Service Management Modernization – Benefits & Challenges

As one of the world's largest wholesale voice carrier with a global Internet backbone that carries over 25% of the global Internet traffic, Tata Communications plays a key role in providing connectivity to its 5,000 enterprise customers (including two thirds of the Fortune 500) and 2,000 service provider partners. Supporting these customers, Tata Communications has over 8,500 employees of which around 2,400 are field reps, working to fix any issues that arise with the network.

Having grown through acquisition Tata Communications had amassed a number of service management systems and, as a result, suffered from low visibility into its overall operations and poor operational efficiency. Low visibility had a negative impact on customer satisfaction while the lack of operational efficiency was a drag on profitability. To resolve this, the operator began a project, around three years ago, to deploy a new customer service management platform across its entire business. The solution included field service management and IT service management.

Phase 1: Customer contact center
The project was delivered over three phases (customer contact center, field service and the Network Operations Center) over the course of a year. The first phase, which took around six months to implement, was deployment in the contact center for enterprise customers. This involved case, incident, problem, service and the Network Operations Center) over the course of a year. The second phase, which took around four months to implement, involved deploying a field service management system for technicians who work on planned maintenance as well as network fault resolution. Previously these activities were managed using spreadsheets. Now the system is fully integrated into the work order management system. Jobs are assigned based on the known skills and location of workers, as well as parts availability, which has led to a significant improvement in customer experience.

Phase 2: Field service
The second phase, which took around four months to implement, involved deploying a field service management system for technicians who work on

to a big increase in the number of first-time completions. Through a video chat capability in the field technician’s mobile device they are able to liaise with more experienced personnel to resolve issues that they had not previously tackled. That has driven an increase in productivity and boosted customer satisfaction as issues are dealt with faster. Work orders related to network and service incidents can be prioritized over regular maintenance and the work schedules updated on the fly.

Phase 3: Network operations center
The third phase, which took around three months to implement, was to replace the core service management platform in the NOC. The system covers incident, problem, change and configuration management for the network. The new platform was integrated with an existing inventory management system in order to correlate between physical assets and customer facing services. For example if a fiber is cut Tata Communications now has real-time awareness about which services and customers might be impacted. As such they can proactively manage the communication of network issues with the customer. Moreover, they can see what the potential SLA penalties might be in order to prioritize remediation work and create the necessary work orders.

The biggest benefit for the NOC has been increased visibility of customer service and better understanding of the business impact of incidents. They have seen a big productivity uplift. When there was an incident in the past the NOC would be inundated with calls from customer facing staff looking for status update. Now customer service reps have real time visibility into network issues (and the steps being taken to resolve them) directly from the service management platform; there is no need to call the NOC. Customer support can push updates to the portal so that the customer is kept abreast, resulting in a marked uplift in customer satisfaction. This increased transparency of information results in fewer calls from customers to the call center and fewer calls from the call center to the NOC.

Challenges and benefits
As with any large IT project the greatest challenge in implementing the new service management platform at Tata Communications was adapting to change. Staff were used to working in certain ways with specific tools. As the benefits of the new system, for customers and staff themselves, became apparent this internal resistance melted away. Another challenge worth flagging was the need to build some new APIs to integrate with network monitoring tools that weren’t already part of the API catalog.

These challenges were far outweighed by the benefits of the new service management system. Through process simplification, faster approvals and tight integration between customer service and field management, the operator was able to reduce fulfillment times by 35% on average. There was an increase in productivity with the number of tickets resolved per representative each day rising 26% thanks to improved ticket routing and tracking. The move from spreadsheets to a comprehensive field management platform allowed real-time dashboards to be created for management and other stakeholders. Overall, the modernization of service management across the call center, field operations and the NOC led to an improvement in customer satisfaction as reflected in an uplift in Tata Communications’ Net Promoter Score in the months following the project’s successful implementation. You can find out more about the Tata Communications service management solution in this case study here.

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— James Crawshaw, Senior Analyst, Intelligent Networks and Automation, Heavy Reading

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- Carriers
- Consumers
- Components vendors
- Huawei
- China
- Trump
- No one

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