

# Mobile operators need OSSs

Mycom International's chief executive officer Siamak Sarbaz tells *Wireless Europe* why cellular operators should take operational support systems seriously.

## How important is OSS in the industry?

I see it as extremely important. I worked at British Telecom when we moved from analogue to digital technology. The directive from the company's board at that time was that no new switches should be rolled out without the operational support systems (OSSs) that we were working on. However, in the past an OSS has often been thrown in as an add-on, sometimes even for free in the sale of base transceiver stations, base-station controllers and switches. Operators saw OSSs as necessary evils when they wanted to look at command, control and fault management in their networks.

As networks have matured and diversified we have ended up with hybrid technology environments. Operators now have to handle GSM, GPRS and UMTS at the same time, in addition to the traditional handovers with the backbone network. Their services have to run across different types of network, some of which could belong to another operator. They therefore need end-to-end service assurance platforms that not only command, control and identify issues, but solve problems as well. Operators that do not have such a platform are going to start losing their customers because they are unable to offer them proper quality of service.

## What are the big challenges for an OSS in a network with many different technologies?

One of the big issues is integration. Mobile operators often have more than 100 different tools to control their networks. These tools are uncorrelated and look at just one particular area of the network. OSS platforms should be able to integrate all the different technologies, systems and tools in a way that is simple and quick to implement. Mycom International aims to provide an end-to-end platform. We have a dynamically adaptive importation engine at the core of our platform so that integration is easy. Our engine learns about the structures and inter-relationships in the network adaptively and dynamically. When these change the engine adapts itself to the new structure so it is vendor and technology agnostic.

OSS platforms should also support the business and operational processes inside an operator. The smarter operators are now realizing that they are not in the business to just own and operate a network. They must sell air time and value-added services, find customers and keep them. They need to focus on their core competence and outsource the operations.



Siamak Sarbaz: "The big challenge is how to integrate and work in a hybrid environment."

## What challenges does the increase in data traffic have for OSS systems?

Quality of service is going to become extremely important as content travels across different technologies and types of operator. With UMTS networks the coverage and capacity change dynamically so an OSS must be able to monitor and ensure quality of service across that dynamic environment. A dynamically adaptive system allows changes in the network to be immediately reflected in the database and correlated across the whole model of the system.

Our system also has a decision support system. This allows us to build up a library of scenarios to troubleshoot problems and means that if an operator's three top optimization engineers leave, the network is

not going to fail. Marketing departments can also use the huge amount of data in the engineering network to promote new and value-added services. Dynamic tariffing is also possible.

## How does an independent OSS help operators?

One of the things that operators would like to see is OSS systems that cater for multiple equipment vendors. These vendors have traditionally tried to tie the operator into their own set of tools. As many operators are choosing more than one vendor they are looking for independence from their main infrastructure vendors to give them more flexibility in the future. Major infrastructure vendors do not have the proper tools and OSS platforms to go across multiple vendors and domains. However, some of the vendors have now realized that if they include in their portfolio a good independent OSS that can be adapted to a multivendor environment, then they can break into their competitors' areas and offer their customers a choice.

## What are the big challenges in the future?

The big challenge is how to integrate and work in a hybrid environment. Networks and services were less complex 10 years ago and did not have so many third-party platforms that each focus on one specific task. Now the issue is how to manage these hybrid networks and make sure that evolutionary changes work well and also benefit the end-user. Operators need to move away from the day-to-day running of their networks and move on to acquiring and keeping customers by offering new value-added services. OSS providers must help meet this challenge. ■

*Interview by Siân Harris, associate editor of Wireless Europe.*