Letter from the Editor

By: Scott St. John - Pipeline

As 2024 draws to a close and we usher in a new year, it's a perfect time for reflection. It's an opportunity to celebrate our achievements and contemplate the challenges that lie ahead. And if last year was any indication, there will be more than a few to look forward to.

Last year was a bit cantankerous. There were and still are wars and atrocities playing out on the global stage, the U.S. had another divisive election, extreme weather raged, and all the while global inflation and higher interest rates hit businesses, and our pocketbooks.

It also wasn't an exactly stellar year for cybersecurity. The faulty CrowdStrike update, the worst of its kind in history, was the most covered in the news with an estimated **billions in insurance costs**. But the number of organizations caught in the crosshairs of hackers was also noteworthy: CDK Global, Kadokawa, the U.K. Ministry of Defense, Ascension, Ticketmaster, Snowflake, and more. In fact, an article published by **Wired** went so far as to call ransomware attacks in 2024 "more brutal than ever."

These vulnerabilities highlight our critical dependence on technology, something I personally experienced when I got caught up in the erroneous SmartThings app update issued by Samsung. I woke to find my smartphone inoperable, caught in an endless boot-loop. Support from Samsung was abysmal at best. It wasn't life or death in the literal sense, but it sure felt like it. I had no access to banking apps, struggled to access business systems that required two-factor authentication, and couldn't receive text messages from family, some of whom had recently left for college. All the Samsung support options required a working mobile phone, which obviously wasn't an option. After exhausting the "help" boards, stumping the AI chatbot, and hours of talking to call centers overseas (who endlessly espoused warranty, company policy, and procedure) to the wee hours of the morning, my only viable option was to ship my device off to Samsung — for a fee, without a loaner phone, and no guarantee they could actually fix the issue.

The issue, I might add, was publicly covered in publications like **Android Central**, and over 5,000 messages to Samsung's own **support board**. Not only did Samsung deem the issue "solved," they couldn't even talk to their own technical team to determine if there was a known fix before I shipped off my device. The other option they keenly pointed out was to take it to a "Samsung Service Center" — of which there are none per se. The Samsung Service Center locator instead referred me to a third-party retail chain called "uBreakiFix," who quickly informed me there was no fix. My last resort, was to do a factory reset and wipe all my data — without knowing if and when it had last been backed up. Of course, Samsung was unable to determine if and when this had been done to Samsung's own cloud-backup service. Even scheduling a service appointment required me to login to my Samsung account, which only resided on my now brick of a Samsung phone. And it probably goes without saying, Samsung couldn't see or provide any of my account information either. The entire experience was, in a word, deplorable.

Now I'm no mathematician, but if you figure each bricked Samsung phone originally cost its customers around $1,000, and at least 5,000 Samsung Galaxy S10 devices were affected by the botched Samsung update (per the message board), that's an estimated $1 million in customer damages. Now multiply that by the five other models affected (per the Android Central article: Samsung Note 10, Note 10 Plus, Note 10 5G, Galaxy M51, and A90) and you're rounding $5 million. Now add to that the cost of an equivalent new phone which most, like me, would have to go out and buy for another one to two thousand dollars. That brings the estimated total consumer damages to roughly $10 million — with zero accountability by Samsung. I, for one, recommend the new device be an iPhone. But suffice it to say Samsung, and the industry, still has a long way to go on creating a superior customer experience (CX).

That's just my story, and I'm sure you have your own. But the dynamics change entirely when you think of the woven web of dependence we have on technology. What if, instead of a mobile phone, it had been a connected pacemaker, insulin pump, or power grid? Like my experience with Samsung, and the many organizations that had to contend with the fallout caused by the CrowdStrike outage, it takes just one faulty update, and — despite multiple lawsuits — no one is held accountable. We are teetering over the edge of a real disaster. Tempting fate, as it were.

But looking back on the year, it's not all doom and gloom. The industry has made significant strides, with GenAI boom as a standout example. In a very short time since the launch of ChatGPT in 2022, AI has taken the industry and world by storm. Real-world enterprise use cases, especially in customer service and content generation, are providing tremendous value and unlocking ROI across industries.

So, what challenges lie in the year ahead? It stands to reason that we need better and smarter CX. The consumer must be empowered with better support systems, skilled people, and self-service applications that actually work. Second, better protection is needed for our connected devices and the networks that drive them, especially when it comes to life-dependent and critical infrastructure. Third, we need to drive innovation forward while holding technology providers to a high level of accountability. The world is changing, and the risks are real. With the right approach these things are achievable, which makes this edition of *Pipeline* so important.

In this issue we explore the top technology trends and innovations that are shaping our digital world. Cerillion explores the **evolution of digital channels and how flexible BSS/OSS systems are powering self-service innovation**. TransUnion discusses **how telecom can enhance customer experience with embedded solutions**. IBM Hybrid Cloud offers a **guide to unlocking ROI with generative AI** by leveraging enterprise data and ensuring scalability. Dr. Mark Cummings **postulates on the future of generative AI,** and Dr. Marty Trevino **reimagines how humans can traverse through dimensional data**. Autoagent examines how **AI automation is modernizing municipal tax collection**. Tecnotree addresses **the critical need for securing networks in the age of AI**. Forescout Technologies focuses on **securing the IoT and mission-critical infrastructure**. Anritsu emphasizes **the need for a holistic approach to private enterprise wireless networks**, and the Nomad Futurist Foundation focuses on **bridging the human capital gap in the technology sector**. All this, plus the **latest IT and telecom industry news** and **more**.

We hope you enjoy this and every issue of *Pipeline*,

Scott St. John
Managing Editor
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