Vodafone Germany improves the customer experience through unified business support systems

who: Vodafone Germany

what: Modernizing disparate business support systems (BSS) to create a unified, omnichannel cloud-native system to rapidly serve customers with a choice of converged services

how: Vodafone Germany worked with Tech Mahindra to create cloud-native BSS called One Sales Foundation, based on Comviva's BlueMarble software

watch: TM Forum's Chief Analyst, Mark Newman, interviews Ulrich Irnich, CIO of Vodafone Germany, about how the communications service provider (CSP) has transformed its customer experience to simplify the delivery of converged B2C services

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results:

- 70% of all customer interactions with Vodafone Germany are now digital

- Significant improvements in the converged sales experience for both telsales and retail customers

- Increased its flexibility in building bundled products

Managing legacy business support systems while driving customer experience improvements

Vodafone Germany offers a range of converged multimedia services over fixed and mobile networks, which are the accumulated result of some key acquisitions over the years. Bringing on board diverse network assets, including cable TV networks, enabled the operator to compete nationally to provide both fixed and mobile connectivity, and it now has more than 31 million mobile, 11 million broadband and 13 million TV customers. However, it also created complexity for the company's IT teams tasked with delivering a fast, flexible and user-friendly customer experience.

Faced with the challenge of managing several legacy BSS while driving customer experience improvements, Vodafone Germany's IT teams in 2019 began to transform the company's retail, telesales and online customer channels. The aim was to optimize its customers' choice of a range of converged services.

"From 2019, the move towards bundling really started to gather pace," explains Ulrich Irnich, CIO of Vodafone Germany. "We had four different BSS systems supporting the needs of our customers, but our customers don't care which kind of stack they are in."

Vodafone Germany worked with Tech Mahindra to create a flexible, agile, cloud-native BSS to serve all its channels, called One Sales Foundation, based on Comviva's BlueMarble BSS.

The teams first tackled the challenge of modernizing systems manned by people, whether in stores or online.

"We divided it into two parts, starting with assisted sales channels, which covers telesales, retail, our own shops, and our partner shops across Germany which are doing assisted sales," explains Irnich. "What we are trying to do in Germany is to make the customer journeys work online and in shops in the same way with no difference in touch and feel."

Although customers increasingly interact via digital channels, shops remain an important place for them to ask questions, resolve problems or try out new devices. "They come when they need some education about what's the right choice for them. And of course, when there are new devices, they come in to touch them."

Vodafone Germany's acquisition timeline

2000
Purchases Mannesmann for €180 billion

2007
Acquires Arcor, a German telecoms company, for €5.5 billion

2013
Acquires Kabel Deutschland, then Germany's largest cable operator, for €7.7 billion

2019
Finalizes €18.4 billion acquisition of European Liberty Global's network assets in Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania

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CIO
Vodafone Germany

Creating a seamless experience for customers

Given the need to support physical and digital services, Vodafone Germany has been working to ensure automated fulfillment across merged channels. Currently, it is busy integrating its digital channels to create a coherent system.

"We are connecting…all digital channels to the same basket so that we have a really seamless experience for our customers regardless of which kind of journey they are starting or where," says Irnich.

Signing up new customers is already a largely digital experience and "the flows are pretty straightforward," he says. However, cable networks can be more complex and require information about installed customer premises equipment.

"We are focusing on really getting these different flows completely optimized," says Irnich. Other services include proactively providing information about network faults via an app.

The company also wants to give customer and sales advisors a 360-degree view of a customer from the perspective of both a household and the individual subscription.

"In Germany and the Netherlands it is possible to combine customer data in real time to gain both a personal and a household perspective of a customer and to offer a choice of benefits to customers that use multiple services," or that have been loyal to the company over a period of time, says Irnich.

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>
> Ulrich Irnich

Processing change

When it came to the digital transformation, "the technology side is easy," explains Irnich. The main challenges lay in "helping our people to adopt and learn new technology and new processes…and change their selling behaviors from the past…People are very used to the old systems…They know exactly which kind of coding you do."

However, employees have adapted to the tools and are now seeing their benefit as they support the sales of more sophisticated products and services. And those who are new to the tool are mastering it more swiftly than users of the previous legacy systems.

"As products get more bundled and more complex, it's much easier. And we also see that new people starting the journey in our shops are much faster in adopting this kind of new tool."

Crucially, Vodafone Germany is also seeing an improvement in customer satisfaction, as measured by its net promoter score. "We are not at the level we want to be, which is 10, but we are close to seven," says Irnich.

The operator is also seeing a shift to online interactions. "If you look to our existing online share, we have already 45% to 50% [of customers] coming to our online systems [first] which is already a big share."

A standardized approach to evolution

Vodafone Germany relies on standardization and cloud-native software deployment to help its IT teams swiftly deploy new solutions. "When you get to the tipping point, it becomes more of a challenge to IT to deliver features faster," says Irnich.

"We are addicted to [TM Forum's] Open Digital Architecture [ODA] and...we [use] a lot of out-of-the-box TM Forum Open APIs. That's number one. And number two is we want to have a cloud-native platform to help us deploy our software in the future much faster."

And of course, standards play a key role in future-proofing the systems it is developing. "The times of big transformations are over," says Irnich. "We are in a constant modernization journey. And we need future readiness in an ecosystem which evolves over time."

Using cloud-native systems to create streamlined customer journeys also makes it simpler for national operators within the Vodafone Group to share tools and approaches that work.

ODA replaces traditional operations and business support systems (OSS/BSS) with a new approach to building software for the telecoms industry, opening a market for standardized, cloud-native software components, and enabling communications service providers and suppliers to invest in IT for new and differentiated services.

"We delayer BSS tech into reusable modular layers...and get applications...cloud ready," he explains. "We are also working on our own open source, digital BSS system, with components which we can easily reuse.

"Every modernization we do, we have an asset library that every market can pick [solutions] from and reuse," explains Irnich. "That's the modernization garage and above the modernization garage lies digital engineering."

The CIO in each country has a dual role – modernizing national IT systems and contributing to the group's wider resources and understanding. For example, the UK is accountable for digital engineering and the use of standards and development around ODA. In Spain the focus is on "driving the channel strategy. And in Italy the focus is on data analytics and the data layer."

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