

# *Billing Systems: Is The Channel Getting What It Needs?*

## Introduction

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With the channels' requirements for their billing platforms continually becoming more and more complex Lifecycle decided to fund a telephone survey to understand more about the market and how as a company we can enhance our partnerships and presence in the marketplace. We wanted to know directly from the channel what it is about their current solution that enables them and empowers them. However, we found that many resellers found themselves to be more constrained than supported.

A telephone survey was conducted by an independent consultant on our behalf over a three week period in October 2007. The survey was done on a random selection of UK based telephony resellers and was split into 3 sections:

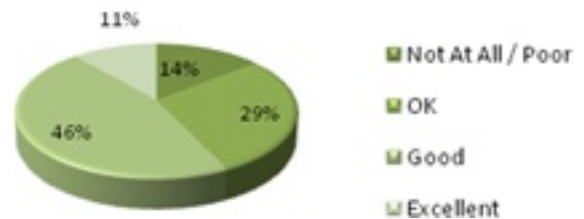
- Basic functionality
- Additional functionality
- Complex functionality



## Basic Functionality

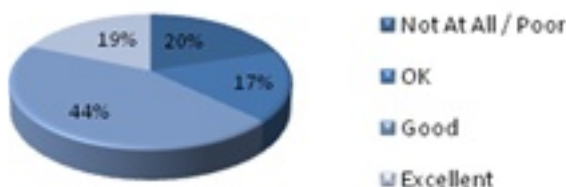
As expected, the majority of the systems used by the channel in the survey fulfil the basic requirements of a billing system. So, areas such as customer acquisition, call / line item charges and bill production all seem to have satisfactory ratings. However with 43% of the resellers surveyed finding it difficult to get support in learning how to use their system, it could be suggested that there is room for improvement in other areas of what one would call basic services. Support and user training, especially with the ease of setting up web based training in this day and age, should by now have helped resolve the issue of learning how to best utilise the system.

### Learning to use the system

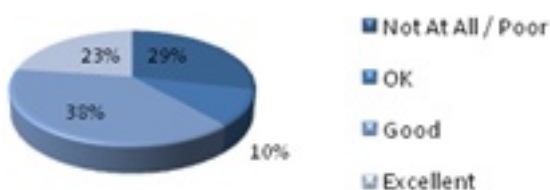


## Additional Functionality

### Billing WLR services



### Automating the setting up of telephony services (like CPS, WLR etc)



With additional functionality such as bill automation, reporting, services such as WLR and ad hoc bill runs, some interesting findings are provided by the survey. For example, over a fifth of systems used do not support WLR and over a fifth of the systems used do not support automated provisioning. Generally, the results show that as soon as something other than basic billing functions are required, such as ad-hoc or one off bill runs many resellers seem to have systems that do not support their requirements. Even something as fundamental as timely management reporting is a requirement that is not always met by existing systems. This may mean manual intervention is taking place for some key activities. If this is so, can the reseller be confident in the accuracy of their data?

## Complex Functionality

When we move into the areas of more complex functionality, four key areas were looked at within this section.

**Web Invoicing** – With 50% of resellers stating that their current system either does this poorly or not at all, there is a clear indication that billing systems have not caught up with technology.

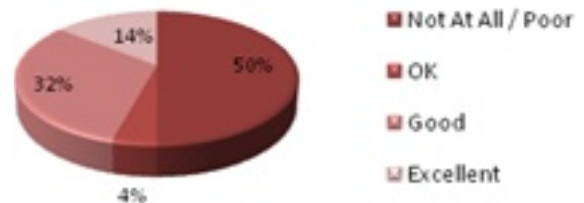
**Managing Collections** – Again, nearly half of the resellers surveyed reported that their system either does this poorly or not at all. Given the importance of revenue collection, it does raise the question about how well billing systems support complete workflow for the channel.

**Fraud and Service Issue Identification** is another key area which is not being supported by all billing solutions on the market. 46% of those surveyed reported that this functionality was either not currently available to them or done poorly.

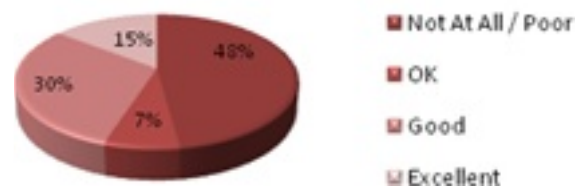
**Providing Information Required to Maintain Regulatory Compliance** – With the TMBS requirements currently going through a period of change to become even more stringent, it was surprising to find that over 60% of those surveyed felt that their current billing system did not give them sufficient information to ensure that they were maintaining compliance.

Michele Gibson from the British Standards Institution said *“Billing bureaus have a huge responsibility and need to be more proactive with their resellers in cleansing and maintaining the quality of data flowing through their organisations to the end user.”*

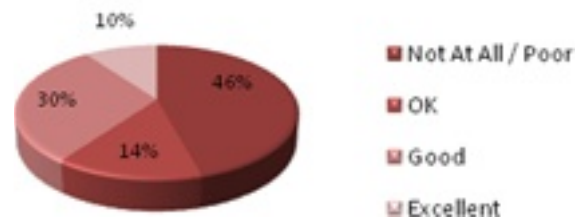
### Pushing Invoices to the Web for your customers



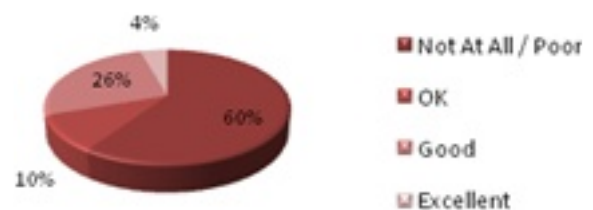
### Managing Collections once invoices have been sent out



### Helping you identify Fraud and/or service issues



### Providing the information required to maintain regulatory compliance



*“Billing bureaus have a huge responsibility and need to be more proactive with their resellers in cleansing and maintaining the quality of data flowing through their organisations to the end user.”*

## Conclusions

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Despite there clearly being a number of adequate billing platforms available to the channel, this survey has demonstrated that too many of the systems used today are not fulfilling the current requirements of resellers.

Competition amongst resellers is growing with more IT resellers moving into the comms market and this is set to rise in 2008. This will undoubtedly increase the demand for capable and agile billing solutions so it is essential to ensure the current platforms can meet the expanding requirements of billing in telecoms.

This survey has also highlighted the necessity for billing providers to think more about how they can offer converged products that will enable and empower resellers to accurately and efficiently collect, mediate, report on, bill and collect payments for all of their services with minimal manual intervention, in a flexible, reliable and timely manner, allowing them to concentrate on growing and expanding their business.

