The challenges of setting up a new IXP: feedback from France-IX

Franck Simon

MENOG12@Dubai
The story behind

- In 2009, the peering market in Paris was fragmented: around 10 existing IXPs with various business models.
- One IXP after the other came to live.
- None tried to set interconnections to gather and increase the traffic.
- French operators were peering abroad on wider and more efficient IXPs.
- A survey and a workgroup called Phoenix fostered the change.
- The survey showed that the market was longing for one big federative IXP.

That’s when the idea of France-IX was born
A challenging start

• But it wasn’t an easy road.

• Among the challenges overcome:

  ⇒ Convince the first partners to help out: datacenters providing free racks for 3 years, operators supplying dark fibers between the POPs.
  ⇒ Deploy a solid infrastructure without cash on day-one.
  ⇒ Conduce people to believe and to connect (pilot phase).
  ⇒ Have a legal structure set off.
  ⇒ Deliver the quality of services expected (and promised).

• Now more than 180 members are connected, both French and foreign parties
5 tips to share

1/ Ask yourself the right questions before engaging the project

2/ Get support

3/ Always keep in mind it’s a business

4/ Be and remain independent and neutral

5/ Publicize your services
Is the market ready for it?

• Knowing your market is prior to anything:
  ‘What would my customers want, when, where and how?’
You have the answers. Then start planning.

• France-IX was designed and formed upon the results of a market survey and we knew:
  ⇒ What the potential members wanted
  ⇒ If they were ready to pay for the services
  ⇒ Whether they were firmly interested in getting connected soon or not

Advice #1: Ask yourself the right questions before moving on
How to have a working infrastructure without cash?

• In our case, the founding members:
  ⇒ Provided human resources for the first 2 years + donated equipment
  ⇒ Paid the invoices for 1 whole year while France-IX was saving up all the recurring costs
  ⇒ Were paid back once the organisation was strong enough (2\textsuperscript{nd} year)
  ⇒ Attended weekly board meetings over the phone (and still do!)
  ⇒ Helped establishing partnership with third parties

• This investment from the founding members gave legitimacy to the project because a) they were well-known actors b) putting their names and reputation on the line.

Advice #2  Seek and get the support you need
How to make sure the IXP will last?

• Whether your IXP aims to be a non-lucrative association or a mixed structure with shareholders, you have to make money to run on the long term.  
  ALL FREE MODELS HAD TO STOP IN FRANCE

• We strongly believe in the paid model which enables you to stay independent and not to rely on external helps like public funding. So we implemented a pricing with equal conditions for each and every member.

• At the end of the day, your IXP will survive and then thrive if you treat it like any other commercial entity:
  ⇒ Satisfy your members: they should agree to pay such a price for such quality
  ⇒ Motivate your staff with enthusiastic projects and a career plan
  ⇒ Stay aligned with your environment: competition, suppliers, regulation bodies....

Advice #3: Always keep in mind it’s a business
How to STILL make sure the IXP will last?

• We often hear that neutrality is a key to success. In the IXP sector, it is a common truth.

• Neutrality means various interests force against each other to find an equilibrium.

• Our administration board consists of datacenters, operators and CDN. They are elected for 3 years. The board is renewed every year by a third.

• Every member has an equal vote inside the association. The association owns entirely the commercial entity.

Advice #4: Be and remain independent & neutral
How to keep on expanding?

• You can set the best IXPs ever possible, without communication, the business won’t take off.

• France-IX set up a reseller program (cf. presentation done during Euro-IX 21)

• Communication is part of France-IX’s DNA:
  ⇒ Communication through the events = get known
  ⇒ Public relations = get known and ensure they still speak about you
  ⇒ Website = corporate image
  ⇒ Newsletters, mailing lists and social networks = deliver content and stay in touch with the members

• It’s a steady and perpetual process

Advice #5: Publicize your services
Conclusion

• In less than 3 years, France-IX managed to connect over 180 parties (including Middle-East operators such as Etisalat and Hotnet) to its infrastructure and to exceed 150 Gbps of traffic

• France-IX concluded 5 partnerships with other regional, national and international IXPs

• While there was a gap to be filled on the French market, France-IX’s success is not entirely due to this fact.

• France-IX’s team has worked hard to develop the adequate services, attract and build the community and be independent.

• Every market is different and nobody holds the truth but there’s a generic trend and a common sense to follow.

• France-IX’s team is here to meet you and discuss this topic furthermore during breaks and socials.
Questions?

Thank you for your attention

Franck SIMON
fsimon@franceix.net
info@franceix.net
+33 (0)1 70 61 9771