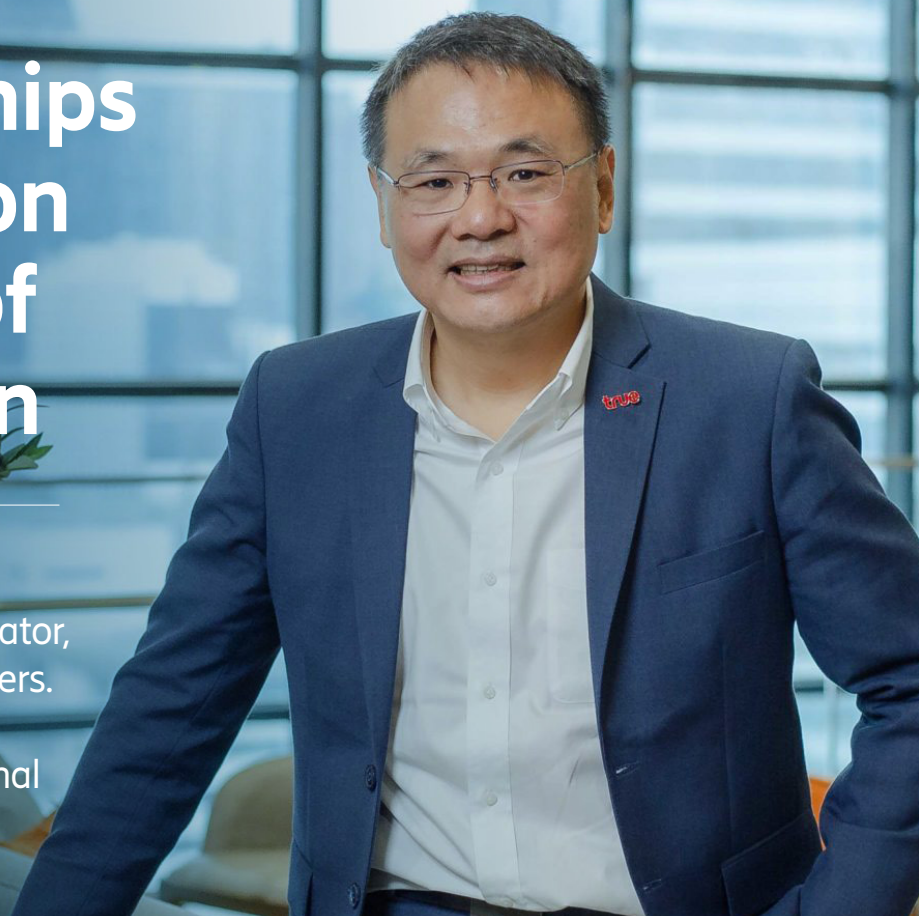


True partnerships and automation are the heart of transformation

Prathet Tankuranun is CTO of True Corporation, Thailand's biggest operator, serving more than 50 million customers. Automation and partnerships are at the core of his network and operational transformations.



True Corporation was formed by the merger of True Corporation with DTAC in March 2023. Prathet Tankuranun, its CTO, says his biggest immediate priority is consolidating the networks and spectrum, while accelerating digital transformation. This includes the Single Grid initiative announced in September 2024 to decommission redundant towers and optimise how it uses spectrum through aggregation. The goal is to improve coverage and customers' experience.

"This is a great opportunity for us to revise a lot of the things we've been doing," Tankuranun says. The plan is to combine the best from both sides, which includes Ericsson's long-standing role as operations partner for the network transformation journey.

Moving forward, "Ericsson can bring in global knowledge to help us transform our network operation into this new era. That is the

opportunity we're looking for," Tankuranun states. He highlights the Swedish vendor's expertise in helping True Corporation fine tune processes to integrate the two organisations' assets, like network analysis.

Insights from such analysis show, for example, where greater redundancy is required in the network and to address repetitive cases with problem management and preventive maintenance. Most especially, though, "We are working with Ericsson to transform and monetise our network," Tankuranun says.

Network and operations

He continues, "We want to simplify how we do things and reduce costs. For example, the number of alarms and tickets generated across the infrastructure is still very high". Tankuranun

adds that best practices regarding processes and tools makes "alarm consolidation a fairly simple thing" and improves how incidents are handled.

"Consolidating towers and combining two core networks into one means combining operations, so automating operational processes is very important as well," he says.

What is stopping more automation?

There is a perception in the industry that telcos globally are 'stuck' at Level 2 of TM Forum's autonomous networks model. He agrees, saying that is how he would describe the combined True Corporation's level, on a par with most operators. Tankuranun adds, "The drive towards the higher levels needs to be strategic, set by the management and leadership of companies."

He explains that the two most important aspects of automation are speed and scale, and sees little point in reinventing the wheel: "I would rather we seek the expertise or partnership from someone who had been doing what we want to do in many operations and many markets, and form a strategic partnership like we have with [Ericsson]. Then we could...hit the ground running, rather than start by building, writing code and everything ourselves."

He continues, "We have the model. We have engines that work everywhere else and we can replicate what they have. That would be faster, easier, and we could achieve good results without having to spend the time. No trial, no errors. That is the second part of my approach to automation – selecting the right partner."

Other factors

Are budget or the making the business case for automation barriers to its implementation? "These are good questions," Tankuranun says. "The investment in [AI and automation technologies] could be prohibitive if you're not doing it right. What we're saying is you'd probably be better off finding a partner. Then you don't have to own everything, but you enjoy the benefits; the good things that come out of it without having to invest too much."

Benefits so far

What benefits has automation delivered to True Corporation so far? Tankuranun says parts of his organisation has experience in "zero-touch operations where a percentage of tickets are handled by machines without human interactions. It works by, 'If it is like this, then that happens', or 'If these three things combine', the machine knows exactly what to do."

Some operations have been streamlined through partnerships where appropriate and consolidation has played a big part too. Previously separate teams looked after different "buckets" with one bucket for the radio portion of the network, another looking after the core, yet another overseeing the transport part and so on. Now the buckets have been consolidated and a unified team works across all the network domains.

He says, "That was what we have achieved in terms of cost reduction, streamlining processes and [improving the] quality of the network. We are pretty good at reducing mean time to repair because anything that could be was



automated. Anything that could be repaired without having to go to the site or cabinets was done by machines."

Having gained this expertise, Tankuranun says that now, "by pushing hard", the target is bring True Corporation up to Level 3 right across the board in 2025.

Immediate opportunities

Are there other areas that operators could automate to improve their return on investment? Tankuranun says that while the network "is obviously the big part of where the benefit is", operators could benefit from expanding automation into customer service and "even some internal kinds of networks like Finance".

For example, "We applied automation principles tens of thousands of cell sites to massively reduce the amount of time and effort required to manage this – to renew, read and pay for the lease, obtain receipts etc.," he says, but feels this is just the tip of the iceberg.

"If the company applies the same thinking to all repetitive tasks it would be very beneficial.

Often you only need to address 20% of issues to get 80% of the benefits. The [other 20% of benefits] will be much more advanced, beyond financial savings. You might get a streamlined process or get better SLAs [service level agreements] and KPIs [key performance indicators] and everything if you can apply AI."

The extra mile for customers

Tankuranun adds, "Another thing we are doing [concerns] fixed broadband. Customers have routers in their houses that provide Wi-Fi coverage. We have created a small piece of code to monitor the condition of the router and the Wi-Fi environment, and send us feedback."

Although typically poor Wi-Fi coverage within households and buildings is nothing to do with operators' networks, invariably the customer blames them and complains. It might be down to the building's construction or a neighbour causing interference on a channel used by a router. Tankuranun concludes, "The AI could help to identify and separate poor customers experience into different possible root causes and suggest solution to each of them."