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Volume 18, Issue 3

Achieving CX Nirvana

By: [Scott St. John](#)

They just don't make things like they used to. Somehow manufacturing shifted from building things to last, to building things as cheaply as possible, with an intentional and disposable end of life in mind. The problem is things used to be better. They worked better. You could count on them. And replacing them now can be painful.

I had this old, hand-me down coffee pot. The old, metal 1970s Farberware percolator. It brewed a near-perfect cup of coffee. Robust, and full flavored. It had a clear top so you could see when the brew reached the perfect caramel color. With a shake, rattle, and puff of steam filled with the aroma of fresh coffee, it would slowly quiet to let you know it was ready. For many years it was a welcome start to the day.

Unfortunately, it finally gave up the ghost...some 50 years after it came off the assembly line. I spent hours in aisles of various stores, looking at plastic replacements. I've been through three. One melted, one leaked, and the other is just meh. It makes "coffee" – but it's not the same. It doesn't soak the grounds the way the faithful Farberware did, and the coffee is a watered-down resemblance of what I once knew. After a couple hours searching online marketplaces, I finally broke down and found another old Farberware. And now my mornings have finally returned to their former days of coffee glory.

The point is that there is value in legacy. Sometimes, legacy just works. Think about plain-old-telephony service. I'm talking POTS, copper lines and RJ-40s. The Internet and power grid could both go down, and you'd still have dial tone. For years I've wondered why this hasn't been incorporated as a "lifeline" added into voice-over-IP (VoIP) offerings. Think about the margins,



and the impact to the customer experience (CX). A simple phone RJ-40 hookup added to a VoIP ATA or EMTA, and a service provider could sell the VoIP-POTS hybrid service, with multiple lines... and they could even go back to charging by the minute for copper line usage. They have the copper. It's completely depreciated. But it's just one example of where legacy and next-generation can live together, in a hybrid world.

Legacy though, tends to be where telecommunications gets hung up. Faced with fierce competition from digital-first hyperscalers, OTT and cloud providers—as well as the threat of price commoditization—service providers are under intense pressure to transform. Significant investments are sunk, and revenue is tied to legacy technology. But legacy overhaul is cost-prohibitive for many service providers, and rip and replace isn't an option. Some don't even know where to begin. Yet legacy isn't where the growth is. The real opportunities lie in personalized, efficient, software-defined virtual and hybrid services. But unlocking it requires a high degree of efficiency, agility, and automation.

CX adds another layer of complexity. Service providers are challenged with transforming, but must do so to serve their customers better and provide a better quality of service. It's not enough just to “work,” because customers want better visibility, control, and automation – and so do you. The trick is doing that by leveraging what has and still works – with what's next.

These industry dynamics make transformation a survival imperative. Service providers must become customer-centric, software-centric, and automation-driven to drive revenue and create products and services while reducing internal costs. The competitive pressure is particularly acute for conglomerates of carriers grappling with outdated or incomplete systems or struggling with lack of integration. Interoperability, such as with an API-driven approach, is integral to transformation and achieving the agility necessary to efficiently compete and continually innovate.

Successfully managing the complexity of CX in a hypercompetitive industry requires a different approach. *Pipeline* recently had the opportunity to speak with CEO Dan Wagner and CMO Matthew Ray of CloudSmartz on tying CX and digital transformation to the bottom line. As the winner of the 2021 *Pipeline* Innovation Awards in the Innovation in Digital Transformation category, CloudSmartz was lauded by distinguished judges from industry leaders like AWS, Facebook, Proximus, and T-Mobile for the company's technical innovation.

CloudSmartz approaches transformation differently. Instead of rip and replace, it puts a platform above existing systems and connects to them via APIs. This enables service providers to harness their existing systems, while opening the door to hundreds more to create hybrid offerings. It also provides a marketplace for service design and delivery and makes them instantly available for one-click purchase. What's more, it puts the power and visibility into the customers' hands so that they have better control over their services, and experience around them. This positions a digital offering by quickly enabling a “back office” as a market product. Legacy technologies can be surfaced using APIs and adapters that feed into customer facing experiences (Rich UI).

This approach helps service providers evolve by enabling a digital experience for their customers – and their customer’s customers—and it’s what CloudSmartz has undertaken with its Acumen360™ product. Acumen360 is a digital marketplace platform solution for delivering a 360-degree unified service experience for service providers. It enables them to build a modular solution that enhances operational efficiencies, reduces OPEX, eliminates swivel chair, and helps deliver a better user experience for service provider customers. Think of Acumen360 as creating a digital-marketplace experience for hybrid telecom services, while providing single-pane automation and enabling CX nirvana.

Digitizing the hybrid customer experience

In describing the contrasts between the traditional approach to transformation and CloudSmartz’s path, Wagner first emphasized striking a delicate balance between the value of legacy and the opportunity of next-generation services.

“There are ways you can manage your legacy business as a standalone while focusing on creating a highly efficient, highly automated next-generation services business that’s going to drive revenue,” he explained. “Service providers, especially Tier 2 and 3, can’t afford to automate legacy, as it’s not where the business is growing. Instead, many savvy service providers are focusing transformation on their next-gen business and on digitizing the customer lifecycle.”

This means moving away from the old, network-centric approach, which entailed putting equipment into the network and reselling it to customers—the “build it and they will come” philosophy. Digitizing the customer lifecycle requires a fundamental shift toward customer centricity.

“You’re really reorienting the business toward the customer experience and providing the product orchestration underneath,” Wagner said. “It’s about managing the entire cycle of CX with a platform across silos and establishing a meaningful e-commerce relationship with your customer and, by extension, your customer’s customers.”

Phased transformation toward CX nirvana

Transformation starts with a focus on enhancing the customer experience. “Start with what your customer buys, how it gets turned on, how they consume it, and how it performs,” Wagner explained. Acumen360 enhances the customer experience through a self-service customer portal allowing 360-degree integration of the service provider’s legacy infrastructure. Automation unlocks operational efficiencies, lowering CAPEX and OPEX, and enabling faster turn-ups and decreased churn, both of which boost brand loyalty.

Introduction of a digital marketplace is the second phase. In this marketplace, operators can sell services that their customers can purchase with one click. They can also bundle services from other providers and partners, and Acumen360 handles correlating these bundled services,

bringing information, data, and pricing together in a streamlined transaction. Enterprise customers are empowered to order on-demand connectivity services in a pay-as-you-need-it service environment that enhances the value chain.

The final phases are service activation and the launch of the consumer portal (Enterprise, SMB, consumer). These enable customers and end-users to purchase real-time, on-demand services like activation and provisioning of the network elements. Wagner illustrated with an example: “It can be as granular as turning up bandwidth for two of your sites, for three hours, and then turning it back down—and paying for only the time you need.” This can also extend to configuring SD-WAN, firewall and IoT devices directly through the platform.

This level of agility is a game-changer. As an orchestration engine, Acumen360 allows service providers to leverage existing capabilities into a multitude of service packages for specific use cases and make them available for ordering—the essence of the network-as-a-service approach. In addition, this agility drives much more rapid product development and launch, cutting delivery time in some instances from weeks to same-day or real-time.

And it’s all done with the complexities of the service provider world and CX in mind. CloudSmartz’s roots are steeped in telecom experience. Former telecom leaders head it with a deep understanding of how software automation works within telecom networks.

“We understand our customer’s pain, because we have felt their pain,” added Wagner. “We have walked in their shoes and understand their challenges and built Acumen360 with them and their customers in mind.”

Acumen360’s phased approach spans a three- to six-month deployment timeframe, instantly realizing some benefits and cost savings. Compare that with the traditional timeline of a year or longer, costing millions of dollars, for legacy overhaul—and it’s easy to see how the platform puts digital transformation and CX nirvana quickly within reach for service providers. And service providers don’t have to rip, replace, or integrate hundreds of systems to unlock transformation. With Acumen360 sitting on top of all systems, service providers can more quickly create new agile service offerings and instantly monetize them through one-click commerce to clients and their end customers. This is a faster, surer path to growing next-generation services business amid the intense pressures of a dynamic industry.

Realizing CX ROI

The connection between services growth and the bottom line is clear, but there’s an additional layer to consider in how quickly service providers will realize return on investment.

Understanding it requires delving into the difference between monetary ROI and CX ROI—and how they are linked. Monetary ROI is driven by increased efficiency—made possible through automation—and revenue from new, agile service offerings, with a typical breakeven of three to five months from deployment. CX ROI is achieved through reduced churn, improved response

time, faster time to revenue, and shorter time to resolution, many of which can be more immediately realized.

The link between them is the service provider's brand. Better CX improves the brand, especially in a digital-first world with very little between the customer and the brand— with high expectations for performance. As Wagner explained, "Acumen360 bridges monetary and CX ROI, and brand enablement is integral to that."

There will always be value in legacy, but it's not where the world is headed, even if it does still make a terrific cup of coffee. To thrive, service providers must create new revenue opportunities while also driving down (or slowing down) internal costs. Those that meet this challenge while also enabling a next-level digital experience will be best positioned to succeed. If you'd like to learn more, you can automatically [book a meeting with CloudSmartz](#) through *Pipeline's* business introduction service, or visit the [CloudSmartz website to learn more about Acumen360](#) and how it helps service providers digitize operations, drive revenue generation, and achieve CX Nirvana.