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# Why Automation is Now Mission Critical for Communication Service Providers

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Customer expectations are no longer rising; they have arrived. Across the communications channel, providers of all sizes, whether they identify as CSPs, MSPs or something in between, are being pushed into a new era of service delivery where seamless, always-on technology experiences are simply assumed. Networks, security, collaboration and cloud platforms have become mission-critical, highly integrated and continuously evolving. Customers want the benefits of sophisticated infrastructure but without developing the technical depth to manage it themselves. They expect it to work flawlessly, and they expect their Managed Service Provider to manage the complexity quietly in the background.



This expectation creates a structural challenge. The operational model that worked for selling connectivity, that familiar cycle of provision, hand over and react when something breaks, is fundamentally inadequate for delivering managed services at the level customers now demand. Managed services is not a marketing label; it is an operational commitment requiring proactive monitoring, service assurance, measurable outcomes and continuous optimization. MSPs that fail to meet these expectations will see increased churn as customers move to providers who can demonstrate value more clearly. Having automated support systems is no longer optional. It is the baseline.

At the heart of meeting this challenge sits an emerging discipline that is rapidly becoming indispensable: managed service observability. This is not simply monitoring by another name. Traditional network monitoring tools are built for engineering teams operating within a single technology domain. Managed service observability sits above the infrastructure layer, spanning SD-WAN, broadband, ethernet, wireless, cellular, cloud and IoT, to deliver a unified, service-aligned view of how the technology a customer is paying for is actually performing. The distinction matters because it shifts the question from ‘is the device up?’ to ‘is the managed service succeeding or failing from the customer’s perspective?’

# How Cisco is Reshaping Expectations Across the MSP Ecosystem

The pressure is not coming only from customers. Major vendors are actively reshaping their partner programmes to reward MSPs that can demonstrate in-life service delivery, not just pre-sale competency. Cisco's new 360 partner framework is the most prominent and consequential example, and its implications are reverberating across the entire MSP ecosystem.

Under Cisco's Partner Value Index (PVI) model, MSPs must achieve Foundation scores across both Managed Service Practice Maturity (MSPM) and Customer Service Practice Maturity (CSPM) to access meaningful commercial benefits: preferential discounts, marketing development funds, specialization status and marketplace opportunities. Historically, Cisco partner compliance concentrated on what happens before a customer goes live: documentation, certifications, sales training and process definitions. Once a network was deployed, Cisco had little visibility into how well customers were being looked after.

That has changed fundamentally. The 360 program now requires MSPs to demonstrate in-life service performance, utilization and customer experience throughout the entire lifecycle. To achieve Intermediate or Expert MSPM status, partners must pass a third-party audit covering sixty-five control points across their entire managed services operation. Auditors expect to see live platforms with real customer data and demonstrated governance, not retrospective documentation assembled for the occasion. CSPM applies equivalent rigour across customer health scoring, adoption tracking, proactive engagement and renewals evidence.

The Foundation score, worth twenty-five percent of the total PVI, applies horizontally across all portfolio specialisations. A single investment in service maturity delivers returns across networking, security, cloud, collaboration and services simultaneously. But many MSPs currently lack the tooling, processes and operational maturity required to pass these audits. This is creating a widening gap between mature providers and those who previously relied on lighter-touch engagement with Cisco. Distributors are also feeling the strain, with reduced budgets and increased responsibility for guiding partners through a more demanding system.

## Managed Service Observability: Built for This Moment

This is where managed service observability platforms enter the picture. A new generation of tooling has emerged, designed specifically for MSPs rather than enterprise IT teams. These platforms sit above existing network infrastructure, integrating via APIs and standard protocols across dozens of vendor technologies, to deliver a unified, multi-tenant, service-aligned view of performance and health across every customer and site. They translate deep technical telemetry into the customer-facing insights that drive SLA governance, business reviews, capacity planning and the structured, timestamped, auditable evidence that programs like Cisco 360 now require.

Analysis of the Cisco 360 audit framework indicates that modern managed service observability platforms can directly address around forty-six percent of the sixty-five MSPM audit controls, with particularly strong coverage in the Adopt and Renew phases where auditors spend the most time. For CSPM, these platforms deliver the health scoring, adoption tracking, proactive engagement evidence and renewal-ready performance data required at Intermediate and Expert levels. With automated reporting and over five hundred days of historical data, they provide the longitudinal evidence that demonstrates sustained operational maturity rather than one-off compliance.

## Sharing Visibility: From Compliance to Competitive Advantage

It would be a mistake, however, to view managed service observability purely through the lens of vendor compliance. The real strategic value lies in what these platforms enable when their visibility is shared directly with customers. By giving customers their own real-time view of the services they are consuming, including availability, performance, SLA compliance and incident history, MSPs create shared transparency that builds trust at every stage of the lifecycle. Customers can verify for themselves that their network is healthy, see when issues occur and how quickly they are resolved, and make informed decisions about capacity and upgrades.

The commercial impact is significant. MSPs who have shared managed service observability with their customers report renewal rate improvements of more than twenty percent, because the proof-of-value conversation happens continuously rather than once a quarter. Support escalations drop by as much as thirty percent when customers can see performance data themselves, reducing dispute cycles and improving customer satisfaction scores. Fault identification times have been cut by eighty percent, and SLA report preparation reduced from days to hours. These are not marginal gains. They represent a structural shift in how managed services can be delivered profitably at scale.

Managed service observability also surfaces the commercial triggers that drive upsell and cross-sell. When a platform reveals that a customer's primary circuit is consistently running above eighty percent utilization, or that cellular backup lines are activating more frequently than expected, or that voice quality scores are degrading at specific sites, these are not just operational insights. They are sales opportunities backed by evidence the customer can see for themselves. Account managers walk into renewal conversations with twelve months of auditable performance history. In competitive bids, that transparency is a powerful differentiator against incumbents who cannot show equivalent proof of delivery.

## Disruption as Opportunity

The disruption that Cisco's 360 program is causing across the MSP ecosystem is real, and many providers are feeling the pressure. But this disruption also represents a significant opportunity, and not just for the largest, most established providers.

Traditionally, only the biggest MSPs could afford the bespoke tooling and dedicated operations headcount required to deliver structured, transparent managed services. Cloud-based managed service observability platforms change that equation entirely. A mid-market provider can deploy cross-technology, multi-vendor service assurance across their entire customer base in days, connecting via APIs across a wide range of vendor technologies with no capital expenditure and no disruption to existing operations. New customer environments can be brought under management in minutes, and customers can be given their own portal access from day one, building the trust that drives long-term retention.

For established MSPs, managed service observability strengthens competitive position by evidencing the service quality they are already delivering, turning operational capability into auditable, shareable proof that wins renewals, improves customer satisfaction and unlocks the full value of vendor partnerships. For smaller providers, it removes the infrastructure barrier that previously made credible managed service delivery the preserve of the channel's upper tier. The tools, frameworks and vendor support now exist for MSPs of all sizes to operate with the maturity, transparency and automation that customers and vendors alike demand.

The next reinvention of the communications channel is already underway. The MSPs that embed managed service observability at the heart of their operations, not as an internal tool, but as a shared platform that customers can see, trust and act on, will define the shape of the market for years to come. The question is no longer whether to make the investment, but how quickly you can get there.

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