

## Co-sponsored feature: Mycom International

**OSS should be at the very centre of the network, says Mycom International's CEO Siamak Sarbaz, taking in data from disparate sources around the network and turning it into useful information — just like a heart oxygenates blood**

# At the heart of the network



Siamak Sarbaz, CEO,  
Mycom International

**Mycom is not a new company, is it, but its name is possibly unfamiliar to many people in the OSS business. Why is that?**

**Siamak Sarbaz:** We have come largely from the professional services side. Mycom is well known to the large telecom operators and vendors across the world in the services area, but less so in the product business. We're a sort of best-kept-secret in the industry. We have a killer product with NIMS-PrOptima that has been purchased by a number of large operators across the world. We're poised to be an 800-pound gorilla in the OSS space — a bit of a surprise to people, because some people may have not heard of us before.

**How long has Mycom been in business?**

**Sarbaz:** We started Mycom in the first quarter of 1997. I used to be part of the Orange group in the UK, and before that I was at the BT research labs in Martlesham. I was part of the team responsible for BT's OMC projects — the operation and maintenance centres, the OSS platform to support the national program of the digitization of the switches across the whole of the UK. This was the network management system, the heart of the command and control of the network.

I joined Orange around 1990, when it was still Microtel, as the network management design authority.

All of my background was network management and then later on I went into consultancy. I worked with Nortel Networks, putting the largest GSM network at the time in Taiwan, but I was based in Paris. Taiwan is now one of the few countries in the world where there is 110% cellular penetration.

My experience in the whole life cycle of our industry as an operator, then as a vendor and then as a consultant helped me to see the big hole in the OSS area — a need for a strategic platform that would allow a coherent network management strategy for any operator to be put in place. That's when I started working on the high level specification for our product platform. We did that in the UK originally.

Today, besides the UK, we have R&D facilities in France, Malaysia and Taiwan. Our service organization is extremely well spread in the world and includes whole of the US.

Initially, The professional services organization — our innovative engineering services organization — was being built up in Asia while we were focussing on the product side in Europe.

From the beginning we focussed our platform on next generation mobile networks, so rather than working specifically for GSM we positioned it as a multi-vendor, multi-technology platform, a technology-agnostic platform. That's why the design has become extremely powerful. It is very different from other people's in the market, who are trying to adapt their old engines into new architectures.

We started with a very open architecture from the beginning. That's why we are far more advanced.

**That means your system can work with networks that use systems from many vendors, does it?**

**Sarbaz:** Exactly. Today's operators are more and more going for a multi-vendor environment. They have hybrid technology networks — a GSM, GPRS and UMTS network all in one — and the boxes are coming from different vendors, and there are a lot of third-party vendors as well as the big infrastructure suppliers we all know about. The operator needs something, a platform that provides a central command and control for all of these, that also provides a view of the network that is end to end.

This is what we call a three-dimensional view — the network dimension, the user dimension and the service dimension. Allowing all of that to happen from one platform is really key to the successful, efficient operations and to the survival of the business of an operator.

The platform was built with a vision of having it at the heart of every operator. The command and control centres of the NOCs had an operational view of the network, but what I wanted to put in was to give it a business intelligence function, to focus the operators more on their end game rather than on running a network, that is simply running their equipment, this way they can put more focus on the business processes and on the services that they have to provide to their paying customers generating much higher revenues, and improving their bottom line.

From that perspective it was something that had to connect to a lot of disparate data sources, with different boxes and different technologies, as you'll find in UMTS today.

**Did you work with one or two operators in those early days?**

**Sarbaz:** We all had an operator background, so we knew what they needed, and rather than teaming up with one operator in particular, we had a collective knowledge from our services division which was extremely powerful. We built that knowledge into the platform — which is different from a lot of the other platforms, which are built by purely software people. A lot of platforms do not have the practicalities that an operator needs.

Whenever we go in front of the big operators now — companies such as the O2 group, which we've just signed — when they see what we have to offer, they

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put us a cut above the rest. That knowledge we have is immense. That pedigree of the engineering services that we had before and keep improving on, translates into a very powerful platform that is very usable by the leading operators.

**How do they justify the investment in your products? By reducing the cost? What are the main arguments they present to their CFO, for example?**

**Sarbaz:** We see that it's a strategic platform, so factors such as cost of ownership are at the heart of it. It brings down the operational expenses hugely, because it optimizes every part of the organization — from engineering design to marketing — and at the same time it brings down the capital expenditure that operators have to do. Instead of going out and buying anything and everything they can look at what they've got and optimize their investment in assets that they have. They can optimize their purchases and optimize existing assets.

The other thing is that because it's at the heart of the NOC, it allows any operator that is moving towards outsourcing of its network operations to do that in a very smooth manner. It allows you to see what part of the operations you can outsource. From that point of view it's really a strategic weapon in the hands of any operator.

With this an operator can keep control of their key performance indicators and key quality indicators, and at the same time allow the operations to be run by others, so they can reduce their headcount and automate a lot of the processes. That helps them save a lot of money.

On the other hand it helps the introduction of new services. 3G is gradually appearing now. What you can see is that speed of services is important. Services are very short-lived, and therefore you need to be able to optimize the introduction of the services and capitalize very quickly on those services you're going to introduce. You need to be able to offer them to your end customers within two weeks — and it's got to work first time, end to end, and it could be going across a number of different domains and even a number of different carriers.

Therefore you have to be able to measure how that service is being delivered. In order to do that, you need KQIs and SLAs that have to be met. Otherwise these guys are going to lose a lot of money. From an operator perspective, in order to win very big contracts with large customers it needs to have a platform of this kind so it can offer this kind of performance — and that's what we are offering as well.

That very much comes from our service culture. We have created an end to end innovative service product. A lot of service companies in this business focus on, say, RF or telecoms implementation. We offer end to end service — from design to creating the sites, installing, commissioning and testing the equipment, doing technical support and the optimization, and performance managing the whole network. That's what we do. We are a one-stop shop.

Our platform is the same: very much a single platform that can offer end to end services, integrating all the services and the products.

**How widespread is the company around the world?**

**Sarbaz:** We have 11 subsidiaries, and over 750 direct employees, plus quite a number of consultants. In each country we also have a network of local subcontractors and companies that we use. We are able to support our customers on a worldwide basis. We work with people like Nokia, Ericsson, Alcatel and others on a regional or worldwide basis. Sometimes we go in together. Sometimes they win the work and they come to us for delivery.

Right now we are doing outsourcing of network operations centres. We have set up a lot of remote integration centres. This platform is going to be at the heart of such things because from these platforms we can offer services — across the world or across a particular region — to all the properties that an operator may have. For example, monitoring services, reporting services.

For example, a group such as Vodafone can buy our service for all its subsidiaries across Europe or across the world if it wishes to. From a single command and control centre they can look at the performance of the different properties and compare them.

**Does the need for that come from the fact that they now have international customers, or because operators have acquired a disparate range of local companies over the past few years?**

**Sarbaz:** I think it's a bit of both. They have operational needs, for people at group level to see how the performance is, but all of these groups are selling their brand — whether it's Vodafone or Orange or O2, and there is a particular service associated with that brand. In order to do that they need platforms to be able to measure those services and to be able to compare.

We have a framework agreement with the O2 group, in Ireland, Germany and the UK, and in all these countries they will be using NIMS-PrOptima at the heart of their performance management.

Many of their large customers are working across boundaries and so they have to be able to offer services seamlessly across their network.

**How different is your approach from that of others in the business?**

**Sarbaz:** The operators have realized that others were using vertical silos of information, with no cross-relationship and cross-referencing of data. We have turned the OSS upside down. Instead of a hierarchical approach, we have put it at the heart of the operation, so everything else is connected to it. You can answer questions that are coming from any departments.

Our system is just like a heart: the bad blood comes in, and becomes oxygenated in the heart before going out the other side, adding value by making semi-useless data into knowledge that lets an operator make the business more efficient.

This is a powerful platform and a lot of operators are looking at using it for a coherent management strategy. They have realized that OSS is not just about managing the network elements — the old traditional fault management stuff — but it's about the whole business, including the service offerings.

The operator can increase the revenue as well as profitability — which is what operators are wanting and need to do. ■