

Changing Tides for NFV and SDN Requires OSS Integration

Since the birth of the idea of Network Functions Virtualization (NFV) and Software Defined Networks (SDN) over five years ago, the industry has settled down. Gone is the hype and over-dramatic enthusiasm for this technology, which has been diluted by the slow progress.

Alongside, the telecoms sector has continued to adapt to the ever-changing demands by the subscriber, with the existing OSS in place playing a fundamental role. So where does that leave NFV and SDN?

NFV and SDN joint venture?

Initially, NFV and SDN were considered a partnership, so closely aligned that only deploying together would create a strong value proposition. Yet, as time and trials have past, CSPs are conflicting on this view. For many it has become apparent that despite that early marriage of NFV and SDN, they should be de-coupled due to the different rates of development.

Technically, implementing an NFV and SDN solution has been complex. One of the frustrations in moving this forward is how to connect this new technology to the legacy systems that play vital roles.

Many consider, certainty on the SDN side, that integration to OSS and BSS systems continues to be a barrier for implementation. With decades of investment in legacy systems and high costs associated with the deployment of these new technologies, getting the integration right between the two is critical for CSPs to benefit.

CSP NFV expectations

The NFV and SDN advantages are still considered to be significant, from improving network performance, reliability and agility, to reducing operating expenses and matching competitor offerings. CSPs still have high, if not a little more realistic, hopes for this technology.

Innovation has always shaped the telecoms industry and as we look to emerging technologies and services there is an exciting future ahead. 61.7% of CSPs consider these advances to be critical to long-term success, according to Telecoms.com 2017 Annual Industry Survey.

Dedication to investment in their support systems is crucial to this success. This is clearly understood by CSPs, as the Telecoms.com survey found that

53.9% of CSPs claim they will increase spending on SDN in 2018, and over a third stated that NFV and SDN are priority investment areas for this year.

If you compare this to the same report in 2015, the sector is still struggling to justify focus. In 2015, 22% of CSPs had no plans with regards to NFV and SDN and the 2017 report reports that still 20% has not started any NFV implementations.

This uncertainty continues with 67% stated that they either need to 'step up their game' or are 'falling behind' competitors when it comes to NFV. There are clearly mixed views on whether NFV and SDN will live up to its initial hype, but there is consensus that it will provide some important benefits to the sector – how much is yet to be seen and the exact ways yet to be determined.

The challenge that needs to be addressed first, is how can this technology integrate with the vital legacy systems, to create seamless performance and experience. Then, and only then, can NFV and SDN be successfully implemented.

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