

2017 Predictions: Putting the telecom agility pieces together

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Telecom operators are set to take advantage of NFV, SDN and cloud to increase agility and better compete against OTT players.

Editor's Note: With 2017 now upon us, RCR Wireless News has gathered predictions from across the mobile telecommunications space on what they expect to see in the new year.

2016 saw both a lot of hype and progress around carrier virtualization and the associated technologies that have promised to deliver telecom agility. From network functions virtualization, management and network orchestration, mobile edge computing and “5G” trials (to name a few) there can be little doubt that the industry has embraced new technologies and processes meant to transform their ability to deliver new and disruptive services at a rapid pace, a pace so far only delivered by over-the-top providers.

2017 will see providers start putting all the pieces together to enable what they have been striving for over the last several years; a reliable and flexible infrastructure that will accelerate service delivery. While many of the pieces to enable rapid service roll outs have been in various stages of definition including testing and delivery, the new year will see a push from the carriers and providers to start integrating these systems into the telecom system delivery life cycle, in other words, the real world.

Operators have been looking forward to this for a long time: back in January 2013, when the European Telecommunication Standards Institute launched the Industry Specification Group for Network Functions Virtualization with AT&T, British Telecom, Deutsche Telekom, Orange, Telecom Italia, Telefónica, Verizon Communications and more than 50 network operators and equipment manufactures, they had a goal to radically redefine how the industry operates. Four years may seem like a long technology cycle given what we see every day for cloud vendors (try to imagine Google taking years to deliver a new service), but for telecommunication companies four years is fast.

When you spend billions of dollars on capital expenses you tend to be conservative on choosing what to roll out, understanding that it will be used for a long time. Virtualization brings the promise of vastly improved operating flexibility with lower capex and operating expense requirements. However, the most disruptive part of the new paradigm is the ability to deliver services far quicker and with less business and technical risk.

2017 will not see the introduction of “many” new technologies in telecom, rather it will see the deliberate integration of several available technologies to deliver end-to-end solutions. For the most part, the telecom industry had to, or decided to not participate in the OTT revolution. They watched from the sidelines as OTT vendors delivered new capabilities that used their infrastructure to disrupt their core business. With the new virtualized technologies being put into place, telecom operators will finally be able to start delivering their own disruptive innovations and technologies. With telecom operators as true competitors it will only drive further innovation and quicker technology cycles.

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