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Billing is an expensive problem in the wireless business. It requires expensive IT systems, complex processes, and skilled engineers to execute. Yet, many users struggle to understand their bills and service costs. This generates significant contact center call volume, which is expensive to field and support. The level of frustration customers feel as a result of billing confusion or disagreement drives customer churn between carriers.

For wireless providers, customer confusion translates into massive costs. Confusion is not the result of a conspiracy to treat customers badly. It is a manifestation of the extreme technical and organizational complexities wireless providers all face.

Having some common rules for displaying information could help to make sense of things. Whatever common information is provided, it should help consumers to validate their bills, understand the cost and value of their services, and give them the means to better compare costs month to month, and perhaps carrier to carrier.

Validas' business focuses on analyzing, auditing, and simplifying wireless bills for consumers, businesses, and governments. Based on first hand experience, we can suggest five simple ways to improve wireless bills that should be evaluated if an effort is made to provide some billing commonality across the wireless industry.

Five Suggestions for Improving Wireless Bills

1. Describe all subscription, usage, and equipment charges in plain language.
2. Calculate and display per-service costs based on customers' actual usage (including carrier surcharges in cost calculation).
3. Display clearly the number of included, used, overage and unused minutes, messages, and megabytes for each user each month.
4. Break out all third party charges, describe them in plain language, and provide contact information.
5. Improve online bill audit tools on par with online bill payment tools.

Any moves that can be made to reduce confusion and avoid heated calls to contact centers would improve the service experience for consumers and reduce costs for service providers. That entire cost equation should be kept in mind in the process of any rulemaking.

Changing invoice formats and processes does have a cost consequence for wireless providers. It is not a simple undertaking. Any rulemaking on wireless bill formatting ought to focus on a scope that is feasible and results-driven so that wireless providers can implement it effectively, expediently, and with little disruption for either wireless customers or providers.

Best regards,

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