



Call Accounting in the Age of Wireless

Call accounting is a best practice for wireline usage management, and a cornerstone of telecom expense management (TEM). Call accounting provides the visibility that organizations need to control wireline usage and spend.

As organizations shift ever-greater portions of their telecom spend into wireless infrastructure and services, the need to account for wireless usage becomes critical for an effective TEM program. While wireless call accounting can't be accomplished by pulling CDR off a switch, there are other ways to capture essentially the same information – and achieve the same cost-saving objectives.

The benefits of call accounting

By providing visibility into the telecom network, call accounting helps you reduce telecom expenses, improve productivity, and gain control over your telecom usage in a number of ways.

- **Encourage responsible use** – When call accounting is introduced into an organization, telecom use tends to drop – simply because users are made more aware of their telecom habits and what they cost the organization. Call accounting encourages responsible use of telecom resources and reduces telecom spend, a good thing under any circumstances, and especially in these economic times.
- **Optimize network resources** – Call accounting reports and dashboards lets you track your telecom activity against available capacity, so you can make sure you have the right capacity to handle peak volume. If trunk usage reports show that you have more capacity than necessary, you can reduce costs by eliminating unused trunks. Call accounting gives you the hard data you need to “right size” your network and maximize the value of your telecom investment and services.
- **Cost calls and allocate charges** – Call accounting solutions allow you to cost calls based on rate tables available from carriers. This provides you with a highly accurate estimate of your usage charges weeks before you receive carrier invoices. When this capability is combined with organizational data, including cost centers and employees associated with each extension, usages charges can be quickly and easily allocated to responsible entities, improving accountability and cost control. It also allows you to bill clients for phone consultations or services by adding surcharges or fees to phone calls associated with a specific phone number or account code.
- **Boost customer satisfaction** – Call accounting can help you maintain high levels of customer satisfaction and retention by ensuring that customer calls are handled promptly and efficiently. Call accounting will help you identify problems such as insufficient call capacity at peak periods, which could result in long call queues. Such problems can often be resolved by adding lines, focusing on efficient call handling, and other solutions to improve customer service. Call accounting also provides the means of measuring the effectiveness of these solutions.
- **Monitor and improve employee productivity and marketing ROI** – Call accounting lets you see the correlation between the success of your sales and marketing efforts and related call activity. It can help you identify the most and least effective callers, teams, and telemarketing programs, so that you can make adjustments to boost productivity and efficiency. Call accounting can also help you calculate the true cost and ROI of telesales efforts, and of marketing campaigns that direct inquiries to a dedicated extension. It gives you hard data to make a case for the effectiveness of your sales and marketing programs.

- **Crack down on network abuse, security threats, and harassing calls** – Call accounting software can help you identify and quickly respond to unusual or unauthorized calling activity. Calls to or from specific numbers, excessively long or frequent calls, international calls, and other types of network abuse can be detected automatically and trigger email alerts. Early detection and notification allow you to take quick action and reduce the impact and cost of fraud and misuse. Call accounting can also enable you to identify the source of threatening or offensive calls, so that you can take prompt, appropriate action.

Call accounting for wireless

With the explosive growth of wireless networks in many organizations, fewer calls are going through the switch. Visibility into this calling activity, and all the benefits such visibility can provide, cannot be provided by traditional call accounting solutions.

Fortunately, there are other ways to realize call accounting benefits for wireless. These rely heavily on the latest invoice management processes and technology, in conjunction with other components of telecom expense management (TEM).

Electronic invoice processing

Wireless service invoices provide usage information that is similar to that provided by CDR data for wireline activity. While this information is not provided in real time, it is in other respects a viable source of visibility into, and control over, wireless usage and spend.

Using this information effectively poses a number of unique challenges. The wireless calling activity must be gleaned from complex carrier invoices, which can run to hundreds of pages or more. This can be a daunting and expensive proposition if undertaken manually. Invoice management solutions that accept wireless invoices in electronic form and process them automatically can cut this task down to size.

Leading call accounting solutions let you generate wireless usage reports that show how much individuals are using their wireless features (as compared to plan allowances) and the amount of overage charges. Some also provide wireless usage exception reports that compare the latest invoice with wireless category usage/charges and highlight exceptions.

Wireless usage information captured from invoices can help organizations realize many of the benefits of call accounting discussed in the previous section. Additional benefits of invoice management include lower processing costs and a reduction in late payment penalties. But this is only a small part of the total savings that invoice management – and TEM – can provide.

The gateway to telecom expense management

Many organizations, initially interested in invoice management merely as a way to gain visibility into wireless, have opted for a broader, centralized TEM solution instead. TEM solutions typically enable best practices and for wireless and wireline usage, invoice, inventory, sourcing, ordering and provisioning, and dispute management. The implementation of multiple management capabilities, beyond wireless invoice management alone, has a synergistic impact on cost reduction and productivity improvement.

While invoices provide information necessary for wireless call accounting, invoice validation requires an integrated inventory management system. The combination of invoice and inventory management opens the door to a range of capabilities, including:

- **Change management** – Managing moves, adds, changes, activations, and deactivation is an inherent capability of an effective inventory management system. Centralization of this process reduces the cost and inefficiency of ad hoc, decentralized methods of wireless ordering and



provisioning, which plague many distributed organizations that do not have a TEM solution in place.

- **Contract management** – TEM solutions that include invoice management capabilities allow invoices to be validated against contract terms and rates, improving the accuracy of validation and reducing the likelihood that you will pay more than you owe for services used. The usage information collected by your TEM system, in addition to vendor performance data, provides the data you need to negotiate the most favorable contracts with your wireless service providers.
- **Dispute management** – An automated invoice validation process will generate exceptions that may warrant dispute. Armed with accurate invoice, inventory, and MACD information, and contract information, organizations are far more successful in winning disputes against carriers.
- **Workflow automation** – Workflow automation multiplies the value of a TEM solution. For example, an online wireless procurement system, accessible to employees through a secure Web portal, can enhance productivity, enforce process and policy compliance, and improve cost accountability. Online procurement systems can present users with customized catalog selections and route their requests to appropriate individuals for review and approval. The same self-service processes can provide similar benefits for MACD, helpdesk, and other service requests.
- **Plan and policy management** – Management of service plan selection and policy design are critical to wireless expense management and should be part of any comprehensive TEM solution. Your mobile users must be made aware of their rights and responsibilities with regard to plan compliance and appropriate use of their wireless devices and services.

The heart of TEM

Telecom management began with call accounting and has evolved into the comprehensive TEM solutions available today. Call accounting, and the usage data it provides, is still at the heart of TEM. This is true for wireless and wireline alike; however differently usage is measured.

Call accounting remains an effective stand-alone solution for managing wireline usage. But for organizations that want to manage their wireless costs, a comprehensive TEM system may be the most cost-effective solution. TEM offers a comprehensive, life-cycle approach that provides the visibility and control necessary to reduce both wireline and wireless costs.

With the rise of wireless and the evolution of unified communications, call accounting may be redefined in a way that applies equally well to both wireline and wireless. In any case, and by any definition, it's part of usage management – and TEM – that's here to stay.

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Veramark is a leading provider of scalable, integrated enterprise solutions for telecom and IT expense and performance management. Veramark solutions provide visibility into operational expenses and generate actionable business intelligence to help organizations reduce spend and optimize business processes. Veramark solutions, which include software and services for Telecom Expense Management (TEM) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), enable best practices for managing complex unified communications networks on a global scale. For more information, visit www.veramark.com.