



Don't let AdvancedTCA wind up like UNIX

At the February joint session of PICMG and Service Availability Forum members, Fred Cook from Sprint-Nextel had some words of warning for the audience: Don't let the growing variety of AdvancedTCA specifications result in fragmenting the technology or you'll wind up like UNIX.

Carriers at the session such as Sprint-Nextel and Verizon/MCI delivered a clear message. They are getting involved because they want the number of options reduced. Standards tend to accept diversity, and that produces differentiation. Instead, carriers prefer fewer options resulting in less training and maintenance expense. More options increases operator error. Operator error results in downtime.

Carriers want the number of physical devices decreased and, more importantly, they want the number of types of devices reduced. Product standardization for operators promotes ease of use and familiarity along with lower cost than traditional proprietary solutions.

And can you work on those error messages? How about something useful that isn't repeated over and over again as each device realizes there is an error. Carriers are optimistically embracing the promise of IPMI on AdvancedTCA blades and want to see system management integrated to the level that an operator receives usable feedback.

Fred summed it up with a wish list for equipment manufacturers:

- Keep the standards tight
- Group options together and name them
- Continue to test interoperability and publish the results
- Provide correlation and filtering of error messages
- Simplify system integration
- Minimize downtime due to operator error
- Demonstrate how the device is supposed to operate to TEMs
- Develop standard load balancing components

Specification developers are listening

It all started last year with the formation of an umbrella organization, Mountain View Alliance. As Rob Davidson, PICMG's vice president of marketing and representative to the Mountain View Alliance, explains, "Now that we have all these great specs, how do we build stuff that actually works together?" Recently, three new groups have been formed to ensure that the products developed to PICMG, SAF, OSDL, and other standard organizations are interoperable. These new groups include:

- SCOPE Alliance
- PICMG Requirements Engineering Subcommittee (RES)
- Communications Platform Trade Association (CP-TA)

Figure 1 shows a Mountain View Alliance map of SCOPE, CP-TA, and SIG relationships. The groups provide an ecosystem driven by carrier input and facilitate inroads into the carrier's fresh build opportunities (also known as green field). The carriers don't have the dollars to

replace or make a wholesale upgrade of working proprietary CO equipment, however, the new data centers required to support VoIP, softswitch technology, and Customer Premise Equipment (CPE) provide a huge potential market for network equipment.

Six leading network equipment providers (Alcatel, Ericsson, Motorola, NEC, Nokia, and Siemens) launched SCOPE a few weeks ago to accelerate the developing ecosystem for carrier grade products by promoting open specifications created by other groups. To accomplish this, the new alliance will develop a distinct profile for each carrier grade base platform based on carrier requirements. The first profile expected for release by the first quarter of 2006 is for AdvancedTCA server applications. Profiles for Carrier Grade Linux and Middleware are scheduled for later this year.

Any PICMG related profile will be handed off to PICMG's new RES subcommittee, where the appropriate PICMG specification requirements will be matched against the profile requirements. If any gaps

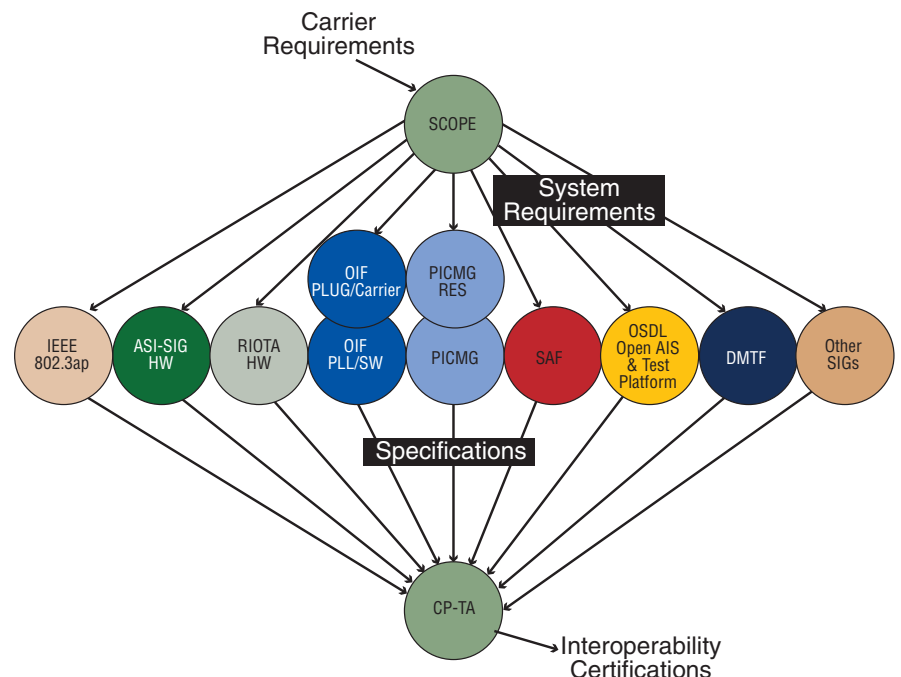


Figure 1

or inconsistencies are found, the subcommittee works with the PICMG membership, both to clarify existing and identify new specifications. In addition, working through the Mountain View Alliance members, the RES subcommittee will harmonize technical efforts with other specification organizations in the ecosystem.

This begs the question of how the various "special interest" factions within these standard-making bodies would be appeased. As Rob said, "The purpose is to open bilateral discussions and to facilitate, not act as an arbitrator. It's going to take making some hard decisions."

Achieving interoperability

Some carriers have their own internal testing labs. Jim Sylvester, vice president of systems integration and testing at Verizon, identified the physical design compliance criteria for different types of equipment ranging from the NEBS-compliant central office to the less rigorous requirements for a data center. A variety of testing capabilities exists among network equipment customers. Standards bodies such as PICMG do not have and do not want to establish testing labs.

To fill this gap, Motorola and Intel initiated a new industry association, the CP-TA working group, to provide a level of certification testing to facilitate faster carrier adoption. To create a preference for products that have been proven interoperable, the CP-TA will certify compliant products. This is not a specification body, but rather a facilitator to move new COTS technologies from early adoption to mainstream adoption. Translated into market potential, this means driving the market tenfold from where it's today, according to Shlomo Prital of Motorola.

People involved in these organizations have expended a great deal of effort to establish the new telecom COTS ecosystem needed to meet the new carrier requirements. But, now the real work begins. We will keep you apprised of the developments in these groups in the next few issues to keep you abreast of their accomplishments.

For additional information on the associations mentioned in this column, e-mail Chris Williams, of Communications Platform Trade Association, at chris.williams@Motorola.com

Or visit:

Mountain View Alliance
www.mountainviewalliance.org

PICMG
www.picmg.org

SCOPE
www.scope-alliance.org

Service Availability Forum
www.saforum.org

Verizon NEBS website
www.verizonnebs.com