



Bringing it all together

## Service Management Becomes Self-Serving

The global industrial landscape has shifted seismically beneath our feet. On the one hand the importance of IT to day-to-day operations is a given: without their systems modern organisations cannot function. On the other, effective communications with customers, employees, and suppliers are totally dependent on an always-on network environment. Today, companies are seemingly able to treat time zones and borders with impunity. In fact, without the internet or corporate networks, we'd be straight back to the business practices of the 1950s.

So what's missing from this heady mix? The answer is glue. What's hidden is the huge cost of creating and supporting the underlying infrastructures that enable our virtual worlds to exist: help desks multiply; IT departments expand; routers and switches breed. The very cost of our organisational freedom is the necessity to stay abreast and keep on the move – and it's not cheap. But will it always be like that? Well, not necessarily. That's where service management comes in.

### Achieving interoperability

As business process transformation accelerates, the ICT fabric must keep pace. An organisation's competitiveness is dependent upon its ability to adapt. An agile infrastructure will soon be essential to the very survival of the enterprise. It is no longer acceptable to build a function-specific fabric that's impervious to change.

Against that background, service management is the science of creating a zero-touch environment where the infrastructure itself flexes in concert with the enterprise's business needs. The current state-of-the-art is self-service, where a customer can use plain business-oriented commands to order new services or re-configure existing ones. The service management Holy Grail is the truly intelligent network, which "listens" to what business processes are telling it, understands those changing demands, and adjusts itself accordingly (and virtually instantaneously).

So where are we along that continuum? Today, engineers take customers' requirements (which they must anyway be able to state in fairly technical language to get them understood) and translate those requests into physical actions. For example, new router configurations are propagated throughout the network and new circuits are ordered and installed. Self-service alone demands an astonishing degree of interoperability between systems and networks. It requires a service provider's systems to automate not only the translation process but also the physical actions necessary. The sophisticated machine-to-machine and software-to-software communication protocols necessary to get even further ahead are still some time away.

## Adopting a common language

The degree of standardisation required to move service management forward is therefore formidable. Fortunately, however, help is at hand. The ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) framework has become the most widely accepted approach in the world to the necessary standardisation. Originated by the UK's Office of Government Commerce in the 1990s, ITIL embodies best practice developed with the input of leading companies. Its principles enable organisations to use a common language, assuring clarity in both the customer supplier relationship and between different service providers.

BT is a long time user and contributor to ITIL and is now applying its principles to service management. By considering IT and network services as a single integrated platform, BT is learning to engage with customers in terms of business process rather than technology. As a result, service is defined first and foremost as commercial imperatives, not IT or networking requirements.

In the process ITIL has already helped BT to increase efficiency and achieve industry-leading service delivery quality. Along the way, accreditation against ISO 20000 – the international service management standard – is being sought for several of its largest managed service contracts. BT's aim is that, by the end of 2009, ITIL will be as business as usual across all such contracts in all geographies. Going forward, BT will be using the same approach in its drive towards re-usable business process components that can be deployed in a modular way for its customers.

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**Frost and Sullivan**

## Lighting the way

BT's service management achievements have not gone unnoticed. In November 2007 it was accorded the title of 'Best Customer Care' at the World Communication Awards. BT Global Services was also successful at the 2007 Stratecast Customer Value Enhancement Award in the Communications Service Provider Segment presented by Frost and Sullivan who commented that: "BT Global Services has, and continues to exhibit a coherent networked IT strategy and has shown foresight to embark upon a significant transformation that will reposition itself to compete in a new market environment".

While arguably lighting the way in service management, BT is not alone in its adoption of ITIL. In a survey of 192 respondents, the research group Gartner recently reported that 60 per cent of European organisations have ITIL implementations in progress with ITIL adoption particularly high in the Netherlands, parts of Scandinavia, and the UK.

Of course, service management has other and equally fascinating dimensions, such as self-healing infrastructures, integrated billing systems, and innovative financial models, which are far beyond the ambitions of this short article. But one thing is certain. Service management in general, and ITIL in particular, will play an ever more prominent role in enabling true business-to-business interaction between service providers and their customers.

## Offices worldwide

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