

# The Future of Telco

Carl Piva, VP of Strategic Programs for TM Forum, talks to InterComms



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**Carl Piva is serving as VP Strategic Programs at TM Forum. Carl is passionate about market and technology disruptions, and about helping TM Forum's members to transform into successful digital service providers in the emerging digital economy.**

**Q: With Telecommunications Service Providers taking more mixed roles and diversifying to chase new revenue streams how does the TM Forum view the future of the industry?**

**A:** Digital disruption is completely rewriting the way we interact with each other. The very fabric of who we are, what we do and how we do it is changing rapidly. We are moving to a world where we will be interconnected in ways we can hardly imagine today. Connections between people, machines, and other things...we have only seen the beginning of this revolution and we think the future will be a very different place.

The first wave of OTT was just the beginning, and yes, it has disrupted the revenue model for traditional communication service providers. Revenues that were taken for granted are quickly being wiped out and will

never return. I think that the variety of telco services we have seen up until today, ranging from telephony to TV, will to a large extent collapse into broadband access over the most convenient medium. The requirements of things and devices will drive an explosion in bandwidth and diversity of use cases. Future models will include a very interesting combination of partnering in the digital fabric where real-time data analytics will play a much more prominent role. The failure to compete with OTT players will gradually turn into (potentially lucrative) partnership opportunities for service providers, where any consumer data that can enrich those services will have tangible value. The dark cloud on the horizon is if service providers are forced into the 'dumb pipe' scenario that has been a discussion topic for years.

From a TM Forum perspective we are convinced that the future is digital and that all service providers need to adapt to different roles in a swiftly forming and adaptive value fabric. There will be no more value chains, instead we will see service providers mash up services in real-time to satisfy a transient digital need. Virtualization across networks and IT will drive speed and agility, and increased machine awareness will drive intelligent decision making in real time.

There are so many opportunities for service providers to partner and find new revenue streams. And why? Because almost every other industry is being forced to become digital. The future winners will know how to partner effectively and provide value where appropriate – but make no mistake, not everybody will emerge victorious.

We believe that the Forum has a role to play in helping the industry to make this jump into the unknown by corraling the wisdom of our global community.

**Q: With this diversity, what are the major hurdles facing the Service Providers and how are you trying to help in educating the industry?**

**A:** Let's focus on three key challenges: A failure to realize new roles in the emerging digital fabric, failure to improve organizational agility and finally the array of challenges related to complex network and IT estates that weren't built for this type of agility and speed.

- ▶ Even if the technical challenges are huge, the first challenge is largely cultural. The mindset shift required to adapt to the new surroundings is tough for a lot of people. This ranges from letting go of the idea of 'owning the customer' to 'we are the big kid on the block'. In many cases, service providers play a supportive act to a higher value use case delivered by a much more valuable brand. In the future, I think we will see service providers supplying the enablement platforms for other industries in more wholesale-oriented roles.

The second challenge is related to a skills gap. Our industry needs an influx of digital talent. TM Forum has a role to play in being the collaboration platform that enables this digital talent to educate the rest of the community. The quicker service providers can transform the quicker they will be able to tap into new revenue streams and identify roles in the digital economy.

The third challenge is technical and operational. Transforming the network and IT estates to move at the speed of the rest of the digital ecosystem is the key priority. From a TM Forum perspective, we have a huge responsibility to guide the membership in this transformation. Some very important steps in evolving our Framework assets to support the digital economy are well underway. In particular, our ZOOM program aims to create the common foundations for virtualization with a particular focus on NFV/SDN. Our Open Digital/IoT program is making sure that this agility can be extended to other industries.

**Q: Most of our readers would be aware of your events this year, particularly Nice, but could you talk a little about your education programs and worldwide locations that they should be looking at?**

**A:** We are actually right in the middle of improving our education programs. TM Forum is committed to creating the widest possible adoption of the outputs of its collaborative teams amongst both members and non-members. To this end it provides a range of training and coaching opportunities driven by subject matter experts and is investing in updating and broadening the available material.

A range of on-line courses cover fundamental topics around the core frameworks and some best practice areas. These are available to anyone, and can be bought with a card transaction. Self-paced on-line learning has proved very popular so the Forum is enhancing these courses to make them more engaging and easier to use. New versions of the courses contain quizzes to test learning and exercises to allow students to try out new skills. The video sessions are shorter and more focused than before, and make more use of graphics. These fundamental courses and more advanced training courses for practitioners are also available to members in live training sessions delivered on-site. This training can be customized to suit the needs of an individual member organization, or the issues being faced by a specific project team. Often members choose a blended option

with on-line introductory training followed up by more detailed on-site sessions for those that need them. There are certification exams covering TM Forum's core training topics and alumni are recognized in lists displayed on the TM Forum website.

**Q: We are working with who we feel are the most important forums going forward, particularly in M2M and IOT, how does the Forum see new implementation of technologies in this area, what are going to be the stand out benefits and major pitfalls for the uptake of these technological advances?**

**A:** Our view is that there will not be a single group who will or could lead the digital revolution we are witnessing today. Similarly to the value fabric discussion earlier in our conversation, the Forum must also establish and grow the right relationships with key other industry fora to stay relevant.

On the benefits side of the equation, new implementations need to have a minimal viable product range of capabilities. Which (minimal) APIs and best practice must be put in place to connect people and machines across industries? The Forum is openly sharing a set of those APIs and best practice to the industry at large.

On the pitfalls side, specifically related to uptake, there are major challenges in diverse areas such as privacy, security, agile service chaining, policy management... the list is long. Another challenge is the incredible noise from too many industry sources, which makes it really hard for developers and others to know what to listen to. We are rapidly expanding our membership base and our collaboration program to make sure we can support the service providers in making sense of these challenges. In February, we concluded our largest ActionWeek event ever with participants from 84 companies on-site, all working on solving these and other related challenges. The results will be presented at our TMForum Live! event in Nice, France in June.

**Q: Is there any other news that you would like to share with our readers?**

**A:** Yes, a lot of news! TM Forum aims to be the best collaborative platform on the planet for the digital economy. Any member company can access the full breath of the collaborative work being developed by hundreds of member companies, in fact representing 27-out-of-30 of the world's largest service providers who collectively account for nearly a trillion dollars in annual revenues.

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