



CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

SPARK NEW ZEALAND

Spark increases speed to market and reduces costs with CSG

CLIENT OVERVIEW

Spark is New Zealand's largest telecommunications and digital services company. Spark provides mobile, broadband and digital services to millions of New Zealanders and thousands of New Zealand businesses. Spark's end-to-end digital services offerings include cloud transformation, managed services, security, data, automation, analytics, IoT and much more.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last several years, Spark has undergone intense transformation. The company rebranded and changed its name, reengineered its internal IT systems, restructured into an Agile organization, and reinforced its commitment to lead with wireless services.

2013 saw Spark embark on a three-year journey to rebuild its internal IT systems, with the goals of improving time to market and reducing opex. In 2018, Spark embraced a company-wide Agile methodology to improve market responsiveness and increase employee engagement.

Leveraging CSG's industry expertise and convergent charging and billing solution to improve time to market, Spark delivers on its core purpose to help all of New Zealand win big in a digital world.

A HISTORY OF INNOVATION

Before deploying CSG Singleview, Spark had to rearchitect its billing function whenever it wanted to offer a new product. Turning to CSG for a convergent charging and billing system, Singleview allowed Spark to quickly offer new products, configuring offers without needing new code.

Spark uses Singleview to manage different products, such as supporting prepaid and postpaid plans from one solution. This convergent solution allowed Spark to respond to the demands of the fast-maturing New Zealand mobile market. With Singleview, complex scenarios are simplified, like sharing data across mobile devices in an account or free calling circles for otherwise unrelated customers. This allows Spark to tap into lucrative market segments.

"Whether you use prepaid or postpaid plans is just a payment choice," says Paul Adamson, Domain Chapter Lead for Billing. "You should be able to get the same products and the same features on both, and that's what we've achieved."

Converging prepaid and postpaid means Spark doesn't have to build the solution twice—or more—each time the company has a new offer. With a convergent solution, Spark can reduce opex with fewer systems to operate and maintain. And the billing and customer service teams only need to know how to manage one system, reducing training time and optimizing resource utilization.



EXPERT COLLABORATION

Spark values having the independence to operate its systems on its terms, and has the capabilities to configure and develop its billing solutions in-house. Still, the company knows it can count on CSG to help with implementation, troubleshooting or any other project. Spark leverages the global experience CSG has working with other companies, and incorporates best practices into its billing operations.

This close relationship was key when Spark began its three-year endeavor to overhaul its internal IT systems, including its business support systems (BSS). Prior to the reengineering program, customer service representatives (CSRs) had a disjointed view of the customer, using different products and tools to manage the customer experience. Operating disparate systems drove up costs and prevented Spark from quickly launching new services.

Spark had already implemented Singleview, Interconnect and Intermediate in the years before. The strong working relationship with CSG, coupled with the functionality of the solutions, made it an easy choice for Spark to incorporate CSG solutions into its future IT state.

“The CSG suite of billing products was key to that reengineering,” says Campbell Fraser, Spark Technology Tribe Lead. “Participating in the migration to the new stack and the overall success of that migration is probably the most significant achievement for both of us.”

Spark and CSG continue to work closely together, and one of the reasons the teams collaborate well is because both use an Agile approach.



FLEXIBILITY AND AGILITY

How has Spark been able to get to market quickly with new services? One part of their success has been using a generic product model. Developed in partnership with CSG, the product model has been used to build and bill for any product. The product model was created based on SID and eTOM frameworks from the TM Forum, allowing Spark to leverage best practices and processes for building new product offerings.

Some products, like Spark’s Netflix offering, didn’t even exist when the product model was created, demonstrating just how flexible the product model is at monetizing current and future services. Spark has used the product model to offer products from SMS to Spotify to the Internet of Things. Spark can also bundle these new products with its existing services using Singleview.

Whatever future products are introduced, Spark will be able to quickly build new offerings, and CSG and Singleview will adapt with them.



INCREASING AGILITY

In July 2018, Spark transitioned to Agile, retooling its organizational structure to run in smaller, cross-functional teams. Every “tribe” is made up of members of different departments, so they can bring new products to market faster and provide better customer experiences. The Singleview developers can collaborate with other departments to brainstorm about which products customers want and get new offers to market faster.

Because CSG also uses Agile in development of its billing solutions, the two companies can coordinate on the features and functionality Spark needs built out and incorporate them into the CSG roadmap. Instead of waiting for quarterly releases with a traditional waterfall methodology, Spark benefits from changes to Singleview as soon as they’re ready.

“When we ask for features to go into CSG’s product roadmap, by nature of CSG’s Agile release strategy, we stay closely aligned,” says Fraser. “Companies that aren’t agile may actually hinder us at times because of the way they’re architected.”

The Agile approach has also allowed Spark to get to market much faster at a much lower cost. In the past, if it wanted to upgrade a system, it would have had been a year-long project running into the millions of dollars. But working with a company that has an Agile approach decreased time and cost significantly. And if Spark asks for a new feature or function, CSG can deploy it in a matter of weeks, not months.

THE BUSINESS BENEFITS

Spark initially used Singleview for its broadband and prepaid offerings, but today, all the consumer and corporate wireless and fiber offerings now go through Singleview. And it continues to innovate, recently launching its Unplan for fixed wireless and fiber.

Using Singleview and Intermediate, the plan adjusts in real time as subscribers’ usage changes. If customers are on holiday and using less data, they pay less. If they’re streaming video on Netflix, they pay more. By making a few minor adjustments to Singleview, Spark was able to quickly launch fixed wireless with different activation scenarios. Offering these personalization options can also help increase customer retention and loyalty.

Managing prepaid and postpaid from Singleview helps Spark reduce opex. The convergent charging functionality also means Spark can provide prepaid features to postpaid customers, and vice versa. Adamson gives the example of sending roaming alerts to reduce bill shock, something the company had done for prepaid customers but switched on for postpaid customers.

Good customer experiences, lower costs, getting to market faster—where does Spark go next with CSG? The company has a few ideas.

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CAMPBELL FRASER
TECHNOLOGY TRIBE LEAD

WHAT'S NEXT

Spark is on the journey to 5G. In September 2019, Spark was first in NZ to launch 5G wireless broadband (and used Singleview to build and bill for these offers). In 2020 Spark will launch wider 5G service offerings, as well as continuing its work with Emirates Team New Zealand to have 5G for the America's Cup racing.

Even though the product offerings may evolve, the close collaboration will stay the same.

"We have a strong working relationship and we always have," says Fraser. "Our billing systems and our rating systems are core to our business and our IT state, and we see it as a very important relationship."

ABOUT CSG

For more than 35 years, CSG has simplified the complexity of business, delivering innovative customer engagement solutions that help companies acquire, monetize, engage and retain customers. Operating across more than 120 countries worldwide, CSG manages billions of critical customer interactions annually, and its award-winning suite of software and services allow companies across dozens of industries to tackle their biggest business challenges and thrive in an ever-changing marketplace. CSG is the trusted partner for driving digital innovation for hundreds of leading global brands, including AT&T, Charter Communications, Comcast, DISH, Eastlink, Formula One, Maximus, MTN and Telstra.

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