

4 Reasons Smart Service Providers Build Storefronts

Companies around the world are accelerating business through digital transformation, focusing on adopting innovative and emerging technologies for competitive advantage. For infrastructure service providers vying for share in an increasingly crowded market, differentiation with a focus on customer experience is crucial. These transformations are causing network and system architectures to become increasingly complex, spanning across public, private and hybrid cloud models while incorporating on-premise and legacy infrastructure components.

The DevOps movement focuses on speed, agility, automation and continuous improvement. In parallel, technology best practice frameworks continue to iterate focusing on defining, mapping and documenting. Microservice models and software defined networking capabilities are being rapidly adopted and hyper converged infrastructure is changing the way data centers operate.

New technology paradigms emerge daily enabling greater efficiency at scale, and also add significant chaos and complexity for the providers delivering infrastructure.

As customers, our expectations for a “great” experience are conditioned by how we consume services and shop for products in our everyday lives. Today, great service experience is defined by the customer having simplified access to key offerings where contextually relevant value-add services are bundled into a solution to meet their needs.

As an infrastructure service provider, how can you keep up with all of this?

The best providers continue to drive down cost, while quickly incorporating emerging technologies, and still ensuring great customer experiences by employing a “storefront” approach to their services offerings.

Aren't Storefronts just a Service Catalog?

In short: Sort of.

This is a slippery slope for IT professionals. Remember, the business customer doesn't care about ITIL. There is a lot of confusion due to semantics in this space. Service Catalogs are an ITIL concept focused on defining service structures along with SLA's/OLA's, and component ownership so those services can be managed.

There are differences between the capabilities software toolsets use for deploying service catalogs and the interpretation of what a service catalog is and does. The best way to explain the difference between a Storefront and a Service Catalog is anecdotally:

You walk into an Ice Cream shop and want to get a scoop of mint chocolate chip in a sugar cone with whipped cream and a cherry on top.

The Storefront Experience

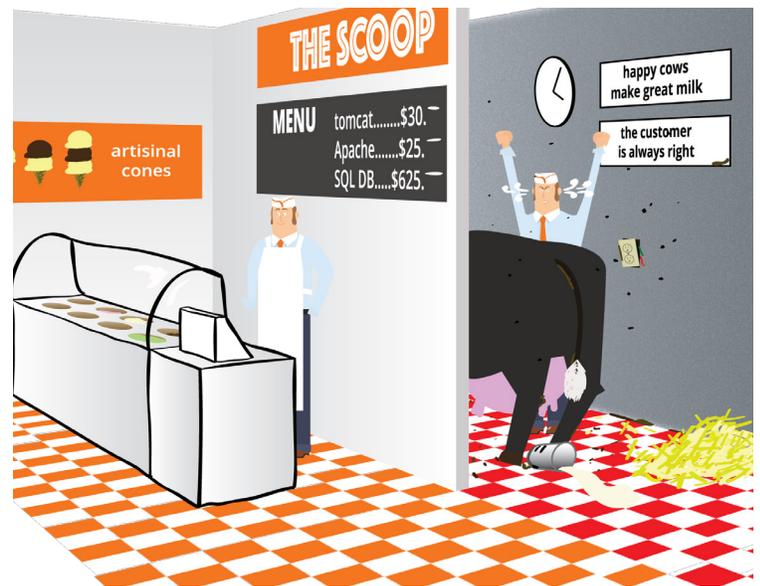
You see an attractive menu of options. You select your choice: It's a delicious mint chip ice cream with amazing whipped cream, made from grass-fed, organic ingredients, including sumerian mocha-toffee chocolate chips.

The cone was hand-made by the local boutique bakery and the cherries were imported from Tuscany.

They also upsold you on some amazing white chocolate sprinkles that they outlined would go well with what you ordered.

You order, walk to the checkout, pay and are done.

Now you are enjoying your amazing frozen treat and planning on coming back here to try their Super Banana Split sundae next week.



Elegant front end for a complex back end

The Service Catalog Experience

You have a list of flavors to choose from, along with some options - sugar cone, cake cone, how many scoops etc...

You order your mint-chip ice cream in your sugar cone, but find out that the store doesn't provide whipped cream or cherries. They've outsourced those parts to 2 different partners across town. They tell you that they can order them for you along with your ice cream, but can't guarantee they'll be delivered and they have no way of providing visibility to when they will show up.

So they give you your ice cream in the

cone, put in the orders to their partners and hopefully by the time you finish paying their partners will show up with your whipped cream and cherry.

Unfortunately, as you check out, the cherry has shown up, but there's no whipped cream to be found as the other partner (a dairy farm) had their cream maker call in sick today. So, now you have an incomplete solution to your ice cream dilemma and the cashier tells you that all sales are final and you need to work with the whipped cream people to resolve that issue.

You just wanted the ice cream cone you ordered.

You will be going down the street to the other shop for your next frozen dessert.

4 Reasons to adopt a Storefront approach to Infrastructure Delivery

Evolution: Like Revolution without the pain

1) Add services and features to the experience without changing the experience and interface

You currently have major investments in place to help manage and automate infrastructure in your world. As new technologies emerge, you need to quickly integrate new tools into your existing delivery models. There will always be feature/function overlap provided by new tools with your existing set. What's critical is that you don't "recreate the wheel" in areas in which you already have viable solutions.

To maximize time to value, and improve the returns on both your financial and time investments, you can use a storefront approach to allow you to evolve by integrating new tool functionality as you are ready for it.

SIAM For The Win!

2) A single spot to interact with complex services has high value to customers

Service Integration and Management (SIAM) is a process improvement approach that helps enterprises manage integrated service models across delivery towers. It is aimed at consistently delivering quality service to customers where there may be many different vendors, processes and tools working in concert behind the scenes.

Remember, your customer doesn't care about your subcontractor or the fact you and your vendors use different ticketing systems to manage work. They just want service delivered, aligned to their contracted SLA's.

By providing a storefront of services to your customers, you can ensure a great experience that is self-service driven, while working to continually improve your delivery models while effectively implementing a SIAM strategy.

Handcuffs are for criminals, not Service Providers!

3) Eliminate vendor lock by using storefront platforms that are open and designed for sharing

As a service provider, you are responsible for the customer experience, regardless of what is happening behind the scenes. By employing a storefront approach driving web-based interaction through a single point of entry, back-end delivery chaos is hidden from the customer.

This will give you the flexibility to swap out and/or upgrade back-end tools without impact to service consumers. This means you are no longer "handcuffed" to a vendor toolset for fear of negative customer impact. By eliminating vendor lock, you reduce risk and have the flexibility to change delivery components giving you leverage in vendor negotiations.

You're so money and you don't even know it!

4) Storefronts save you and your customers money

One thing guaranteed to get any executive's attention is money (greenbacks, dinero, skrilla, cashish... etc..). Ultimately, the service provider business is about profitable growth. By setting up services to be consumed by customers easily, quickly and without requiring extra labor to deliver, you are optimizing the opportunity for profit.

In taking a storefront approach to delivering infrastructure, you are setting your organization up for flexibility to continue to differentiate your services while empowering customers through self-service. It's widely known that dynamic and integrated self-service reduces support and service delivery overhead. It also drives customer satisfaction.

For the provider, this ultimately equates to lower service delivery cost, lower total cost of ownership and happier customers. Happy customers stick around longer. The longer they stay, the more profitable revenue you gain.

Infrastructure delivery is complex and full of chaos. As a provider, that is your reality. But, don't make it so for your customers. They demand easy interaction and they have choice in whom provides them their service.

Most people understand that it's way easier to go out and buy your milk, bacon, eggs and bread than running your own farm, cultivating and processing raw ingredients to make breakfast. It's faster, easier and less expensive, and: Who doesn't love bacon? Your customers don't want to farm their own infrastructure either.

Not only does a storefront approach to infrastructure delivery assist service providers with acquiring new customers, it helps ensure retention and profit growth when done right.

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keep up?***

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