Generating Business and Revenue

Tony Poulos, Head of Market Strategist at the TM Forum, talks to InterComms about development in that sector

Tony Poulos – BSS Evangelist, TM Forum

Tony Poulos has been involved with software development and systems integration in travel and telecommunications for over 20 years. He developed a convergent billing system in the early nineties in Australia and from there he worked in a business development role with Unisys' Telecommunications Practice in Europe. He was co-founder of Copernicus Global Billing Services, a London based, web-enabled, managed service provider for outsourced billing and payments collection. He has worked in the areas of revenue assurance, billing, payments, mobile internet access, mobile email and content delivery.

In addition to being a regular speaker and chairman at telco and finance conferences in Europe and Asia-Pacific, he is a Contributing Analyst for IDC, writes for a number of industry publications worldwide and is Anchor, for TelecomAsia's, Telecom Channel. Tony was an executive of the Global Billing Association for five years prior to its merger with the TM Forum. Until recently he headed up the Revenue Management Market Support Centre of the TM Forum and conducts its training classes in billing and revenue management. His new role is one of BSS Evangelist.

Q: What's new with BSS and OSS?
A: I have just finished writing a paper for the TMF on the merging of BSS and OSS although we are struggling with giving it a new name. It is really all about transforming and moving to the proposed all-IP space and ending the divisions and silos that used to exist between BSS and OSS. Everything now is really geared towards the business. We have to think about everything's ability to either generate business or revenue and even the lowest network or OSS element is critical to delivering the service and the revenue at the end of the day. We are changing our mentality and looking at everything as being all about enabling business.

Q: Is that really so new?
A: If you do that, you start finding out that business and IT, even after all these years are still not quite aligned. I went to a conference in Dubai lrecently and this was the hottest topic. However, we were talking about this same thing ten years ago. The business lines still tell IT what they want but IT either don't understand, aren't listening or think they can do it better. It doesn't seem like we've got much further on and even the companies who have outsourced their IT are also having trouble communicating their requirements to the outsourced company. We are really hoping to start looking at BSS and OSS in the same frame and then to be able to get IT in line with the business. They are the last bastion to get behind it. Just about everybody else has got it now and it is all about revenue, it is all about stuff that makes money.

► **Q: How is this issue affecting the TMF?**
A: That's the biggest thing we are encountering at the moment in helping our members. We have had the Frameworx in position for a long time and that is our bread and butter. However, people who go and look at the ETOM and the SID and TAM are sometimes overwhelmed by it. If they want to problem solve an issue they either don't have time or they don't have the energy to go and delve deeply into the Frameworx. One of the things the TMF are doing is producing a series of Quick Start Packs. If someone has got a problem, with order to cash for example, we have already outlined all the elements of that including all the Frameworx elements and we put them into a package for them to try and help people to align and get to the solution more quickly. Previously, specialists in each of the operators knew all about the ETOM, and the SID. There are now a lot of new, non-IT people in operations that are going to be producing new service or products and the Quick Start Packs will be a great help to them.

Q: Where are the major areas of interest for now?
A: There is lot of interest around smart billing. Operators are introducing dynamic billing and starting to send out notifications to people that they can get cheaper calls in the next hour, for example, because they are in a cell area that has very low usage. That is quite a dynamic change (excuse the pun) for telcos but the electricity sector have been doing this for years. In the UK for example, if you run your appliances at night you get a cheaper rate. The telcos are now doing the same thing. Instead of having to account for busy hours at all their major cell sites, they are trying to get people to use the cells at non-peak times and reduce loads.

We are also finding that senior managers are starting to get interested in the revenue side of the business again. It used to be common practice to farm out money for new billing systems and management didn't think too much of it as it was an essential item. Now they were starting to wonder why customers are experiencing roaming bill shock and the

regulators are saying that they should be monitoring in realtime for both postpaid and prepaid customers. Mobile operators are trying to come to grips with that at the moment.

Q: How are they doing?
A: Some have done quite well but others have made a bit of a hash with it and are struggling. Things like policy management and online charging systems are getting lot of airplay at the moment. There used to be policy management of the network but now you are talking about policy management in terms of managing your customers, sending rules for different customer and customers setting their own rules that unique.

Q: How does that work?
A: Customers will be able to go on to a website or on their mobile phone and select how they want to pay their bill or how they want to be handled. An example would be if I am roaming I don't want any data charges to be accrued so cut me off data roaming. Another would be if I don't want my kids to make any calls between 9 pm and 1am. You would be able to set the rules on the policy manager and the network would enforce them for you. It would be a value added service to customers. It was started off because of bill shock when roaming, particularly with data usage issues that people were encountering with their smart phones. You now see some clever applications that have been put together allowing customers to manage themselves. A lot of enterprises like the idea because they can, for example, manage their staff by agreeing to pay for calls during business hours but after 7pm at night they would get billed on their own account.

In-app billing is another hot area at the moment. Telcos are not necessarily heavily involved in that, it is the over the top players like Apple and Google who are cleaning up in that space but it is something that telcos have been looking at as well.

Q: Has the TMF being pre-emptive or are members telling you they need to get a handle on this?
A: We are a member led organisation but we do a lot of thought leadership as well. We issue articles and if something hits a nerve then members will ask us to look at it in more detail and then our collaboration program picks it up and we start talking about it. Quite often it is either with our Insights publications where we write about new areas and get feedback on it for our members. I think the Forum is becoming much more proactive and that is a progressive move.

For more information visit: www.tmforum.org