

# THE NEW I3FORUM BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Philippe Millet  
Chairman, i3forum

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**F**or 8 years now, the i3forum has been a key enabler of wholesalers' migration from TDM to IP and onward to IPX. Through its different working groups, recommendations and events, it was able to unify the carrier world and create the momentum necessary to accelerate this evolution.

Now the i3forum is ready to build on its success, and broaden its scope to incorporate a number of topics identified as key evolutionary streams by carriers, and to become the voice of carriers in the broader telecom industry.

I recently spent some time discussing the rebirth of the i3forum with Philippe Millet, Chairman of the i3forum, to find out exactly what we can expect from this new focus in terms of scope, activities and structure. Very exciting times ahead!



### ACCELERATING THE IP TRANSITION MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

*The i3forum's initial aim was to accelerate the migration to IP and IPX within the carrier community. Can you tell me if that was a success and what is to come in the future?*

The i3forum was formed with the clear purpose to facilitate the transition of carriers from TDM to IP, mostly for voice and similar services. In order to make that happen, we needed to find a way to get the different players to work together as quickly and efficiently as possible.

I feel that we have done a pretty good job and have had both an impact and an influence on the transition and have helped our members and the wholesale industry to migrate to IP faster. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to be done, and we want to build on that going forward.

A lot has been achieved, not only with the deliverables, but more importantly when it comes to the carrier community that we created. We therefore decided to leverage and build on that to start addressing the next challenges, to transform the i3forum and continue facilitating the evolution of the industry.

The first thing we did was to broaden our scope beyond the transition to IP and IPX, which remains of course very high on our list.

We have added an additional dimension by reinforcing our role as 'the voice' of the carrier world with other entities such as the GSMA, service providers, the vendor community and the regulators, as we are doing for example with the fight against fraud with BEREC.

We have excelled at operating with very limited cost, on a shoestring really, and that is great.

But there were some drawbacks to that, as we found that it has really limited our ability to make a bigger impact and have a more significant influence on the industry. We therefore decided to incorporate the i3forum, so that we could get the resources we need to move to the next level and better serve carriers' interest.

*What is the status of the migration to IP and IPX and does the i3forum intend to continue supporting it?*

We recently conducted a comprehensive survey, with the help of HOT TELECOM, during which we polled our members to find out where they were at with their IP and IPX migration.

What we found is that the migration is well under way for most carriers, but that there are still some ways to go before we can say that the job is done.

For example, 44% of the respondents reported that their internal voice platform was fully migrated to IP, but only 6% had completed the migration of their voice wholesale international interconnect network.

In that area, 47% said that between 25-50% of their international wholesale interconnections still had to be migrated to IP before the transition could be deemed as completed.

When it comes to IPX, 64% of the respondents stated that their company sees IPX as a key priority. 36% have succeeded in interconnecting between 25-50% of their customers to their platform, with 14% having connected more than 75%.

We can see that the momentum is definitely picking up, as 15% have seen their voice

traffic transported over IPX grew by over 50% in 2014-2015, while over half benefited from diameter signalling traffic increases of over 200%. Nevertheless, there are still space for improvement, as 86% stated that less than 25% of their voice traffic was transported end-to-end over IPX.

So I can safely say that the migration is happening now. Is it happening in the way we thought it was going to happen? Probably not. It is more of a slow evolution than a big bang.

For example, some may be very advanced with their migration, such as the Tier-1's who already had their IP/IPX interconnections running, but many others are still in the middle of the changeover.

Based on that, we are re-evaluating the support that the industry needs on IPX. But as the main technical and commercial topics have now already been addressed by us and other people, we believe that we now need to work more on promoting what we have done and make sure that more people know what is available and benefit from it.

### SUPPORTING CARRIERS' EVOLUTION

*What will be the main industry challenges the i3forum will tackle in the next year?*

We will continue to support the migration to IP and IPX and the fight against fraud. Above and beyond that, we are still exploring, but the next topics we have identified, as key evolutionary streams for the wholesale industry, include NFV and the whole transformation of the way we run and build the networks.

APIs is a subject we will delve into also. It is not a new topic for the telecom industry in general, but it is for carriers in some way. We will look at how carriers can use APIs to better work together and maybe create new services and business models. That is definitely an interesting question.

The third big topic is IoT. We are still not convinced that there is something in it for carriers, but we feel there might be some challenges or opportunities that we can address and support going forward.

***'36% of our carrier members have succeeded in interconnecting between 25-50% of their customers to their IPX platform. 14% have connected more than 75%.'***





There is one more topic we are toying with, which is certification for IP and IPX. There might be a need for someone, somewhere to help distinguish between pure IPX offers and all the other different flavours. We already have a definition of IPX, so maybe the next natural step would be to initiate the certification project.

But more importantly, we will remain driven by our members, their concerns and the questions they ask themselves. We very much want to create more working groups and look at other topics as they come, as the industry is evolving very rapidly at the moment.

### ENABLING THE FUTURE I3FORUM 2.0

*Can you explain how the i3forum is evolving, its new structure, new role and objectives?*

As stated earlier, we are going through a big transformation: new scope, and new structure. We will now be incorporated and will have a proper board and bylaws, which will make things a bit more formal. This should help us bring new members on board and operate more professionally.

We are now also broadening the membership to extend it to include vendors, OTT, service providers, consultants and analysts. However, we still want the carriers to remain in control, while we enable all the new members to participate.

To date, we have succeeded in getting almost 25 new companies to commit to joining the new organisation.

In addition, we will be joining forces with the Open Visual Communications Consortium

(OVCC). Through this merger, we are uniting two different worlds: wholesale and enterprise. These are often two sides of the house that do not talk to each other, but we feel the lines are blurring and we are aiming to support this evolution and bridge these two worlds.

We hope to capitalize on our wholesale and their enterprise knowledge and expertise and collaborate to define new evolved applications and services that will be part of our future.

From there, our new mission includes 3 key roles: The first is to continue gathering information and helping everyone in the industry better understand what is going on and what is coming.

Our second role will be to continue putting together recommendations that work, that are practical and that will help each carrier to make their own educated decisions.

Finally, we will focus on any other activities that will accelerate the transition to new ecosystems. This is broader than new technologies, as it also covers the operational, service and the business model aspects.

*To conclude our discussion, do you have an opinion on the future of the wholesale industry and its current evolution?*

It is clear, there is a future. Carriers are managing the core network of international telecoms and that will always be needed. Without the core network, nothing can happen. Everything needs interconnection, as everyone depends and relies on each other. I don't see how that can go away.

Most probably the business opportunities will

be different going forward, as the landscape is changing, particularly for voice, and so the business models will likely change, but the industry will continue to exist if in a different form.

So let's get this industry organized. It is unique and needs a unique organization to help it move forward and bring people together. We will make sure that the i3forum is that organization!

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Isabelle Paradis  
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*Isabelle has worked for 22 years in the telecoms industry. Her personal expertise ranges from Int'l Wholesale through to Business Strategy, and Marketing, along with extensive research and global consulting experience.*

*She has written numerous articles and spoken at many conferences on the challenges of international telecoms evolution in an all-IP world, a subject close to her heart.*