

Location as a Foundation for Digital Transformation

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It's virtually impossible to find a senior executive in any industry who hasn't heard of digital transformation. The concept of applying innovative digital technologies to solve critical business problems is disrupting all major verticals, from healthcare to manufacturing. While most businesses aspire to be seen as technology-savvy leaders in their space (and have drafted annual, CIO-driven initiatives to back it up), succeeding in truly transforming an organization is often very difficult. It requires abandoning old methods and processes while simultaneously embracing new ideas and approaches to running a business.



The telecommunications sector is no different and for an industry whose products enable the digital transformation of other verticals—whether ride-sharing or consuming business applications in the cloud—the space will continue to experience the pressures of major market forces that will necessitate the need for its own digital transformation. The key to unlocking digitally driven growth in this environment will be to start with a mindset of “location first” and build out all go-to-market operations around that mentality. Those who can adopt this mindset and overcome the difficult transition of parting with the old way of conducting business will not only survive but also capture market share and grow in an increasingly complex space.

Understanding the process gap

The telecommunications space does have a great track record of innovating and delivering high-quality, digitally driven user experiences to customers. OSS/BSS technologies have done a nice job of automating many backend operations such as order management and billing. The issue, however, is that this level of innovation hasn't made its way to the sales and marketing sides of the organization. This go-to-market function should be the focus for any CIO looking to identify the place to enable maximum value with digital transformation initiatives.

Let's take a look at sales organizations in particular within the connectivity space. Say you ask a senior-level sales executive to show you the best targets for the team to pursue, based on data-driven insight into all of the buildings they can service, which tenants occupy those buildings, or how many other competing networks service those sites. You'll likely get long processes with multiple touchpoints to drive those answers—if they exist with any real accuracy. Moreover, if you asked this leader if they can incorporate this into the pricing strategy, you'll probably see that this is a significant pain point as well. The cold reality is that digital transformation hasn't truly made its way to the front of the house, mainly because it's been virtually impossible to establish location as the primary object of focus and layer on top of that the intelligence needed to make smart decisions—and the automation required to execute quickly.

Successful transformation of the go-to-market operations of a network operator offers the opportunity to capture increased revenue and market share in the space. And, a few key areas have the most impact on the sales pipeline and process. Specifically, these include:

- **Increased visibility into potential deal flow:** a sales organization has the ability to identify its entire addressable market (whether the buildings are on-net, near-net, or served through a growing ecosystem of suppliers) and automatically communicate that internally and to partners

- **Higher win rates:** sales leadership and sales representatives alike have a shared, data-driven method for identifying the optimal opportunities to pursue—whether those opportunities are direct, wholesale, or channel-driven. Most of the data needed to support a viable method would relate to network and tenant insight, such as the competitive nature of the building or a detailed understanding of the end customer and their technology stack
- **Higher average selling prices:** sales teams that successfully transform themselves should be able to leverage highly specific, building-level data to intelligently assess a price for each product and subsequently automate the process of issuing that quote to the customer

Any go-to-market team would be highly enthusiastic about a world where its members can quickly and easily identify their entire addressable market, target their ideal prospects, and then price those deals intelligently and in any automated way. So, what's standing in their way of achieving this utopian vision of a digitally transformed go-to-market team? The simple answer is a foundation and mindset of location truth complete with location-based insights and automation.

It should come as no surprise to practitioners in the telecommunications space. For years, they've dealt with "swivel chairing" into multiple systems to piece together a view of their market and, for years, most technologies and internal projects have let them down. They are often forced to accept a "good enough" approach to selling and marketing their products—one that is usually based on insight that is not multidimensional or trusted. They may know a certain provider services a geographic area but cannot determine whether that provider serves a specific building. They may know a couple of larger companies in their serviceable market, but they often fail to identify all of the ideal companies that they can win over as customers.

It is only with a location-specific mindset that a telecommunication organization can build the foundation of digital transformation. Telcos need to be able to depart from the generic, manually driven insight and processes that have plagued them for decades if they want to leap ahead of the competition and grow.

Emerging trends will require location focus

It's clear that the inability to embrace digital technologies and processes that include location context will pose significant growth risks, while investing intelligently in them can lead to notable revenue capture. However, in addition to the natural competition that exists with other companies in the space, telecommunication organizations are also facing a tidal wave of structural changes that will redefine the space and, with it, the winners and losers. And again, companies will need to adopt a location-specific mindset in order to capitalize on them.

These changes include the continued rollout of 5G infrastructure, the shift to the cloud and the advent of SD-WAN. With 5G deployments, network operators will need to identify all of the new infrastructure rolling out in their addressable market. These new assets represent significant revenue opportunity but, if they can't be found, they are of little use to network operators. Identifying the specific location of these deployments will be paramount to capitalizing on the 5G trend and, as previously stated, failure to do so will significantly limit growth potential. It's important to note, as well, that location in this context may not even be a specific street address, but rather addresses, right-of-way points or towers on an otherwise empty parcel. A digitally transformed go-to-market team needs to be so bought into location-centricity that this poses no challenge to them and can be leveraged as a competitive differentiator.

SD-WAN will force the decoupling of the last mile network from the management plane. It will lead to the need to identify diverse, redundant networks that can serve enterprise offices. Network operators and managed service providers that lack location-specific intelligence into which networks can service which locations will fall behind on executing SD-WAN transformation projects, while those armed with intelligence that can quickly automate the execution of such projects will win.

There are a variety of other emerging trends to consider—such as edge computing, for instance—but these examples illustrate the need to be location-driven in mindset and execution if an organization is to compete effectively within the telecommunications space. If a digital transformation initiative doesn't address the location dynamic, it's important to question its ultimate efficacy.

Getting started on the journey

It can be overwhelming to identify where to start on a digital transformation journey, but one thing is clear: it's difficult to go wrong if you focus on go-to-market projects with location-specificity as a requirement. Regardless of the technology stack itself, putting location at the foundation of your digital transformation will be a recipe for success.