivity solution, which is a software-defined interconnected cloud connectivity fabric that simplifies the design, procurement, delivery, operation, and management of cloud connectivity. In a split vote, Uitas Global pulled out the win, making PacketFabric the runner-up.

Innovations in Cloud

Netcracker and Uitas Global dominated the Innovations in Cloud category, with a ten-point lead over the next semi-finalist. Netcracker submitted its Netcracker Business Cloud (NBC) solution. NBC allows CSPs to expand to new IT, XaaS, SDN/NFV services and make personalized bundles, and ICT providers expand to telecommunication services and offer a broader portfolio for their business customers. Uitas Global once again submitted its impressive Uitas Cloud Connectivity solution, which simplifies the design, delivery and management of cloud connectivity. Ultimately, the judges selected Netcracker as the winner, and Uitas Global as the runner-up.

Innovations in Data Aggregation

In another tight category that came down to a split vote, Inflect and CloudSmartz squared off as the finalists in Innovations in Data Aggregation. Both were cutting-edge thought leaders who submitted state-of-the-art innovations. Inflect submitted its Global Marketplace and patent-pending Routefinder application, built upon its proprietary data service called Vinyl. The solution—which allows users to easily buy and sell connectivity between end points—was also a finalist in and the winner of the Editor's Choice Category. CloudSmartz, which was also a finalist in Editor's Choice and the winner in another category, submitted its Acumen360 solution as a digital customer experience portal and automation platform for customer, product and network innovation. Both submissions amassed data from multiple data sources to provide actionable intelligence to the user in a simplified interface, to quickly and easily enable additional innovations. In the end, the Innovation Award Judges selected CloudSmartz as the winner, and Inflect as the runner-up.

Innovations in Analytics

In Innovations in Analytics, the finalists came down to Radisys and Intersec. Radisys submitted its MediaEngine, its in-call speech recognition and media analytics solution. MediaEngine is a virtual media server platform for real-time communication services—such as VoLTE, Unified Communications, Conferencing, Contact Center, Customer Service and WebRTC—and combines the ability to recognize and analyze speech in the context of voice and video calls. Intersec entered its GeoInsights solution, which enables service providers, enterprises, governments, and smart cities to access all of their connected devices' locations regardless of the device, handset or application. GeoInsights gathers massive amounts of network data from various sources such as Wi-Fi, mobile, sensors, LoRa, and RFID without any additional load on the operator's network from active requests and enables additional analyses and heat mapping. Both submissions demonstrated the true spirit of this category—and innovation itself. The judges ultimately selected Radisys as the winner and Intersec as runner-up.



Figure 3 - Winners were announced as participants enjoyed a mouth-watering, four-course meal at Le Siècle

Innovations in Assurance

Comarch and LightRiver were the finalists in the Innovations in Assurance category. Comarch submitted its Intelligent Assurance and Analytics (IA&A) solution. Comarch's IA&A enables integrated assurance with OSS/BSS data analytics, big data management capabilities, an artificial intelligence module using machine learning algorithms for predictive maintenance, and knowledge accumulation functionalities to automate the collection and collation of best practices related to preventing and solving network issues for operators. LightRiver entered its netFLEX solution. Its netFLEX Optical Assurance Automation was designed and developed to automate the overall visibility, health, and management of transport networks and services. The platform can automate the detection or prediction of a network or service impairment, automate the associated test or isolation of the problem and, in many cases, even automate the remediation. In another split decision, the Innovation Award judges selected Comarch as the winner and LightRiver as the runner-up.

Innovation in Managed Services

The competition in Innovation in Managed Services boiled down to Netcracker and Uitas Global. Netcracker, having entered several solutions in other Innovation Awards categories, submitted its Netcracker Managed Services offering. Netcracker's Managed Services solution boasts a wide range of customer deployments and encompasses a wide range of professional services from the very early stages of customer engagement—including managed services project value consulting; a wide spectrum of hosting, operating and outsourcing options; to analytics-driven operations assurance and optimization. Uitas Global submitted its Cloud Connectivity platform, which provides a fully managed service and 24x7x365 in-depth monitoring and management of network infrastructure from the enterprise to the cloud, including fault and performance management, integrated trouble ticketing, and reporting. It also includes the Uitas Atlas network-management platform, which provides a single view into cloud connectivity services for near real-time visibility and control, providing proactive and predictive network monitoring and enabling providers to identify and address service and equipment problems in real time. Once again the judges favored Netcracker for the win, and Uitas Global as the runner-up. The results left just one category to announce: Most Innovative Technology Provider. The winner of this category would win the title of Most Innovative, a trophy, and the coveted prize, valued at over \$50,000.

Most Innovative Technology Provider

We certainly have saved the best for last, as the Most Innovative Technology Provider category is unique in that it looks at more than the innovation or advancement of technology. This category evaluates the company itself, its culture, and how it embraces innovation as a whole—as well as its growth, potential, products, solutions and how well it serves its customers. It also looks at how the company is moving the industry forward and how it helps foster additional internal and external innovations—among many other factors, including the tools, methodology and technology used to embrace and promote innovation.

Many companies entered this category with the hopes of winning, and only half a point separated the finalists from the next semi-finalist. But the finalists came down to two leading competitors: Intraway, which had already won in Innovations in OSS, and CloudSmartz, which had won in Innovations in Data Aggregation.

In its submission, in addition to providing a detailed illustration of how CloudSmartz embraces and facilitates innovation within its company and with its partners and customers, CloudSmartz simply summarized its case by saying "Innovation is the single most important thing that drives and evolves our success and strategic direction...". In addition to providing remarkable examples of innovation, solving customer problems and collaborating both internally and externally, Intraway also provided a concise summary by stating: "Intraway's entire culture is based on innovation from the day the company was founded." In the end, however, the CloudSmartz submission won the judges' votes, the title of "Most Innovative," and the Grand Prize, making Intraway the runner-up in this category.

Retrospective and a look ahead at the *Pipeline* Innovation Awards

As you can tell from the length of this article, there simply isn't enough space to write about all the competition, categories, innovators, inventions, or innovations that were submitted in this year's program. All of the [Pipeline Innovation Awards contestants](#) are clearly leading the industry forward with advanced technology—and are worth exploring. The semi-finalist scoring was so close, and difference between semi-finalists and finalists so narrow, that we have decided to expand the number of finalists for each category, as many of the semi-finalists were worthy of the same level of recognition. From within the finalists, selecting a winner and runner-up can come down to splitting hairs—as illustrated by both the scoring and the judges' votes. Runner-up should by no means be viewed as second place, as both finalists have achieved such a high level of sophistication in technology that both are, in fact, the industry's top innovators.

And while the 2019 Innovation Awards encompassed the industry's biggest and brightest minds, and included some of the newest market entrants as well as established industry veterans, some other players remained on the sidelines. These companies missed their chance to compete, promote their innovations to those that buy, recommend and invest in innovative technology solutions; be recognized in the most industry's most credible awards program, and be validated by the most objective recognition of innovation in the world. They also missed their chance to mingle with the top innovators from around the globe, dine on a four-course meal, and enjoy an incredible evening overlooking the French Riviera.

If you were one of the companies that missed your shot, don't fret. Nominations are open and you can now enter the awards simply by filling out the [Nomination Form on Pipeline's website](#). The *Pipeline* Innovation Awards program is all-inclusive and the logos (for nominees, semi-finalists, finalists, winners and runners-up), recognition, promotion, trophies (for both winners and runners-up), tickets to the awards banquet, and the Grand Prize (for Most Innovative Technology Provider) are all included for everyone who competes. Contestants can now also pay as they go, entering the program for as little as \$495 and then only paying as they progress in the program, at the time of advancement.

For those companies that competed this year, we extend a heartfelt thanks from all of us at *Pipeline* and from the 2019 Innovation Award judges to you. It's truly remarkable to see the continued evolution of technology in this industry, the innovation that each of you embrace, and how you are collectively changing the world. Now perhaps, would be a good time to stop—if only briefly—to smell the roses.