The New SaaS: Service...as a Service?

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Today, customers simply expect more. We're all used to online subscription models, whether it's for a streaming service or food delivery. We enjoy the control and ability to manage them according to our needs. It's becoming the same with support for enterprise network infrastructure and bandwidth. Users can now easily scale bandwidth up or down, at their preferred time periods, on a customized network that they fully control and manage. Enterprise customers want that same level of autonomy for customer service and support. The two most significant changes we've seen across our industry are self-service functionality and increased digitization. People who are pressed for time prefer to log into a portal whenever possible and resolve an issue quickly and on their own schedule.

Increased demand for connectivity

As recently as five years ago, it was a much different landscape. Since then, worldwide content demand has increased tenfold, creating a corresponding need for more bandwidth in more locations than ever before, including traditionally underserved regions. More people are working remotely, creating larger variations in organizational network bandwidth traffic.

This is the new hybrid work environment, supported more than ever by high-bandwidth connectivity.

Many companies have also begun opening different network hubs to support their employees' varying bandwidth needs. That additional connectivity, in turn, funnels right back through their infrastructure, creating a cyclical need for increased bandwidth.

Telecoms and network connectivity providers have risen to this challenge. Providers are recognizing the critical nature of keeping pace with emerging technology trends and evolving customer requirements. As a result, they are finding new ways to supply the available bandwidth needed and

continually shoring up their underlying infrastructures. Our industry prides itself on always looking forward—but nobody expected, or even saw coming, the seemingly overnight demand for connectivity that we all experienced. The right tools and processes had to be developed and streamlined to meet this instantaneous demand, as existing processes were slower and less streamlined than necessary.

Everything had to be done faster, anticipating customers' needs. Our industry did that by building out infrastructures to get ahead of the curve. That's what smart companies are doing, staying closely tuned into what's going on in the world today and proactively keeping ahead while also meeting current demands. That is where we need to be, and we will invest in cables and infrastructure to support that bandwidth, including implementing new systems, better ways of working, and new ways to integrate data to provide a faster service and better experience for our customers.

Delivering global network support service

When we talk about delivering a service, the most important part is the upfront expectation. Those early customer conversations are equally important as the service delivery down the road. Delivering a service or experience that differs greatly from initial conversations is almost always a guarantee for a failed project.

After those early conversations, service must extend all the way through purchase, deployment, and activation. And when real-world factors begin to alter the scope of that signed contract, customers expect a service provider to be accountable, transparent, honest, and willing to work with them on alternatives to reach a positive outcome. Everyone would love to have a fault fixed as soon as possible. However, the most important part is setting our customers up for success so that they can manage their stakeholders effectively. That means placing more emphasis on communications and holding internal teams accountable to meeting expectations. When a major fault occurs, customers need to know that they will get all relevant updates regularly, as we know they also have stakeholders and outcomes to deliver.

It's a matter of figuring out how we enable customers to be successful, understanding the business impact rather than just acknowledging that service is down. This is a fundamental shift from a product mindset to a service mindset, and part of the process for telcos who are ready to move on from being a supplier to a partner.

The ultimate goal is getting to the point of having a trust-based partnership with customers, one in which if we ever have to deliver less than optimal news, we can work through that and move forward in a positive way.

Self-serve portals

Self-serve functionality certainly benefits the customer because that's how they manage much of their lives today, from booking personal travel to ordering food to buying home goods. In today's world, their service transactions occur in real time, with no waiting on hold to reach an agent. They are opening and logging a ticket, seeing the ticket generated, and getting a response. We're seeing more and more telcos and suppliers implementing those types of tools for their customers.

The benefits can be immediate and clear. For example, Telstra International has done a lot of work to digitize, automate, and simplify its operations, digitizing up to 90 percent of our transactions to make it easier to do business with us, and significantly reducing the time needed to provision and service customers by 40 percent. Our introduction of digital ordering has allowed us now to provision IP and Ethernet Private Line (EPL) components in minutes as opposed to days.

The trend toward increased automation and self-service will definitely continue, in terms of nailing up a network in a portal on both the assurance and delivery end. Customers feel like they're interacting quicker with the supplier. On-demand is generally more efficient, and it keeps a comprehensive record of each transaction from beginning to end.

But with that said, organizations also need to offer the "human touch" for certain issues. When escalations happen, customers won't want to solely use a portal. They will also want to talk to somebody directly who can assure them that their issue will get resolved. Having the right foundation in place to support an online portal is critical.

A service provider must do everything possible to make support as easy, available, and as intuitive as possible to meet customers' new expectations. That's a formula that hasn't changed, and probably never will, because it's the cornerstone of customer service.

The future of global network support

If service providers fail to evolve with the changing times, they risk getting complacent—and failing. The key is always listening to the customer and working with them closely. Customers are often the ones on the front lines, on the cutting edge of technology, pushing the boundaries further and further. We always talk about a partnership with our customers. That's what we want, to be a partner with them on their growth. When our customers are successful, we are successful.