

POLICY MANAGEMENT 'FOOD FIGHT' HEATS UP

The hype around policy management cannot be ignored, but will the chaotic state of "policy" be well-defined and clearly executable in the near future?

By Susana Schwartz

With all the activity in the policy management area the past few months (especially during Management World last month and B/OSS World last week), it is clear that service providers are looking for systems that derive business value from data trapped in networks and customer relationship management and back-office systems.

The market is certainly "hot," but no clear direction is established yet. "I call this the 'food fight stage' because vendors are looking at this in so many different ways," said Susan McNeice, vice president of research for operations/business support systems, business intelligence and analytics for Yankee Group.

Indeed, some suppliers are looking at policy management from an operator-centric point of view, while others from more of a subscriber point of view. Some are hardware-focused, some are software-focused. And yet others are a blend of many elements.

There are approximately 30 vendors claiming to offer some sort of policy management to improve decision in the areas of network services, bandwidth throttling and targeting customers' preferences.

There are vendors with more

of a hardware play, such as Star-ent (acquired by Cisco), Camiant (acquired by Tekelec, which also acquired Blue Slice), Sandvine, Bridgewater and even Volubill; and then there are billing vendors and mediation players such as Intec or Convergys, or mediation players such as Openet, that look to leverage user profiles to establish customer preferences as an adjunct and to employ policies that help operators achieve their goals.

"Some of these players look through the lens of giving customers a vote in the means by which they consume services, while some look at it as network policy for operators to enforce rules about how their networks are used to rule out unfettered use and abusive situations," McNeice said.

When talking about policy as a means to implement business rules and derive value from smarter decisions about identifying, prioritizing and best serving the most profitable customers, there inherently is good that comes out of it, as there is work to align business and IT.

According to Elisabeth Rainge, analyst with IDC, who also covers this space in her network and telecom software research, "Today, IT staffers do not have time to become 'technology experts,' rather they have to learn to serve finance

departments and CFOs, CMOs and other business people, as well as the network to support business goals."

Policy management has emerged as a mechanism for helping both business and technology folks establish rules and enforcement policies around customer preferences and network capacity issues.

Rainge pointed to the policy and charging rules function that supports 3GPP Release 8 as a "means to an end" in terms of dynamically managing broadband and ensuring quality of service (QoS).

The PCMM work from Cable-Lab's packet cable multimedia architecture has also evolved to add QoS and "resource accounting" capabilities to IP-based applications, including video, voice, as well as DOCSIS-powered data.

This type of work and the continuing news about high-profile congestion woes for mobile data network providers is further feeding the policy management frenzy. Perhaps high-profile MSO projects designed to relieve network congestion, such as that by Comcast during the past year for "protocol-agnostic" bandwidth management, will further galvanize suppliers to repurpose rating and charging, mediation and hardware capabilities.