

Gain Unique Insight into Your Customers Business - From an Unlikely Source

When your customers want to know more about what's going on inside their business, they could do worse than study their telephone bill. This article examines how detailed analysis of analysis of telecommunications activity can help you to identify and solve all sorts of management issues – far beyond simply managing your customer's tariffs.

Access to Insider Information

How many organisations would like to be able to answer the following questions?

1. Can you be sure that your 'best' clients are actually the most profitable ones?
2. Can you find out if home-working employees are doing the job you pay them to?
3. Do you know if you're paying too much per month to your IT support provider?
4. How can I complete a total technology refresh without additional budget?

All these questions could be answered by simply analysing your customer's telecoms billing data in the right way. But complex businesses have numerous different bills coming in across the organisation, often from multiple suppliers (BT, Cable & Wireless, O2, Vodafone etc.) covering multiple services. And in this age of rapidly developing technologies like 3G and Voice over IP (VoIP) it is not always possible to compare like with like.

Even the thought of trying to make sense of all the data available is a daunting prospect. Over-worked IT or finance teams within larger corporate businesses generally don't have the time or expertise to regularly break down and check their telecoms spend and usage. But if there is a significant opportunity of increasing value and profit for your customers by making better use of the information contained within their billing data – then it's worth finding out if there's a straightforward and cost-effective way to achieve this.

Increasingly, corporate customers are looking to their billing suppliers to provide them with insight into their telecoms management and how they can make cost savings. This value added service can help you to distinguish your services portfolio from your competitors, not only helping to retain customers but attract new ones.

Where do you Begin?

With something that seems so complex at first glance, knowing how to take the first step is often the hardest part for larger organisations. There's bound to be a time element involved when initiating a project of this type – and it's unlikely that your customers will have the resource to hand. By being proactive in offering this type of value added service, you can differentiate your business from the next as your customers are likely to be looking to their suppliers who they consider to have the knowledge and experience to be tasked with such a project.

Questions you can ask your customers include:

- Are you receiving telecoms billing and usage data in the most practical format?
- Do you have a number of different providers which have not been consolidated, possibly as a result of acquisitions?
- Does your finance team wade through heaps of paper from different departments, when your telecoms provider could supply a single combined bill – broken down by whatever specification you require – in an electronic format?

By undertaking some formal analysis on their telecoms bills, your customers will be in a better position to understand how their business functions and where improvements in costs and staff efficiency can be made.

The following scenarios, based on actual business experience, illustrate a range of ways in which billing data could provide vital management information for customers, over and above the usual "what do we spend - and with whom?".

Can your customers be sure that their 'best' clients are actually the most profitable ones?

A leading law firm with 25 partners and 150 staff knew which clients were their 'best customers' in terms of fees billed, but it was impossible to understand which ones were actually generating the most profit, as some clients were far more labour-intensive than others.

By attaching a simple Data Capture Device to their telephone system, which captured real-time information on all inbound and outbound calling activity, they were able to determine that the right charges were being made to the right clients - and in turn link this back to the relevant partners. But more importantly, by building up a complete picture of the time which partners and administrative staff spent on the phone, they could identify the unseen costs – and put a very different perspective on some clients' 'profitability'.

The information gained enabled them to allocate additional resource to some clients, but also justifiably increase monthly management fees where appropriate - in line with the costs involved in managing the more labour-intensive ones.

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Managing Home-workers

Organisations which manage large teams of home working telemarketers can experience many problems. It is an administrative nightmare to deal with numerous expenses claims and multiple telephone bills - plus it can be difficult to ensure that all agents are working their contracted hours and not 'giving up' once they have reached their daily targets. These organisations need to identify where the information being received from agents is inaccurate, either through inefficiency or an actual intent to defraud.

A charity in this position implemented a system where all calls could be routed via their chosen telecoms provider, by keying in a three digit prefix before dialling. This immediately removed the administrative issue of dealing with multiple bills and expense claims - and also reduced the number of personal calls, as the process of keying in a prefix number became harder to justify for agents who were not habitually dishonest.

The consolidated data could then be analysed to identify areas of poor performance or failure to meet targets. For example, if agents should have been on the phone for 45 minutes out of every 60, it became easier to see where this had not occurred. Likewise, agents who appeared to make many short calls, where they obviously did not have time to complete a proper conversation, could also be identified.

Monitoring Outsourced Services

High-street retailers with hundreds of outlets throughout the UK often use an external IT support provider to solve IT queries. In this example, Head Office could not understand why their support company was charging such a high monthly fee, when many branches seemed to rarely use their services.

Having consolidated billing data into a single database and with appropriate analysis tools, analysis was completed on the call traffic across all UK branches. The business was able to define search criteria, with the results being presented on a UK map showing geographic areas relevant to their branch structure.

The new system enabled them to identify unusual calling patterns, such as stores who spent the most, those who made unnecessary international calls, or those who made a lot of out-of-hours calls to the same number. But in addition, they discovered that certain branches were making far more calls to the company's IT support provider than was considered necessary. This was resolved within a few months by providing additional training which reduced the calls to the outsourced helpdesk and consequently the support costs incurred.

Implementing a technology refresh with no budget

An IT department is a vital service provider to the rest of a business; however more often than not it is seen as an overhead or cost centre - this often makes it difficult for these departments to secure budget increases to fund technology or network changes. But it is possible to turn this department into a service provider that can add far greater value to the business as a whole.

This can be illustrated by considering how a leading construction and infrastructure development organisation has managed to achieve just that. Having been created as a business entity by the merging, de-merging and general restructuring of various subsidiaries and divisions, the IT department saw an opportunity to fund a technology refresh by overhauling the way the business managed telecommunications expenditure.

Initially they assessed the existing spend of the overall business and identified exactly how much and on what tariffs the various divisions were currently being billed for services by each provider. They then consolidated their telecoms spend and billing with each of their core suppliers and centralised all costs into the IT department. With central visibility of costs they embarked on a rigorous cost reduction and rationalisation project to drive down costs. At the same time the IT department introduced their own internal branded re-billing service and recharged each unit on the same terms and prices that the unit had previously paid to suppliers.

By reducing costs, but recharging budget holders on identical terms to previously, the IT department were able to centralise the entire cost savings, which provided the budget to fund an entire network upgrade, where no previous budget existed.

And Finally

In summary, it is possible to achieve a great deal of insight into how an organisation functions by using the data available from communications. You can help your customers to create budget without spending more money, increase staff efficiency, improve the management various suppliers and identify opportunities for cost savings across many areas.

By helping your customers to work just a little smarter and apply some lateral thinking, who knows what unique insight you could help them gain into their business - and from such an unlikely source?

If you would like to learn how you can help your larger corporate clients to gain control of their telecoms issues then please contact AKJ on 01634 673 800 or visit our online Knowledge Centre at www.telcoinfo.co.uk.