Mobile Service Management Requires Ongoing Attention

Mobile service management requires time and discipline, typically resulting in substantial savings. Here's how to get started.

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Most organizations find managing mobile services and equipment to be a challenge. But without ongoing attention, the costs frequently spiral out of control.

Here's how to develop an organization's mobile inventory and identify usage patterns, then use the data to optimize mobile expense.

First: Collect the Data on Your Organization's Mobile Services and Equipment

The initial data collection enables you to evaluate the completeness of the information you have on hand or can get. If your organization is like most, there will be some details readily available and others that will be harder to obtain. Once you have the needed data, it's important to have a process in place to keep it current. This process is ideally developed and agreed upon before an expense optimization can begin since mobile services and equipment typically change often.

What mobile services and equipment does your organization have?

Start with an inventory. You can request an inventory list in the form of an Excel spreadsheet from your mobile service provider representative. Here's what it should include:

- Each mobile telephone number
- Status of the mobile telephone number (active, suspended, or disconnect underway)
- The name of the mobile user (It's your responsibility to keep this information up-to-date. If you reassign a number and the associated mobile device to another user, the mobile provider will have no way of knowing this unless there is a process in place for notification and updating the records)
- The mobile plan name (mobile service providers typically have multiple plans—some new, some old and "grandfathered"). In some cases, a single mobile line can have more than one plan. Different mobile providers use different terminology for the same type of plan, so if you use more than one mobile service provider, it's important to understand the plan offerings of each and the corresponding terminology.
- How many mobile lines is the organization paying for each month, and what are the total monthly charges for each line?
- And how do the total charges on each line break down into component charges?
- How many mobile devices (usually smartphones) does the organization have, and how is it paying for them?
- Is the organization using or paying for "data only" devices?

You may be paying for lines that have not been used for voice, data, or texting in recent months. If the line is associated with a user, contact them to ask if they're using the device on a Wi-Fi network on-premises, which would result in looking like the line is not being used. If this isn't the case, likely, the line is not needed. It's common to find that many mobile devices do not have an associated username as this detail needs to be maintained by your organization and often is not. To fill in incomplete data, send an email to each mobile corporate user asking them for their mobile number.

Next, for those lines still unidentified, text all mobile numbers without an associated name and ask the user to identify themselves, or the service on the line will be interrupted. Any unclaimed lines can be suspended, and if no one is heard from after that, the line can be disconnected. Managing usernames can be tricky. For example, some people use nicknames, and some may change their names after marriage.

Unlike smartphones, data-only devices often end up in a drawer or are otherwise misplaced if not used regularly. Since smartphones can also act as a hotspot for internet access (just like a data-only device), unless you're using and keeping track of the data-only devices for a specific purpose, you may want to consider eliminating them.

- What service plans are the organization using – unlimited, pooled, or basic?
- And how much is spent on monthly service?
- Is the spend consistent or variable?
- Is the organization paying for special features above and beyond the cost of the plans?

Each mobile service provider offers plans in different ways and the plan offerings change regularly. Knowing your usage will enable the analysis of alternative plans. You may enlist the help of your mobile service provider, or you may use the services of an independent consultant. Many organizations buy all users unlimited plans, but in some cases, this is excessive since their usage is low. In some cases, very high usage will result in throttling of speed for the data. Multiple mobile lines can be part of a usage pool that all members of the pool draw from.

As mentioned, if a line is determined to be unnecessary and cannot be reassigned to another user, you may want to disconnect it. This may generate an early termination fee. Some analysis is needed to see if it will cost less to pay the early termination fee than to keep the line until the contract runs out. Most mobile line contracts are for two years.

What is your organization's actual usage for voice, data and messaging/texting?
In order to determine the usage trends, get at least six months of data including instances of overages.

- Monthly usage for voice calls
- Monthly usage for data
- Monthly usage for messaging (texting)
- Monthly charge for any special features

Once you have this data, you can decide on what basis you will optimize your mobile plans. You may want to take an average of six months, but if usage is steadily increasing, you may want to optimize for current or anticipated volume. Optimization requires knowledge, skills, and typically computer-based tools which will provide alternatives and anticipated savings for each. As mentioned above, your service provider can help you with this, but they are not incentivized to lower your spending with them.

Next: Take Action
Suspend Mobile Lines
During the data collection, you will identify mobile lines that appear unused and not needed.

Suspend Those Lines for Immediate Savings While You Are Still Investigating Whether They Are Needed
Both AT&T and Verizon allow you to suspend a mobile line and stop billing for two three-month periods each year. For lines where you cannot identify the user or where zero use has been confirmed, suspension is the logical next step. If users come forward once their lines are suspended, the lines can be quickly reactivated.

Optimize Plans
Not only do plans change frequently, but users' usage patterns can change as well. You need to continually revisit user patterns and make changes to your plans accordingly. Regular optimizations can help you to stay on top of this and not pay for unneeded services.
The optimization will show which mobile lines require plan changes. You will need to place orders with your service provider to make the changes and follow up to be sure they are made. This can take one to two billing cycles. Additional analysis will show the savings resulting from the analysis.

Develop a Method of Keeping Mobile Records Up to Date Going Forward
For a smaller organization, you may assign someone to do this manually. But for large companies with thousands of mobile lines, you may wish to develop a method to match up the mobile usernames with employee records and employment status. This way if someone leaves your organization, their mobile number will be immediately flagged and can be suspended or reassigned. There are mobile management systems available for large organizations, usually hosted systems sold as software as a service (SaaS).

Keep Up to Date on Alternatives for Mobile Device Costs
There are several different approaches to this which may vary depending upon your mobile service provider. You can pay for the device in total upfront or use a monthly payment plan, which may result in you owning the device, or more likely, being able to exchange it for a more up-to-date device at the end of a two-year contract. Some organizations are buying their mobile devices frc

Schedule Quarterly Meetings With Your Mobile Communications Service Providers

Develop a rapport with your mobile service provider sales team or confirm your consultant is doing it for you. This is the only way to ensure that you are staying up to date on new plans and special promotions that come along often.

*Jane is writing on behalf of the **SCTC (http://www.sctcconsultants.org)**, a premier professional organization for independent consultants. SCTC consultant members are leaders in the industry, able to provide best of breed professional services in a wide array of technologies. Every consultant member commits annually to a strict Code of Ethics, ensuring they work for the client benefit only and do not receive financial compensation from vendors and service providers.*

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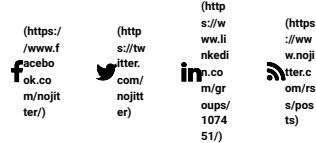
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