FirstComm Streamlines its Operations
with IDI Billing Solutions

FirstComm, a leading technology solutions provider offering data networking, voice, and managed services throughout the Midwest, aimed to consolidate the number of key systems required to support its current business.

Following the acquisition of another major telecom company, FirstComm found itself stranded with a legacy billing system that was unable to support the launch of new services and scale accordingly, creating the need to migrate existing and newly acquired customers onto one reliable, comprehensive platform.

✓ The Challenge:

Phasing out legacy systems, introducing new service offerings

Up until the acquisition, FirstComm's existing billing platform solution allowed the company to bill for core wireline services – to a certain point. Following the transition, however, FirstComm was faced with the daunting prospect of not only billing for a slate of new customers, but also trying to integrate new, advanced services into their product catalog. This led to challenges with the back-office IT systems, as the legacy billing software code was outdated and no longer supported by its initial vendor.

FirstComm began its hunt for a telecom billing provider after the company spent 18 months integrating new systems across the organization. To match its billing quality with its heightened capabilities, the company sought a billing platform that would enable them to sell advanced services

with higher margins. In order to maintain its competitive pricing, this would mean finding ways to offset operational costs, as well as opting for a lean, customized billing platform that would tackle the company's specific pain points, without having to pay for unnecessary functionality.

One of the telecom organization's major business priorities involves workflow. FirstComm wanted to push configuration out to the admins in each department in a more intuitive way, with minimal complications or issues on all sides. It desired a workflow system that allowed for a simple way of tracking orders and instant accessibility to information at any time.

"There was no R&D going on, so every time we needed a change, we basically had to spec out exactly what we wanted the system to do, and then were billed for it. I'm amazed it took us as long as it did to move out of this system. We knew there were obvious holes in our legacy billing system,"

– Mike Leedy, VP of Billing Operations and Development at FirstComm.

Not only did it need integration to improve its own day-to-day performance, Firstcomm wanted to ensure that its new billing platform could be integrated to extend CostGuard functionality to other on-premises systems. Integration is a significant part of what the business does, particularly in its development in web service APIs which provide a secure and programmatic way to access the company's data and to run functions that can be done in the CostGuard applications such as creating customers, making payments or placing orders.

✓ The Solution:

IDI and CostGuard®

With so many moving parts in the equation, it seemed necessary that FirstComm would need close collaboration with a partner to develop and launch an advanced billing software solution. This led the telecom provider to IDI Billing Solutions. IDI was at the forefront of FirstComm's sights throughout the search process, as decision-makers noted that IDI's Workflow capabilities represented a holistic solution for the challenges – no small feat, considering FirstComm's extensive track record around billing platform overhauls.

"We had gone through numerous billing conversions," said Leedy. "We've had a tremendous amount of experience with various billing platforms before and had looked at IDI a few times in the past."

Upon learning that FirstComm's most recent acquisition had previously worked with IDI's CostGuard offering feature, decision-makers felt that IDI represented the best chance at getting a proven solution that would align with operational timelines.

"The stars just aligned," said Leedy. "It became a very easy choice for us."

✓ The Implementation:

Streamlined operations, going 'above and beyond'

The major project objective was to configure and migrate FirstComm's customer base into IDI's CostGuard solution and SaaS Operations. After FirstComm entered into an agreement with IDI, it took approximately 10 months to fully implement the CostGuard system. This, according to Janice Fordyce, FirstComm's Billing Manager, represented a serious sprint for both companies - one that IDI took in stride.

"We chose IDI initially because of the Workflow application but obviously we needed much more than that," Fordyce said.

The implementation process required a software upgrade to the latest version of CostGuard for use throughout the organization. It also established new systems that allowed for migration and testing of the FirstComm legacy systems, creation of a master product catalog and the configuration of numerous web applications. The project aimed to utilize CostGuard's web applications for customer care, orders, workflow and web APIs for integration.

This implementation occurred in two major phases. Phase one represented the short-term work necessary to retire FirstComm's prior billing system. During this process, IDI worked to implement usage processing, billing accuracy and automated treatment processing, as well as the CostGuard software upgrade that allowed for use of the latest web modules. Phase two addressed the concurrent migration process of FirstComm's Teleflex and Mercury customer bases.

The Results:

Efficiency, visibility and accuracy

During the integration and implementation periods, IDI worked directly with FirstComm to ensure it was making the most of the CostGuard technology. FirstComm grasped the use of the CostGuard solution quickly, making the implementation process straightforward for both parties.

"Rating manual feeds used to take dedicated, full-time personnel. That person is now freed up to help support the billing team. Where someone spent half the work week doing manual tasks, they now can take on additional tasks."

The new system also reduced billing turnaround from days to a few hours - a meaningful improvement in efficiency. Even better, customers didn't notice any changes during or after the implementation. This is a testament to IDI's efforts for cohesive implementation. Yet the real magic was in the back office, as CostGuard gave FirstComm greater visibility than ever before into their customers, and a much easier product catalog to administer.

"With IDI, you can look back on what we've saved per month and per year in internal salary, hardware and other costs related directly to our legacy system - it's immeasurable," Leedy said.

"One of the many things we love about CostGuard is that everything is at your fingertips," said Fordyce.

"If you are looking up a product to see how many customers are using that product, you can just right click and export that list into a spreadsheet. It's very easy to use, easy to track orders and easy to keep eyes on workflow and where in queue things are at any given time."

IDI: The Premier Provider Of Billing, Automation And Workflow Solutions

Working with IDI Billing Solutions has allowed FirstComm to manage its customers throughout the course of its major acquisition. CostGuard's automated workflows and easy-to-learn processes have empowered the company to grow its business capacities and maintain its customer satisfaction, all while saving time and improving accuracy in both ordering and billing.

"Everything IDI provided is just incredible," Leedy said. "From the product catalog, to the reporting, to the dashboards, to the tax engine: Coming from where we were at, it was a very easy choice for us to go with IDI and move into this system."

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