Key Issues
Synamedia SaaS journey sees more demand to become prime SI

For a company like Synamedia, with so many strings to its bow, getting across the many product messages at a major industry trade fair like NAB is a near-impossible task. A pre-NAB press conference held this week was therefore a calculated way of setting the scene ahead of the industry flocking to Las Vegas in a fortnight.

There is a bigger news item under embargo until closer to the show, involving a recent acquisition and product expansion, which eagle-eyed readers will have spotted a clue to on the pages of Faultline in weeks gone by.

In the meantime, Synamedia is fiercely focused on its SaaS shift, not just to attract new business from nimble cloud-native video streaming businesses, but as a way to reduce spending from capex to opex for large lighthouse (early adopter) clients – i.e. pay TV operators and broadcasters.

Not only do SaaS technologies provide more technical flexibility for video service providers, but SaaS is seen as a structural evolution that benefits suppliers like Synamedia with more freedom to innovate. The multi-tenant SaaS model allows companies to build and test repeatedly in labs, instead of operating in a vacuum.

This is largely the same message as a year ago, where Synamedia was one of countless vendors waving the SaaS flag at NAB 2022 – signaling a sea change away from customer-to-customer/project-by-project workflows. The difference a year later is that Synamedia's SaaS-based portfolio looks a little more polished, although all will be revealed on the show floor at NAB 2023.

This telco software-inspired roadmap was instilled first by the arrival of new CEO Paul Segre, who traded call center software giant Genesys for Synamedia (both owned by Permira) in October 2020.

Shortly after, Segre poached former Genesys colleague Lucy Norris, who came over to Synamedia as GM of Broadcast Technology and Customer Success, to support the vendor's traditional lighthouse customers, which – crucially – are continuing their journeys towards SaaS.

The broad term of customer success can span everything from post-sales services and support, to adoption and expansion of additional technologies – all ultimately leading to retention.

"There isn't a service provider out there not working with SaaS," claims Norris. Others might disagree.

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Synamedia's Iris addressable advertising suite was used as an example. When Iris launched towards the beginning of 2022, new features were – unbeknown to early clients – being added at a frightening pace, reaching 130 code drops in the first six weeks alone.

Of course, this kind of rapid update cadence is not possible for all video service providers. Synamedia's traditional customers have a high degree of on-premises configured technology, although most of the configuration can be done through published APIs.

"We're not walking away from the ability to be an integrator. In fact, we're getting more demand to be a prime systems integrator – and in some cases to operate on behalf of those companies," Norris continued.

These are the likes of Sky, Astro, Vodafone, DirecTV, and DirecTV LatAm – clients described as the reference point for Synamedia's Broadcast Technology division which continue to help drive innovation from the inside-out.

Synamedia Go was the first glimpse into the company's broader multi-tenant SaaS strategy, but this suite of modular services initially did little to inspire and was plagued by launch delays – an indicative downside of the SaaS approach.

Serendipitously, the Synamedia Go SaaS suite has a new customer

Serendipitously, Synamedia Go has just snagged a new customer, with yes, the pay TV subsidiary of Israeli telco Bezeq, using the Synamedia Go Experience Manager – including personalized content recommendations. Synamedia's better-known security suite and video network technologies are also being used by yes, but Synamedia Go was the emphasis of the announcement.

The new yes+ smart TV apps launched a month ago, on Samsung and LG, developed using the 3Ready framework from 3SS.

Meanwhile, some customers are in more advanced stages of cloud journeys than others, meaning there are still plenty of instances where it just makes sense to stay on-prem. This is why the Synamedia Solid appliance remains at the core of the Video Networks division, running the Virtual Digital Content Manger
(VDCM) that boasts substantial market penetration.

Not forgetting the Synamedia Vivid portfolio, which sits as the umbrella for cloud workflows and the OTT video processing suite as a multi-cloud offering – covering primary distribution with CDN, with OTT and broadcast in the middle. Under this multi-cloud umbrella, Synamedia believes clients should not be orchestrating cloud services, so will manage the end-to-end infrastructure on behalf of customers.

The end goal is to migrate existing clients to full or hybrid cloud architectures, with minimal disruption using the same teams for existing on-prem technologies.

Jim Turner, Synamedia's relatively new VP of Product Management for Streaming Platforms, presented his take during the company's press event. Turner cited content discovery as one of his team's focus areas, as operators look for ways to make more direct connections to gather intent data and customer data with a route to improved ROI.

Turner pointed to Synamedia's May 2022 acquisition of Utelly, one mostly forgotten since the fanfare of the Quortex acquisition that followed in July. The assets of Utelly, the UK-based search and recommendations specialist, have since been used to create the Go.Aggregate product, part of the Synamedia Go suite, to create metadata from multiple sources, enrich it, simplify it, and meld it into a single user experience. This effort increases usage, reduces overheads, and makes it easier to bring in new sources of data.

"We can use cloud technology to simplify processes, bring products to market quicker, and reduce operational costs," added Turner.