



SERVICE DELIVERY

Microsoft pulls the plug on its service-delivery platform

Microsoft has effectively pulled the plug on its attempt to carve out a niche in the telecoms-service-delivery environment by announcing that its Connected Service Framework platform has reached the end of its life, its way of saying that it is not putting any more R&D effort into CSF, even though the product has more than 30 customers.

The announcement appears to be a case of “turning out the lights” after the departure of Michel Burger, CTO of Microsoft’s Communications division, earlier this month. Burger has since become head of service-architecture strategy at Vodafone’s Now Plus service.

Apart from being something of a blow to Microsoft’s ambitions in the telecoms sector, the failure of CSF has potentially deprived the IMS camp of a major supporter. “We need IMS to expose network assets as services because we don’t want to deal with the network directly,” Burger told Informa Telecoms & Media at the IMS Strategies event, held by Informa in Dusseldorf, Ger-

many, a year ago. “I’m convinced IMS is the right platform for us.”

In a presentation at the event, Burger had said that Microsoft was proposing to use CSF as a means of delivering services using “mashups” – applications that draw data from a number of sources – and that a range of functions that could be provided only by a network operator were vital to the success of mashup services.

But Microsoft’s retreat from CSF raises a number of questions about its future strategy. Guy Redmill, managing director of market-analysis and consulting firm Redmill Communications, says that if Microsoft has switched its focus to only building services and delivering them to telecoms operators, it’s unclear how the company will connect with their infrastructure. He says that in distancing itself from the network, Microsoft will become dependent on telecoms operators to expose the network elements required by its offering.

“A retreat from CSF may actually

suggest that it [Microsoft] expects the enablers they need will be exposed from telco infrastructure anyway but that Microsoft is unable to participate at this level,” he said. “Therefore, it may in fact be that something like IMS will become essential to provide enablers, or that it expects the enablers to be presented by something, which we might usefully term IMS, in the near term. In effect, Microsoft moves up the chain, away from the core of the network, and devolves those responsibilities to vendors that really understand the integration challenges.

“It’s just that it [Microsoft] doesn’t want to be involved in the presentation of those essential enablers. Could it be that they have moved into the application-server space and above? All they need to worry about there is SIP, or an abstract web-services API, such as is being delivered by some vendors in the space today.”

No one from Microsoft was available for comment.

NETWORK MANAGEMENT

Ericsson to manage radio-access network shared by 3 and T-Mobile

Ericsson has won a four-year contract from Mobile Broadband Network (MBNL), the 3G radio-access-network (RAN) joint venture formed by T-Mobile UK and 3 UK at the beginning of this year.

Under the terms of the contract, Ericsson will be responsible for operating and maintaining that network and T-Mobile’s 2G RAN.

As part of the contract, Ericsson will be decommissioning an estimated 5,000 cell sites. When the joint venture was formed, the participants said capex and opex savings would not become apparent until near the end of the five years the agreement initially covers, citing the cost of decommissioning as a major factor.

3 says that the network-sharing venture is running ahead of budget and that the project will be critical to sustaining mobile broadband growth,

even though the integration is proving more difficult than expected.

On Dec. 12, MBNL is due to host a board meeting, at which it says it will discuss its 2008 progress and business plan for next year.

Graham Baxter, 3’s chief technical officer, says that, nearly a year into the venture, he is “more convinced than ever it [network sharing] was absolutely the right thing to do.” He says sustaining mobile broadband rollout and growth would otherwise become more difficult in 2010 and beyond.

There have been few large-scale network-sharing announcements among European operators this year, but Baxter says others might reassess their position in the current climate, because network sharing addresses some of operators’ central concerns.

First, it can reduce costs during the economic downturn. MBNL original-

ly targeted a joint saving of £2 billion (US\$2.9 billion) over 10 years, and Baxter says the venture is ahead of budget. “The massive change in the financial environment has strengthened the need for strategies such as network sharing,” he says.

Second, network sharing can help improve capacity and reach, factors that have been a major consideration for European operators in light of the recent rapid acceleration in mobile broadband take-up.

Baxter says 3 UK has gained more than 600,000 mobile broadband subscriptions – one-tenth of its subscription base – since launching the service in September 2007.

“There has been no service in the last 12 years that has matched the growth of mobile broadband,” he says. “The last time we saw growth like this was in prepay.”