# Building Business Better with *Customer-driven Networks*

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Service delivery today is virtually instant. You can place an order on Amazon with the click of a button and a drone delivers it to your doorstep in about an hour. Piping hot pizza in under 30 minutes. Groceries, same day. We no longer need to wait or go out shopping for virtually anything.

Today's customers expect a seamless, real-time experience that they control. They know what they want, and they want it as close to now as possible. Customers gravitate toward a robust self-service experience and quickly abandon brands that can't deliver. This heightened customer expectation has transformed industries that have adapted quickly, such as retail and e-commerce, and sent customers rushing to digitally native brands that never had to transform in the first place.

Why are [networks services](#) so starkly different?
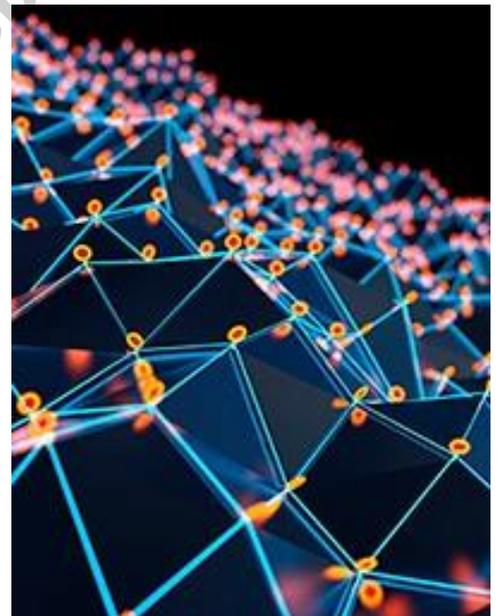
The Death of the Dinosaurs

Before deregulation, telecom was just a utility. Akin to electricity, water, or garbage. Customers didn't need to be kept happy – they simply had no choice. If they wanted service, there was just one service provider. This is the culture from which telecommunications was born.

For a couple decades after deregulation, network and communication service providers had something special, shiny, and unique: the network. Customers didn't really know what it was or how it worked. Adding on enterprise data and subsequently wireless services kept customers sufficiently confused, and the customer experience (CX) amounted to nothing more than entrenching as deeply as you could to a few, large enterprise customers and making it as difficult as possible for them to leave. CX at the time was tantamount to a bad marriage, but then something happened. Network services became commoditized.

Suddenly, everyone had their own network with similar capabilities, and you no longer needed a network to deliver voice services. As for mobile services, you had your choice of providers, and Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs) were a dime a dozen. 3G, 4G, 5G – take your pick. But enterprise customers still needed expensive, on-premises PBX solutions, one might think. How else would they obtain all the fancy direct dial and toll-free numbers, extensions, and voicemail services? Enter virtual PBX. But they can't take their phone number with them, right? Nobody wants to change their number. Wait, Telephone number portability. Video conferencing? There's an app for that. T1 Lines? Enterprise wireless. The times were changing, and they were changing fast. Service providers were hanging on hard to network services with both hands and white knuckles as the end-all, be-all but failed to realize they were becoming relegated to commodity bit-pipe providers. At least it paired well with their legacy, utility culture. But then something else happened, customers got smarter.

Consumers of network services, particularly enterprise customers, developed a better understanding of the underlying network. They knew what they needed and began to demand more complex heterogenous network combinations encompassing cloud, wireless, and wireline services. In fact, many enterprises even began building their own radio-access and wide-area networks (RAN and WAN). Then they began to layer Software-Defined Networking and Artificial Intelligence (AI) over the top. This resulted in frustration and ultimately churn, as telecom customers looked for a better way to consume network services. Customers wanted it all, ideally from one provider, and were not willing to wait. Things only got worse during the pandemic, where CX concerns finally started to catch the attention of telecom execs.

CX has now become the last-standing competitive differentiator. At the same time, those who were raised – and steeped in – the old utilitarian environment have since assumed leadership positions. Other service providers hired executives with no understanding of telecommunications or networking. Each poses its own unique set of cultural challenges and, depending on where you are, they may still be there as they key or primary decision-maker. For several years, this has created a culture war between the old-guard dinosaurs and the onboarding next-generation digital natives. But there's light at the end of the tunnel and a changing of the guard is underway, as the dinosaurs begin to leave, retire, or die.

Now is the Time for Transformation

The old process for designing network services hasn't worked for more than a decade. This has led to declining market share and eroding revenues with communications service providers struggling to survive. Enterprise customers won't wait for the configuration, pricing, and delivery of network services. They want it in minutes, not months, or they can (and will) get it somewhere else.

In today's click-to-deliver world, this presents a massive disconnect between network service providers and enterprise customers. However, service providers in some regions have begun to transform. For example, in Singapore, you can order mobile-phone service through an app or website,

and a SIM card simply shows up at your door. All you have to do is slide it into your device, and you're up and running. But mobile phone services are a relatively simple example. Complex enterprise network services are a whole other story.

It's time for service providers to embrace the same digital transformation mindset embraced by leading enterprises to deliver a customer-centric approach that streamlines customer interactions and simplifies network consumption. There's a perfect opportunity to do so right now, as the guard shifts from the dinosaurs to the digital natives. However, transformation simply for the sake of CX may still be difficult to sell within some service provider organizations, but the potential business benefits such as harnessing and consolidating existing siloed systems, accelerating revenue, and laying the

[foundation for AI](#), should sell themselves. And if that's not enough of an incentive, digital transformation has [never been easier than it is today](#).

Even if the old dinosaurs are still wallowing around the water cooler and non-telecom execs can't fully grasp the complexity of network services, they both can buy into transformation for the automation, efficiency, cost savings, access to data analytics, and new revenue streams digital transformation enables.

Build it Better and They Will Come, and Stay

By beginning with the tried-and-true business benefits, and beginning to build your business better, you can kick start your transformation. Not only will you be able to rapidly realize, capitalize upon, and profit from these results, but you will soon find that you will attract more customers, who will consume more network services, and stay for the superior experience. Sounds easy, but it requires a sophisticated platform, visionary culture, and innovative mindset to deliver a modern, one-click, self-service CX for enterprise network services.

[The Acumen360™ platform from CloudSmartz](#) provides a digital customer experience solution for network service providers, offering a unique experience tailored to each enterprise customer and end user. Acumen360 aggregates network information from various networks and existing internal systems into a unified platform, creating a data-driven customer portal and single source of truth. It unlocks tremendous automation, data analytics, and personalization features, and provides both enterprise and small-business customers with a one-click, self-service experience for rapid pricing and zero-touch network service activation. It also features partner ecosystem management for value-added services and accelerating new revenue streams.

Combining its [Configure-Price-Quote (CPQ)](#) and self-service capabilities with its near-instant service delivery, the Acumen360 platform drives down service provider operational expenses while delighting today's digital enterprise customers. The platform is highly extensible, with the ability to integrate with existing systems leveraging an API Core (Acumen Transformation Engine) allowing for standards-based APIs, such as supporting TMF & MEF standards, as well as proprietary APIs including Business Support Systems (e.g., Dynamics or Salesforce), Operational Support Systems (B/OSS), and other significant operational platforms such as global connectivity providers (e.g., ConnectBase), customer support (e.g., ServiceNow), order management (e.g., [TransUnion/Neustar](#)), and network inventory (e.g., [Ni2](#)).

An ideal solution to accelerate customer-centric network transformation for service providers is a comprehensive platform that integrates seamlessly with standard APIs, much like Acumen360. Such a platform acts as both a foundation and a framework, expediting the shift towards customer-focused network services. It eliminates the extensive time traditionally needed for integrating various systems and solutions to create unique customer journeys. With a solution like Acumen360, time to

transformation and deployment can be shortened by as much as 12 months, allowing service providers to swiftly reap the business and customer experience (CX) benefits. Using a singular, integrated platform approach for enterprise self-service that unites silos and systems also sets the stage for further advanced automation.

Laying the Foundation for AI

[Intelligent automation](#) has already been shown to make a significant impact, reducing missed appointments and payments by as much as 75 percent, calls by up to 50 percent, and time to

payment by up to 60 percent. This should be enough of an incentive to start transformation with a customer-centric digital experience platform. But to unlock advanced automation, data from customer, network, product, and relevant business systems must be aggregated into a single source of truth. Once a unified platform is in place, it unlocks limitless potential for future automation.

Generative AI can be used to help enterprise customers deliver more personalized and effective customer communications by leveraging machine learning (ML) to understand patterns, relationships, and performance between networks, services, and human-customer behavior. AI can also be used to analyze predictive network and bandwidth usage patterns for more timely communications, proactive network capacity planning, software-defined network use cases, and to enable autonomous networks. Generative AI can then be used to generate effective new content that resonates with customers. There are limitless possibilities as AI, ML, and generative AI use cases continue to gain momentum, but it must begin with a centralized customer-centric platform.

AI may be the single most transformative shift in modern times. What was once science fiction quickly became a reality with the advent and mass adoption of generative AI solutions like ChatGPT, CoPilot, Gemeni, and a cornucopia of other AI applications. Advanced, intelligent automation has become a tangible reality today and it is quickly becoming a business imperative. The benefits of real-time, around-the-cloud automation and personalization are simply too great to ignore and those that embrace this innovation will thrive, while those that don't simply won't survive.

Failing to Act Means Failing

We've seen over the last decade what happens when service providers fail to act. They lose value and relevancy in today's highly competitive digital marketplace. Telecom networks and services are no longer unique, and CX has become a distinct differentiator. Network service providers must transform to shift into a click-to-deliver, self-service mindset simply to stem the bleeding caused by poor CX and churn. Then they can begin to thrive, innovate, and grow. The cultural shift required for such a transformation is already underway and there is no better time to start than now.

Business benefits such as increased efficiency, lower costs, better allocation of human resources, and the acceleration of new revenue streams, should be incentive enough to embrace transformation. And the long-term implications are that you will find you have both more and happier customers, which will continue to pay bountiful dividends over time. You may then be surprised to realize all that you can do to innovate and differentiate on top of the strong foundation you've set in place.