

It's time to share the mobile traffic burden

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Digital transformation is all around us, revamping the core practices of businesses. Communications service providers (CSPs) such as telcos are also looking to transform what they do and how they do it. They face a demanding public, hungry for content that is more affordable and holds more capabilities, as well as a business community that relies on robust telecoms for its own digitisation initiatives.



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According to Cisco's latest Visual Networking Index (VNI) Global Mobile Traffic Forecast 2017-2022, mobile data traffic worldwide is growing at an alarming rate. In South Africa mobile data traffic will grow nine-fold between 2017 and 2022. This is a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 54%, to reach 1.2 exabytes per month in the next three years, up from 133 petabytes in 2017. The report predicts that mobile traffic will account for 49% of South Africa's total internet traffic by 2022, up from 24% in 2017. Mobile traffic per mobile-connected end-user device will reach 12GB/month by 2022, up from 1.5GB in 2017.

This increase in mobile data traffic is bound to put pressure on CSPs struggling to deliver consistent quality of service. Consumers born into the digital era - who have grown up with a smartphone in one hand and a tablet in the other - are even less likely to forgive transgressions in the form of service drops, slow downloads or grainy, stuttering content.

Sharing the load

The challenge CSPs must address to compete in the age of content is how to share the load. Carefully considered strategies have the potential to boost customer loyalty. Think about the millennial who is digitally savvy, informed, impatient and demanding. This is the new customer base. The one-stop shop is a must if you are to keep them loyal.

Fortunately, CSPs can find allies among application service providers (ASPs) such as Hewlett-Packard and over-the-top (OTT) service providers such as Netflix. These companies are also concerned about the end-user experience (UX).

According to OpenSignal's State of Mobile Video report, download speed is just one factor influencing UX. The consistency of connection speed and signal delay also have an impact on the overall video experience.

While congestion management solutions are available, in some telecom-specific business support system (BSS), suites can help mitigate issues - such as an ability to provide customers with fast access to priority applications even in peak-use periods, dynamically manage temporary failures on radio and core networks and improve UX for high-value subscribers. On top of this, they can also prioritise mission-critical communication traffic for dedicated groups of subscribers. CSPs and content providers will have a much better chance of overcoming the obstacles to outstanding UX if they partner up and integrate their solutions.

Benefits for all

The technical solution that enables such a partnership is the Service Capability Exposure Function (SCEF). With this functionality, CSPs have the opportunity to securely expose their network and infrastructure to a host of partners, such as application services providers, content providers and IoT platforms.

The benefits of these partnerships extend to both operators and partners and filter down to customers. All business parties can now manage the quality of service instead of the operator alone. Content providers can create new packaged offers for users at will and have more control over how they are delivered, allowing them to enhance their content and make it more attractive to the operators' customers.

In addition, partnership models can deliver free data for customers on special marketing campaigns which drive traffic for telecom operators. Sponsored data in the initial days of the campaign can be used to attract customers. Partnerships between CSPs and other companies, for example, Uber can allow drivers to gain free access to maps and taxi servers during working hours (provided by the telecom operators). In addition to this, riders can enjoy free access to certain entertainment platforms during trips.

The viewing of advertisements leads to data revenue on the CSP's network, and the more traffic created by a customer, the more benefits that accrue to the ASP from value-added services. Furthermore, accelerated revenue generation on the CSP's side allows the operator to make quicker payments for any infrastructure investment.

The tight partnership between content providers and operators can also go further in improving the quality of ASP traffic detection. The ASP transmits its app signatures in automated mode, making it more efficient and cost-effective for the operator's Policy and Charging Enforcement Function (PCEF) to manage and prioritise this traffic.

When we talk digital transformation, one of the most talked about technologies is the Internet of Things (IoT), an architecture that has become increasingly popular as businesses seek ways of delivering more to customers, using fewer resources. Machine-to-machine (M2M) communication is facilitated by the ASP-CSP partnership model. IoT can be integrated more smoothly, with the joint architecture now responsible for the coordination of background data transfer, device-triggering functions, event monitoring, Non-IP Data Delivery (NIDD) and group message delivery.

Facing the future...together

This fresh model of collaboration with content providers, to improve UX together and stay competitive, will be vital for the CSP looking to reduce costs while transforming itself into a digital service provider. The ability to manage new content services and packages for each subscriber drastically reduces time to market and boosts customer satisfaction and loyalty in ways previously unthinkable.

As CSPs steamroll ahead with their digital transformation efforts in 2019 - looking for ways to enhance operations without risky infrastructure investments - partnering with the very companies that rely most on backend QoS is a great way to share the burden of more demanding consumers. By standing together, CSPs and their ASP and OTT partners can insulate themselves from the rigours of an increasingly competitive market and boost UX to loyalty-generating heights.

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