

SERVICE DELIVERY

Who needs IMS when you have SDP 2.0?

Hewlett-Packard says the latest version of its service-delivery platform, which it recently launched, integrates network and IT domains and thus enables telecoms companies to offer their customers greater access to new multimedia and Web 2.0 services on their mobile devices, without having to deploy IMS.

Peter Dragunas, HP's director of network-domain and service-provider solutions, told *3GWB* recently that the main enhancement to the company's SDP was the addition of software for governing, managing and controlling the QoS of third-party applications and Web 2.0 mashups. He said that HP's approach is to provide access to network resources that show a customer's active presence on the network or that person's physical location; web resources for access to customer data, multimedia content and social communities; and, perhaps most important of all, IT resources, such as billing, network management and other BSS and OSS systems.

All of this sounds like the kinds of features IMS is supposed to enable, such as how to bill for mashups and how to implement end-to-end QoS. So why bother implementing IMS if these things could be achieved using an SDP?

The reason, Dragunas says, is that the business case for IMS is focused on reducing opex and capex by consolidating networks, but the case for IMS as a platform for new services is less clear. "While the case for cost reduction appears to be strong, with good real-life examples in the area of converged networks, the case for new revenue-producing IMS services is still unproven," he said. "Most of the service innovation today is happening in the data-network space, social networking and Web 2.0. Very few, if any, of these services require IMS capabilities, and most of them can be delivered on existing broadband, wireline and wireless infrastructures. ... This may further delay the need to deploy NGN infrastructures just to deliver new services."

Guy Redmill, managing director and founder of consulting firm Redmill Communication, agrees but says there are other reasons for deploying IMS. He says that although HP claims that SDP 2.0 can integrate with any OSS/BSS, a common standard to connect to the HSS as specified in IMS might minimize at least some of these integration requirements. IMS offers a standardized way of connecting the underlying elements, something SDP doesn't offer.

What HP is doing, according to Redmill, is hedging its bets. "If there is an existing softswitch or legacy switching environment, then HP is offering bits of IMS that are relevant without the requirement to purchase an expensive CSCF and simply calling it an SDP," he said. "On the other hand, if there is a CSCF in place, then the whole thing can be termed an IMS rather than an SDP. So, HP is moving away from the IMS hype whilst, presumably, positioning the thing to be connected in the IMS domain as well."

OSS

TMF standards get a boost from Oracle

Oracle Communications has recently joined a growing band of OSS vendors that have launched integrated inventory applications, but Oracle's Unified Inventory Management product is believed to be one of the few to be built entirely around the TeleManagement Forum's Shared Information/Data (SID) model.

Oracle is winning plaudits for the move, not least from Martin Creaner, chairman of the TeleManagement Forum. "With this product commitment to TM Forum standards, Oracle is clearly showing leadership in adopting and implementing a standards-based approach to commercial-off-the-shelf products for the communications industry," he said in a written statement.

Analysts, too, see the development in a positive light. "I'm really pleased to see a company with the clout of Oracle taking up TMF standards in such a big way," said Steve Lewis, a senior consultant at Mason Communications. "It is

exactly what the rest of the industry needs to do." He added that if vendors continue to make their service- and network-support systems compliant with eTOM (enhanced Telecommunications Operations Map) and SID, they will be solving problems likely to be encountered as network and service architectures become more complex.

Oracle's announcement and others like it are important, because they signal that an alternative approach to the consolidation of network and service infrastructures is available. The consolidation approach involves creating a unified architecture, which would incorporate everything required to manage and control both the network and service domains – something that sounds rather like IMS. It carries inherent risks. For example, many operators are putting off migrating data from service silos and disparate network elements to a common database on the grounds of cost and complexity.

The more federated approach, using SID, is about joining the operator's systems together with a common vocabulary and set of definitions. It also has the potential to reduce the cost of integrating new systems into the network and permits "business as usual" while the operator migrates to next-generation technologies.

Unified inventory-management systems are becoming important, because they enable operators to pass data from any part of the overall network to any other part, making, for example, real-time charging, authentication or selective allocation of bandwidth possible.

Lewis warns, however, that although UIM systems will increase the probability that network-transformation projects will succeed, operators will ultimately need to transform their operational- and business-support systems too.

"While the core and access networks are undergoing radical change, OSS/BSS modernization is being delayed," he said. "However, legacy systems that are designed for per-minute-based services and are simply not sufficient for the next generation will cost operators more in the long run, should they continue to ignore them."