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FIVE STEPS TO BUILD A TELECOM MARKETPLACE

Mobile advertising will account for nearly half of all advertising sales by 2021, up to US $96B annually, according to a recent Magna Global report. Global smartphone penetration is high, and with the recent shift from desktop ads to mobile video and app installation, smartphones are the ideal targets for advertising and marketing campaigns. There is one major problem, however— many customers lack data connectivity. In some emerging markets, at any one time, 80% of subscribers don't have mobile data access via a mobile carrier, and are heavily reliant on inconsistent Wi-Fi connectivity. In Mexico, for example, half of the subscribers don't have a data plan, and for those that do, it's often limited to only 20 MBs per month.

More than just an increase in bandwidth, the new telecommunications revolution signals a shift for communications service providers (CSPs) toward an open technological landscape: A telco marketplace to bring together a diverse set of digital service producers and consumers.

So then, how would a CSP create such a marketplace?

Consider these five logical milestones to achieve this goal:

Step 1: Identify Customers

Significant investments in 4G means that CSPs must focus on a gradual transition to 5G services with value creation as the primary goal. The initial use cases will likely be enterprise-oriented, or there will be new use cases that are hosted, managed, and offered as anything as a service (XaaS). Depending on the go-to-market strategy, CSPs could also target enhanced mobile broadband (eMBB) services for retail customers to have the building blocks ready for future services, with the goal of becoming a one-stop shop.

Step 2: Identify Producers

To drive adoption, CSPs need to promote monetization possibilities with a marketplace platform. For example, a CSP's B2B unit could offer bundled SIM and device connections via a marketplace to enterprises with flexible pricing and quote options. Similarly, the broadband division could offer high-speed connectivity and configurable add-on bundles to set up and manage enterprise networks.

Eventually, after reaching sustainable growth, the marketplace can host all types of service providers, including software providers to offer security services and hardware manufacturers selling handsets, IoT devices, and virtual reality hardware.

Step 3: Platform Assessment

To connect producers to consumers, the marketplace platform must be agile to fulfill several requirements from both sides of the scale:

Consumers: Customers are inclined to react to a visually appealing, noise-free experience that clearly presents all service details including reviews, support, pricing, discounts, quotes, and activation windows such as delivery ETAs. Other features include personalized recommendations based on usage history for registered users, discount options, loyalty schemes, and a frictionless buying experience with cross-platform self-service options.

Producers: Producers require the tools to describe and design the finer details of their offering such as tags, social sharing options, and variant creation within a content management system. At the same time, producers must be able to handle cross-channel customer queries, respond to reviews, manage inventory in real time, and easily define partner-driven discount policies. The platform must allow service providers to onboard seamlessly via digital 'know your customer,' contract management and settlement options. It should also feature dashboards and automated reports for monthly sales and settlements with the option to track invoices and raise claims digitally.

Step 4: Reuse the Existing IT Stack

Filtering down to key modules, examine if the existing product catalog is capable of supporting the ever-growing product innovations, APIs, data models, cardinality rules, and whether content management capabilities are on par to deliver the extensive requirements to create listings. Is the existing CRM equipped with configure-price-quote (CPQ) capabilities? Is the business support system (BSS) equipped with inventory and billing capabilities? More importantly, a good feasibility check would be compliance with partner management and settlement requirements.

Step 5: Make or Buy Decision

Unfortunately, most CSPs today aren't prepared to handle these requirements, which begs the question: make or buy?

CSPs must evaluate the maturity of existing IT components to feasibly build an in-house marketplace solution, otherwise working with vendors and solution providers will be necessary. Options vary – do you use point vendors or collaborate with platform providers who can customize the platform for CSPs? However, there isn't an offering strong enough to meet all marketplace requirements, especially given the new technologies and frameworks involved. Therefore, it makes sense that CSPs buy from a platform provider that can deliver customized solutions.

What to Look For in a Marketplace Solution

- Significantly reduces latency/jitter, avoids inter CPU handover leading to a Higher Throughput
- A headless content management system that includes CPQ, billing, settlement, inventory, and workflow engine capabilities to enable rich digital experiences
- Alignment with future-proof MACH design principles (microservices, API-first, cloud-native, and headless) that are critical to providing modular services, statelessness for web-scale, storage, and agile experience creation
- Adherence to **Open API 2.0**, TM Forum's Open Digital Architecture (ODA), and other technologies like SPA and 12 Factor App principles to work towards an open platform, preferably built with open-source tools
- An experienced telco vendor over a pure-play web solutions provider with limited or no experience in working with CSPs
- Expertise from the vendor on building platforms that require consistent inflow of development, QA, and DevOps resources, and in delivering on time with an agile-based sprint development methodology

A marketplace is a dynamic model that will constantly evolve. Thus, CSPs must select a platform that is built on an open architecture and is easy to customize in the future with in-house DevOps practice. Even more important is for the solution provider and CSP to share the same vision for building and supporting such solutions over the long term. There must be a joint belief in openness and knowledge sharing to eliminate vendor lock-in and provide self-reliance for the CSP.

Mavenir's Digital Enablement (MDE) platform is the industry's only telecommunications-specific digital marketplace solution. Specifically designed to provide a digital commerce experience at par with traditional e-commerce platforms, it offers a unique combination of Mavenir's years of experience delivering to CSPs and a deep understanding of their business models and monetization possibilities. MDE uses MACH design principles and open source tools, technology, and frameworks to build a dynamic and continuously evolving commerce platform.

For more information on Mavenir's Digital Marketplace solution, please write to sales@mavenir.com

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About Mavenir

Mavenir is building the future of networks and pioneering advanced technology, focusing on the vision of a single, software-based automated network that runs on any cloud. As the industry's only end-to-end, cloud-native network software provider, Mavenir is transforming the way the world connects, accelerating software network transformation for 250+ Communications Service Providers in over 120 countries, which serve more than 50% of the world’s subscribers.

For more on Mavenir Solutions please visit our website at www.mavenir.com

