

Why TM Forum is going all-in on Platforms

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For many years, TM Forum has been at the forefront of enabling enterprises to turn the latest wave of digital technology into business opportunities. To do this, our members collaborate to share best practices and develop common solutions to the shared business challenge of end-to-end management of complex systems.

One of the biggest revolutions in business that we are seeing today is the rise of the platform economy. We are all familiar with some of the largest platform businesses: Amazon, Google, Airbnb, Uber, etc. They have completely transformed business models, and their rapid growth has put incredible strains on the markets and players that they are disrupting.

The platform strategy

The platform strategy really is quite simple: Build digital ecosystems that connect customers with producers of goods and/or services – and hide the complexity from them.

Communications service providers have a unique opportunity to turn their networks and operational and business support systems into a flexible platform that can connect producers to consumers, as well as providing a great customer experience.

As we look ahead to 5G, this platform approach may well become essential for success. As well as enhanced data rates, 5G opens up new business models with the Internet of Things, smart cities, digital health and connected cars as just a few examples. No enterprise can address these opportunities alone – those that become a central facilitator or curator for a value fabric of partners addressing the opportunities will be the ones to thrive.





Make it happen

This is why TM Forum, under strategic direction from the Board of Directors' Collaboration Subcommittee, which includes executives from several of the world's largest communications service providers, is developing a platform architecture for the communications sector called the Digital Platform Reference Architecture (DPRA). It builds on the Frameworkx suite of standards-based tools and best practices, which includes the B2B2X Partnering Guide, the Digital Services Reference Architecture (DSRA), the Digital Ecosystem Reference Architecture (DERA) and our growing suite of Open APIs, which have been officially adopted and mandated by nine of the world's largest service providers for digital service management.

The DPRA is being developed using the results of over 60 proof-of-concept Catalyst projects conducted during the past few years to address many technological and business-related challenges associated with platform development. These rapid-fire projects, which connect service providers, technology suppliers and global enterprises to create innovative solutions to common challenges, have resulted in a rich library of case studies and platform implementations.

Tools for business transformation

While the DPRA provides an overall architecture, our members continue to work on an extensive portfolio of shared assets that are helping digital service providers transform their businesses today. Within our Agile Business & IT program, for example, they are working to extend the library of practical assets that can be used to accelerate the internal transformation of a business. A key element introduced this year is a reference architecture for a hybrid network platform, showing how both the Forum's assets and some of the recent open source initiatives can be brought together to release a platform exploiting the power of new virtualized infrastructure together with existing assets. Orchestration has also been a big focus of this program, since orchestrating services end-to-end across virtualized and physical infrastructure, including partners' networks, is proving to be one of the most difficult operational challenges for communications service providers and their suppliers.

Our research has shown that operational and organizational issues are an equal or greater challenge to transformation than architectural issues, and our

members are also developing a vision for the Operations Center of the Future, which brings together key principles and practices for the operational side of running an agile platform business.

Frameworkx evolves

Frameworkx has been one of the most adopted suites of business standards in the communications industry for many years and its development has kept pace with the huge changes in the landscape. This year we will complete a refresh of our ever-popular training courses to increase the focus on using the frameworks to transform to agile business processes, and enable flexible, highly automated working with large numbers of partners.

The roadmap of challenges

Our Open Digital/Internet of Everything program and Smart City Forum provide unique spaces where partners can come together to focus on the roadmap of challenges as they look to build successful businesses and partnerships in this new economy – how do you capitalize on the potential of the economy of data? How do you deliver services securely and with privacy baked in? How do you manage complex partnerships and make sure everyone gets paid? How do you create a measurable roadmap for smart city transformation?

And of course, all of this effort to create these complex businesses would be for nothing without a constant focus on the end customer. Our Customer Experience Maturity Model continues to be adopted and evolve, and as value fabrics become ever-more complex we are working with other groups to develop shared metrics to provide a common language for partners to communicate service performance and customer experience.

TM Forum is working on a wide range of projects, but all of them are focused on creating shared assets that our members can use to accelerate their business transformation and ensure that they thrive in the new technology and business landscape ahead. This is what we have been doing for over 25 years. The changes to be navigated are different – change is constant and it's exciting because that's where the opportunity for innovation lies.

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