IBM

Collaboration, service innovation and cost reduction: Lotus and WebSphere Portal software for telecommunications service providers.

Contents

Intense competition, unpredictable customers and getting ahead

In recent years, the telecommunications landscape has shifted dramatically. And the changes continue to rush in from all directions. New players taking advantage of the global Internet are flooding the marketplace and commoditizing services. These disruptors release new offerings far faster than the timeframe that traditional communication service providers have historically taken to launch new, value-added services. Scores of subscribers are switching from traditional land-line services to new service options available over high-speed Internet. And many are dropping landlines altogether in favor of wireless services.

Subscribers expect innovative services and offerings. Telecommunications companies not only need to deliver these new services—and deliver them more rapidly—they must also find ways to operate more flexibly and efficiently in the face of the challenging competitive environment.

This executive brief examines the forces that are shaping the telecommunications landscape, and the role collaboration technologies can play in overcoming service challenges and reining in costs. It explains how IBM Lotus® and IBM WebSphere® Portal software can provide flexible, cost-effective solutions for improving internal collaboration among employees, and external collaboration among business and residential subscribers, partners and suppliers to help address today's business imperatives.

Convergence, marketplace forces and new realities

Since the advent of the Internet, the telecommunications industry has evolved rapidly and dramatically. Traditional voice services have been commoditized, replaced by people communicating in ever richer, more complex ways that are enabled by new technology. And if their rapidly changing behaviors weren't enough, the degree of choice subscribers have in providers—and the ease with which they can switch—makes it essential to have the right tools to reduce churn and drive and support change. IBM has observed several key trends that telecommunications companies need to factor into their strategic technology decisions to keep pace with this rapidly evolving marketplace.

The communications industry is more intertwined with media and IT

Widespread convergence has occurred both within telecom and across multiple industries. Within the telecommunications sector, companies are moving to all-IP networks, and they're adding video and data services in addition to fixed and mobile offerings. From a cross-sector perspective, telecommunications companies are increasingly intertwined with information technology, digital media and consumer electronics companies. At the same time, mergers and acquisitions involving regional and global brands and virtual operators continue.

Convergence is driving the need to transform service offerings and reduce costs

For many years, service in the telecommunications industry revolved around new service rollouts to a generally captive audience. Interaction with subscribers was limited to changing accounts and addressing billing questions. But the overlap of Internet media content with traditional networks has forced telecommunications providers to rethink business models. They need to offer new combinations of services more frequently—and offer them at a competitive cost. And finding ways to reduce costs or generate new revenue through partners, for example, is an ongoing necessity.

It's also no longer enough to just provide a service and a bill. Subscribers seek offerings that support their lifestyles. In fact, they are often eager to invest their own time to help define and shape new services. And the more they see their good ideas take shape as new vendors' offerings, the more likely they are to stick around—especially in an environment where switching between service providers is easier than ever.

Responding to marketplace forces requires innovative, flexible approaches

With each passing day comes a new challenge, whether it be an economic issue, new competitor or changing subscriber expectations. Yet when it comes to answering challenges and creating new offerings, telecommunications companies don't have the luxury of time; the ability to innovate efficiently is a business imperative. The challenge is figuring out how to dynamically respond to the changing marketplace while reducing costs and optimizing workforce effectiveness to drive profitability.

"Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds."

—Alexander Graham Bell

Collaborating smarter to address evolving business challenges

Providing higher levels of service and more-innovative offerings, while controlling costs, clearly presents difficult business challenges—challenges that require smarter networks, smarter processes—and smarter collaboration. So what does smarter collaboration look like in a modern communications service provider, and what are the benefits? Let's examine collaboration both internally among employees and externally among subscribers, partners, suppliers and extended stakeholder networks, and let's see how the right tools affect day-to-day activities to help drive a competitive advantage.

Rapidly conceive and test new products with social networking

Social networking and group collaboration (or Web 2.0) technologies can enhance collaboration—both internally with staff and externally with customers—to help drive new service offerings, increase efficiencies and improve service. For example, with the help of technologies that support blogs, wikis, social tagging and polls, you can improve your ability to rapidly conceive and test new products by enabling employees, partners and subscribers to collaborate.

Social networking technology in action: innovating services

Challenge

To strengthen its marketplace position, a North American telecommunications provider sought a flexible solution for quickly launching new offerings. Its goals were to increase customer stickiness and boost revenues in the face of intense competition.

Solution

The provider adopted an IBM Lotus Connections solution, which provides enterprise-grade social computing tools that enable collaboration between company employees, partners and subscribers. The lightweight Web 2.0 platform is pre-integrated with IBM WebSphere Portal software for access, personalization and control as well as a search solution.

Benefits

- *Accelerates the co-creation of offerings with subscribers and partners*
- *Helps drive continuous improvement based on user feedback*
- *Strengthens reputation as an innovative company*

More quickly creating revenue-generating services with Web portals
Web portals can help telecommunications companies address pressing challenges on multiple levels, ranging from the need to innovate in response to digital convergence, to the need to sell over the Internet and optimize employee productivity. How? Portal technology enables companies to leverage their complex infrastructures to address new marketplace opportunities or improve efficiencies.

Customers, employees, and partners can all benefit from portals. For example, telecommunications companies can use portals to provide a menu of online and mobile services, ranging from self-service information on new or existing products to a digital media "vending machine" solution. Products such as ring tones, wallpapers and downloadable music are all profitable items that can be managed via a portal. In essence, a portal can provide the ability to simplify and personalize subscriber interactions with critical information and services.

Moreover, employees can gain faster access to applications and information as well as integrated access to information from multiple sources. Through improved access to a wealth of role-based information, employees can find what they need to more efficiently address product- or service-related questions, cross-sell another product or service, or immediately process an order.

A Web portal in action: supporting integrated services

Challenge

To optimize growth in a rapidly expanding Asian marketplace, a telecommunications provider wanted to offer integrated services to subscribers nationwide. Because its IT infrastructure was siloed, complex and not very scalable, it sought to transform IT systems with a flexible, scalable architecture.

Solution

IBM helped the company establish an enterprise application integration platform based on the highly scalable IBM Service Provider Delivery Environment architecture. IBM WebSphere Portal software and IBM® Mobile Portal Accelerator provide the user interfaces. The proven solution helped the company realize its goal of being one of the first providers to offer integrated nationwide services.

Benefits

- *Enables integrated self-service offerings for mobile or computer users*
- *Supports mobile service and content delivery for personalized services and offerings*
- *Simplifies user experience, helping increase customer satisfaction*
- *Provides high scalability, supporting rapid customer growth*

Improve the quality of service and reduce churn with mashups

Mashup technology can enable nontechnical employees to rapidly combine information from sources inside and outside the organization to create a new service or real-time view of that information based on business needs. For example, account managers could piece together information from various applications to see hotspots in accounts and determine how to resolve issues.

They could combine a view of active trouble tickets, a map showing the locations of field engineers, and an indicator of engineers' statuses, and wire them together to stay on top of outages. Mashup technology can also be used to quickly deliver customer-facing solutions that can enhance satisfaction and create new revenue streams, such as mashups that combine a customer's telecommunications services with social networks.

Previously, creating the types of services and views of information that are possible through mashups would have required IT's help and taken weeks to build. The beauty of mashups is their ability to use existing resources, assets, best practices and processes to bring new, innovative services to market in less time and for less money than traditional approaches. In other words, they support greater organizational agility and streamlined processes.

A mashup in action: creating new revenue opportunities

Challenge
A carrier of voice and data communications solutions for fixed and mobile communication service providers sought a way to enhance its offerings and create new revenue streams for itself and the providers on its networks.

Solution
The carrier uses IBM Mashup Center software to create customer-focused mashups for enterprise business needs or for social networking. For example, the carrier can help service providers create an awareness-enabled mashup that allows a salesperson to easily use his phone to access client contact information from social networking applications and communities. He can then select the name of the individual he wants to meet and, via his mobile device, determine if the individual is available while mapping his or her presence. If the contact appears to be available and nearby, a text message confirms the meeting. And everything is handled within the space of the phone's browser.

Benefits
- *Supports the rapid creation of new value-added services that underpin strong customer loyalty*
- *Helps clients improve the productivity of sales reps and increase their average revenue per user*

Building a foundation for smarter collaboration

Ultimately, success with smarter collaboration requires alignment of business and IT objectives. Delivering services takes the right foundation. The way you build that foundation impacts your company's flexibility and—ultimately—how successful you are in achieving your business objectives.

That's why in addition to providing the collaboration solutions described later in the paper, IBM created the Service Provider Delivery Environment (SPDE), a standards-based telecommunications industry framework that leverages IBM and IBM Business Partner industry assets and best practices to support solution deployment and integration. The SPDE framework gives you flexibility to deploy multiple solutions at the pace the makes sense for your business and allows you to reuse what you already have in your IT portfolio. This helps speed implementations while lowering risks compared to alternative approaches.

IBM WebSphere Portal software is the key user interface to the SPDE framework. It enables the delivery of aggregated applications and content to customers, employees, partners and suppliers through exceptional user experiences and virtually unmatched scalability. With the SPDE, you can also take advantage of other IBM industry-specific offerings that support service innovation such as IBM Mashup Center and IBM Idea Factory.

The elements of smarter collaboration

IBM provides a range of solutions that can help your company quickly develop and deploy collaboration solutions that support innovative service creation and cost reductions. A number of IBM software applications and offerings support the creation of portals, social networking solutions, mashup solutions and more.

IBM WebSphere Portal software

Built on a standards-based platform, IBM WebSphere Portal software is a marketplace-leading portal that provides an exceptional user experience to subscribers and employees. The core portal platform, with a service-oriented architecture (SOA) and rich support for Web 2.0 technologies, can help you shorten development time, improve performance and develop highly interactive, desktop-like composite applications. Flexible, solution-specific business accelerators can dramatically speed time to deployment and can provide quick time to value for your organization. And IBM Industry Toolboxes for WebSphere Portal software offer best-practice guidance optimized for telecommunications.

IBM Mobile Portal Accelerator

IBM Mobile Portal Accelerator helps you extend the WebSphere Portal solution to a wide range of customer- and employee-facing mobile devices, supporting the "write once, render many" approach to a broad range of mobile devices with device-independent authoring. The solution uses a continuously updated device repository and adapts to new devices without changes to the existing content. Moreover, it can access multichannel applications to extend business-to-consumer (B2C) services to mobile users.

IBM Mashup Center software

IBM Mashup Center software, a key component of IBM Mashup Accelerator, is designed to provide an easy-to-use business mashup solution, supporting line-of-business (LOB) assembly of dynamic situational applications—with the security and governance capabilities IT requires. With this lightweight mashup environment, you can unlock and transform enterprise, Web, personal and departmental information into consumable or "mashable" assets. Mashup Center not only can help you reduce your application backlog and improve productivity by empowering LOB self-service application development, it also can help you offer innovative new products to customers.

IBM Lotus Web Content Management software

IBM Lotus Web Content Management software, a key component of IBM® Content Accelerator, can help you increase the efficiency and accuracy of Web site deployments by placing content creation in the hands of content experts—while IT can retain control. And, through advanced personalization, Lotus Web Content Management software can deliver the right information to the right audience when they need it.

IBM Lotus Forms software

Electronic forms powered by IBM Lotus Forms software, a key component of IBM® Business Process Accelerator, can help organizations of all sizes accelerate process automation efforts, increase efficiencies and reduce operational costs. Lotus Forms electronic forms software helps facilitate data integration with existing IT systems, and makes it easier to extend business processes to customers with Web-based electronic forms. And Lotus Forms Turbo software can help nontechnical users quickly create Web-based electronic forms—including surveys, applications and order forms—without IT involvement.

IBM Lotus Connections software

IBM Lotus Connections social software for business empowers employees to be more innovative and helps them execute tasks more quickly by using dynamic networks of coworkers, partners and customers. The software includes an array of capabilities, including:

- *A home page that provides employees with a consolidated, customizable overview of their social networks.*
- *Profiles that help employees quickly find the people they need by searching across the organization using keywords to identify expertise, current projects and responsibilities.*
- *Communities that help people who share a common interest collaborate by exchanging and sharing information or interacting with one another via collaboration tools.*
- *Blogs that provide a way to help people inside or outside your company connect and build communities of shared interest by giving them a way to voice and share ideas.*
- *A bookmarks feature that gives people a better way to manage their own bookmarks as well as share, subscribe and search the community's bookmarks.*
- *Activities that help employees organize their work, plan next steps and invite members of their professional networks to help execute everyday deliverables, faster.*

IBM Lotus Sametime software

IBM Lotus Sametime® software is an award-winning unified communications and collaboration platform that helps employees quickly find, reach and connect with people, no matter where they are via enterprise instant messaging, voice or video chat, online meetings or real-time group collaboration. And newer capabilities allow companies to integrate their telephony environments with their real-time collaboration tools in a unified end-user experience.

Why IBM is the right choice for helping to innovate services through collaboration

IBM has a proven record of more than 80 years of helping telecommunications organizations like yours tackle tough challenges and innovate. And we have already helped leading telecommunications providers around the world to implement collaboration solutions, so we can put our deep solution portfolio and broad industry experience to work for you.

Top telecommunications service providers worldwide deploy IBM software solutions. Working with these companies, we have established thought leadership in advancing internal and external collaboration solutions. Your organization can benefit from access to insights that IBM has gained through its extensive experience in implementing these solutions and developing best practices and processes. In fact, our industry leadership includes a worldwide network of IBM Global Solution Centers where you can experience innovative smarter collaboration solutions and learn how they can be integrated with your existing architecture.

For more information

To learn more about how IBM can help your organization support improved collaboration, assist with new service innovation and control costs, contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit:

ibm.com/websphere/portal/industry

ibm.com/lotus

IBM®