Cloudy Future

Martin Creaner, the TM Forum's President talks to InterComms about new dynamics at the organisation

Martin Creaner, President and CTO, the TM Forum.

Martin Creaner has been working and advising in the Communications Industry for 18 years and is presently President and Chief Technical Officer of the TM Forum. Prior to joining the TM Forum, Martin held a number of executive positions with BT, the major UK based European Communications Service Provider, and with Motorola, the global Wireless Networks Equipment manufacturer, where Martin led the 2.5G and 3G OSS solutions development activities. Martin sits on the board of a number of telecoms companies, and is the Chairman of Selatra Ltd., which is a java games applications service provider for the mobile marketplace.

Martin is an accomplished speaker and regularly is asked to chair or give keynote talks at leading telecommunication industry events.

Q: What news from Management World Americas?
A: Our big event in Orlando in December will be a bigger event than we have had in previous years. In terms of the keynote speakers, we have an embarrassment of riches from 'C-levels' from key North and South American telcos and cable companies, Amazon, the US Department of Defense (DoD) and the National Association of Recording Merchandisers who organise and police licensing payments for music. Across the board, we have some very interesting people.

This years event is genuinely an 'Americas-centric' event. The focus of the tracks, the executive roundtables and the panel discussions is are centered on topics that matter to the Americas market such as Net Neutrality, the Federal Incentive Scheme for telecoms and the defence industry in the US. As a result I expect this year the event will begin to build a strong core constituency rather than simply being the little brother of our Nice event.

Q: Has the change in the event been led by the TM Forum's leadership or membership?
A: This particular shift is more top down than grass roots. I think the grass roots tend to look at specific issues that they are interested in, but most don't look at the full scope of the TM Forum's remit. So this sort of broad shift in the shape of one of our major events is where the board and the executive management really add value.

Q: You earlier mentioned a defence strand to the TM Forum, can you elaborate further?
A: We are seeing rapid growth now in the defence initiative we launched a year ago. I recently spent a day in Washington with about 100 people from the US Department of Defense, Defense Information Systems Agency and their suppliers, discussing the role that TM Forum standards could play. We also had a smaller, similar event in Stuttgart, mainly for NATO and we are going to have another, larger European based event, probably in Brussels at the end of September. This will try to pull in all of the relevant people who are involved in communications in Europe's militaries and as many of their suppliers as appropriate. These guys are already extensively using TM Forum standards, such as the ETOM to help refine business processes, and the SID to develop their information models. However, one of things that has jumped out is the big gap that we have in terms of providing some solid guidance and direction on security.

Q: Why?
A: Over the years we have tried several times to launch security initiatives inside the TM Forum. Every single time, it was full of people interested in learning what other people are doing, but generally unwilling to contribute themselves. Telcos viewed security as something they did internally and were not interested in contributing themselves. The TM Forum can only move forward when people are willing to contribute.

This time however, there are a large number of contributions coming in. The UK government with their Public Service Network is one example. They have already adopted a lot of TMF forum standards and are becoming increasingly involved with us. They are looking at submitting on security to kick start the initiative. We have also begun to see other defence related leadership. The Mitre Corp for example are very interested in contributing and are driving the security initiative forward. I think the security initiative is actually going to work this time. It certainly has a much more encouraging start than any of the previous starts.

Q: What is emerging as the next big issue?
A: Another important area inside the Forum is on Cloud computing. Every article I open and every talk I go to, people are talking about how they are using Cloud, getting into Cloud and how they are going to become Cloud suppliers. This is bottom up, it's bubbling up from our members. All of the major telecoms players are looking at how they become Cloud suppliers. There are big suppliers like Amazon, Google, IBM and AT&T all jockeying for position in how to create a world of smart clouds and relatively dumb clients. There are several layers to Cloud; infrastructure as a service is being driven by the likes of Google and Amazon who I expect will be very dominant in that area over time; platform as a service, which is attractive to a lot of the telcos whereby they might decide to open an API to one of their core platforms such as billing for use by third parties, and charge for it on pay per use basis. I think telcos could do very well here, because they have very robust, advanced systems designed for

► ultra high volume. And Software as a Service, which has been around for several years but is experiencing a strong revival.

Q: What's the TM Forum's role in all this?
A: The TM Forum has multiple roles. Obviously there is core stuff, related to setting up a world that is much more centralised in terms of competing infrastructure and so you are going to have to adopt common information models that everyone can plug into. Several of the core frameworks that TM Forum have been developing over the last ten years become really relevant to the new Cloud world with the whole area of billing and revenue management becoming particularly relevant. The other interesting thing that the TM Forum always does is to reduce the amount of confusion around terminology. In Cloud, one of the areas we are going to focus in on is simply trying to come up with common definitions around measuring performance, benchmarking performance, defining service levels and defining the standard purchasable units of clouds - whether it happens to be bandwidth, storage or something more complex like licenses related to services.

The TM Forum has begun an initiative to bring in buyers relating to Cloud; big non-telecoms companies, whether they be banks or automotive companies. They will work with us to define some commonly needed details for cloud. Cloud is going to become a big area for the TM Forum over the next year.

Q: Any news on the TM Forum's Benchmarking work?
A: That been going from strength to strength over the past year. We now have about 140-150 companies participating and we are producing about dozen major reports a year on key benchmarks, such as revenue assurance or large IP services. We have just launched another initiative, where we are looking at partnering with a company who are doing sales performance benchmarking for large vendors and determining how sales process measure up. We are doing that really

because it is very much outside our comfort zone. We are very good at very good at benchmarking how well Service Providers respond to a customer inquiry or deliver a DSL service, but benchmarking sales performance is a slightly fuzzier concept. It is nonetheless going to be very interesting because it opens up a whole new set of benchmark opportunities for our vendor members, whereas all of our current benchmarking programmes have been centred purely on service providers.
To give you an idea of the sort of growth we are seeing

in benchmarking. In March 2008 we had fifty companies participating but, between then and March 2009 we increased that to about 120 and we have added another 30-40 over the last few months. Benchmarking has reached a critical mass, making it even more attractive for other companies to participate.

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