



Mobile applications: Killer app vs killer environment

Have you noticed how everyone in the channel used to talk about the killer app, and how the subject has now fallen into a pile of disappointment? It doesn't take a rocket scientist to point out the obvious: there is no killer app. But Patrick Fitzgerald reckons there might be a killer environment to bring home the bacon ...

The success of advanced devices and higher ARPU is predicated on the ability to bring new services on these fancy mobile devices to the consumer.

To capitalise on high-end consumers, operators must be in a position to leverage their network investments by connecting next-generation services quickly and cost effectively and deploying them to the consumer. Rapid turnaround times are needed so that services can be linked to promotions around events such as Wimbledon or Christmas. That means the applications need to be assembled, linked, delivered, and then disassembled quickly.

An INSIGHT Research report projects that the market for these high-growth applications will be worth \$66bn by 2010.



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So if for nothing other than economic reasons, the killer environment will become within the market reach. The technology and understanding is now available, and the financial forces are now kicking in. 2008 is looking like a promising year indeed.

So why has it taken so long? IMS and rapid application deployment are vital to communication service providers' future successes. Being a vast and powerful architecture, IMS brings a fair amount of complexity and cost.

Unfortunately, IMS does not adequately allow legacy applications access to IMS elements directly; the net effect being that major IMS expansions are delayed pending positive business cases. As a result, service providers are looking to maintain and reuse existing revenue producing applications and infrastructure in creative ways to maximise their existing customer base and revenues.

Migration

Compounding the problem, the service provider's converging network tends to create a lack of cross network-to-network feature transparency and impedes rapid and flawless application delivery, as new applications must be repeatedly stove-piped into the evolving underlying networks. New applications delivered today must ensure seamless application behaviour across multiple networks and be ready to migrate to IMS as it rolls out.

Today's application development options include rewriting the applications to add appropriate signalling or call control into the application, or utilising additional and costly general purpose equipment such as soft switches, signalling gateways and media gateways that provide the necessary rich call control and signalling required for network connectivity. These paths only compound the non-reusable deployment model, create numerous management and cost challenges, and do not keep up with the ongoing network evolution.

These solutions simply do not address the evolving networks' impact on applications.

The question then becomes how to migrate to new IMS-based services while allowing the current applications to integrate with the new architecture. The IMS framework expects new SIP-based Application Servers to replace existing TDM and legacy applications. It is this required migration that presents a unique opportunity for solutions that manage to bridge the gap between the feature-rich, tried and true legacy applications and the IP core of IMS.

The answer: deploy a purpose built network layer solution that provides network connectivity between current and new applications as well as existing and next-generation network elements. Today's

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networks require a purpose-built network element that is deployed independently from the network and applications while still keeping pace with the ever evolving network to ensure feature transparency.

Until the path is clear for operators to reuse applications there will not be a financial picture that enables the killer environment to happen. At present, it costs operators \$10-\$15m per application to connect their applications to the service provider environment, the INSIGHT Report found, and it can take between 18 and 20 months. Also, many mobile operators will explain that application developers are often in charge of connecting applications to their networks – which is like asking a roofer to work on the plumbing in your house.

This is clearly not speeding the path to the killer environment.

Ironically the promise of next-generation networks, such as IMS, is about driving more applications like location-based services through phones like the Nokia N95. Clearly a new, quicker business model is needed – without being hampered by this arcane way of connecting applications. Keeping applications immune from the evolving network layer is the way forward to obtaining this killer environment. ■