



Figure 1. The Internet of Things makes us the masters of our technology.

By Elyse Granger

Forget Being a CSP. Be a TSP!

Transitioning to What Matters

Are you tired of hearing about the next new “age”? It seems every week there’s a new era, generation, or trend that we should be following. Taking nothing away from the fascinating trend of nutra-juices and whatever kind of kale is currently popular with Kelly Ripa. Thankfully, there’s an actual IMPORTANT trend that telecommunications providers, broadband providers, and campus technology departments should be following closely: I’m talking about



Figure 3. Skyline Membership Corp. has mastered the Solutions Provider mindset.

The Infrastructure Age. Pay attention to this trend -- it will provide some very unique opportunities to the telecommunications industry!

In order to explain The Infrastructure Age, let's backtrack a bit to an age very familiar to the telecommunications industry: The Information Age. The telecom industry knows this era well because they helped bring it about; this period was defined by linking rural communities to the rest of the world and creating global connectedness.

Now that most are connected and a telecom's role as a "connector" has been mostly fulfilled, their customers will look to them yet again as they begin to grapple with the nuances of this new technology. Suddenly, everything is "smart" (or at least claims to be). Your smartphone can talk to your smart home; your smart watch can talk to your smart refrigerator. It seems the "Internet of Things" makes *us* the masters of our technology. That is, if we know how to use it. (See Figure 1.)

Enter: The Technology Solutions Provider (TSP)

A TSP's role is to help their customers adopt, use, and profit from the changing technological landscape. Eventually, if not already, communications services providers (CSPs) will become secondary to TSPs in

terms of giving customers what they need, when they need it. Customers who once sought the help of telecoms to connect them to their friends and neighbors now need to learn how to make the most of these connections.

Many telecoms will fall into the trap of becoming frustrated as they think their customers no longer need them. But that's not the case. In fact, it can be argued that telecoms are more needed now than they were when they served as CSPs.

Consider a few examples: When a farmer needs to deploy the Internet of Things (IoT) technology for better water resource management, the TSP can help the farmer understand and adopt emerging technology in order to do this. (See Figure 2.) When a factory wants to create a direct channel for its goods through the Internet, a TSP will facilitate that channel creation and maintenance. And, when local businesses are resource-constrained and need IT services, a TSP will provide managed offerings or partner with them to obtain those services. In short, the CSP is the go-to resource for how a person, business, or organization connects with the rest of the world. The TSP will be the go-to resource for how a person, business, or organization applies technology to those connections.

Focus Is Everything

Service providers have a unique advantage in the Solutions Provider space because they *already know who their clients are*. No doubt smaller providers have an even greater advantage over large ones because they've made it their business to know their customer and their unique needs. From there, it's only a few short steps to becoming their partner in utilizing new technology.

What does it take to bridge the gap from CSP to TSP? CSPs who have done well in their market know the importance of a good customer experience. They've realized that by focusing on *quality*, they keep and attract more customers. This focus has created empathy for the customer, and fostered a relationship that has led to customers looking to the CSP for help in other areas.

Empathy is the foundation for a TSP. Once the TSP understands the challenges and opportunities technology adoption creates for its customers, it can package its expertise into a product offering. The TSP should identify potential targets for its new product offering and gauge the size of the market.



Figure 2. Technology can impact rural communities in unexpected ways.

You may already be well on the path to a TSP. One of Mapcom's M4 customers, Skyline Membership Corp., has used its streamlined operations and next-generation infrastructure to offer hosted VoIP phone service. (See Figure 3.) This allows workers at local companies to not only operate from home, but to also work from their cell phones anywhere in the world. It also means that Skyline's customers can grow their services as their businesses grow, and they only consume as much service as they need. Skyline Membership Corp. has taken advantage of its solution skill set to create TheVideoExchange.com, where Service Providers can come to exchange content created for local access channels. This is just one example of what it means to be a TSP. It all comes down to understanding the needs of your customers and packaging technology expertise into a product that fits your community.



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Serving the Future

So you've heard how a TSP benefits the customer, but how does it benefit the telecom or broadband provider? It's a given that the more services you provide, the greater your perceived value is for your customers. Once you have fostered this new relationship with your customers, they will likely return to you again and again for their emerging telecommunications and solutions needs.

Service providers don't want to just initiate a one-time transaction -- they seek to build a relationship. Becoming a TSP will allow this relationship to take place, and will also set the provider up to continue profiting from the relationship, regardless of what the future holds.



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