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## INDIA'S LARGEST MAGAZINE EXCLUSIVELY FOR SATELLITE & CABLE TV

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### GETTING CLOSER TO THE CUSTOMER THROUGH "THE BILL"

Although the CATV Act CAS Amendment failed to clear the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) through lack of time, industry observers are predicting that the bill will eventually get passed after Parliament takes a break and that the result is just a temporary delay for cable TV operators, television broadcasters and consumers who will have to gear up for a new era of addressable pay TV television.

It is these companies that will be left with the job of meeting the terms of new legal requirements and in order to meet these conditions, new methods of doing business will be needed. Changes in legislation inevitably bring about changes in business practise and it is likely that many small operators will move under the umbrella of much larger organisations; as markets change and develop, some consolidation is inevitable. However, in order to meet the requirements of different legislation, new systems and software will be needed.

The new legislation that has so far gone through the lower house, states that cable operators shall submit a report to the Central Government in the prescribed form and manner. It should contain the information regarding the number of total subscribers, the subscription rates and the number of subscribers receiving programmes transmitted in basic service tiers or particular programme or set of programmes transmitted on pay channels. Additionally, in respect of cable services provided by such cable operators through a cable television network, such reports shall be submitted periodically at such intervals as may be prescribed and shall also contain the rate of amount, if any, payable by the cable operator to any broadcaster.

### CRUCIAL ROLE FOR BILLING SYSTEMS

When the amendment is passed by both houses, the Indian Government will get transparency in the figures of viewership and in revenue collection by the cable operators. The legislation will also ensure that the subscriber pays only for those channels, which he chooses to view.

This is where billing systems can play a crucial role.

The billing system should support every aspect of the customer management and billing operation, such as:

- Single view of the customer
- Order processing
- Dispatch
- Billing
- Collections
- Inventory management
- Promotions and discounting
- Prospect management
- Single bill for multiple services
- Marketing and financial reporting

### ACCOMMODATING LOCAL PRACTICES

Every market is different and subject to different regulation, legislation and tax regimes. In Brazil, for example, the billing system at Globocabo had to be adapted to meet local conditions and specialised custom software was introduced.

Billing solutions chosen by operators need to be flexible to accommodate differences in system setup, billing operations, and local business practices. Intelecable™, supplied by DST Innovis, is

used in more than 18 countries and provides service to more than 10 million customers. It is currently running in 9 different languages (including Japanese) and with its adherence to National Language Support (NLS) standards and its double-byte capabilities, screens can be translated into virtually any language and system-wide parameters allow for extensive customisation.

### **GETTING READY FOR CONVERGENCE**

As the services offered by cable operators increase, a real-time rating engine becomes essential. This will allow differing tariffs or rates to be applied for individual services. As operators develop their customer offerings, there will be different levels of subscription and maybe even individual one off views for special events (pay-per-view). The operator may choose to charge differently for these services and it is essential that a billing system has the technology inherent in it to cope with this development.

A sophisticated billing system will not only be able to provide these sets of figures but will also provide a basis for the development of new services as and when operators choose to introduce them. An open billing system will support video, voice, data, and interactive services from a single, integrated database. As convergence inevitably happens in the future, cable operators will want to be in a position to take advantage of the opportunities to develop their businesses. The billing system should be "convergent-ready" with an open architecture, range of distributed APIs and the ability to grow as the business does. It should easily interface to and integrate with current systems and third-party software applications to best meet the users business needs.

In the future operators may wish to offer business customers High Speed Data Services and the billing system should be able to include this additional service as part of the normal process. Using a single database for billing, equipment, service orders, customer care, and troubleshooting and all customer management tasks, reduces operational costs and provides easy access to complete customer information.

### **BROADBAND AND INTERACTIVE SERVICES**

Billing systems contain a wealth of customer history such as buying and payment patterns and pay per view choices. They will have a key role to play in tracking the bundling of services, and as we move away from purely broadband services to broadband and interactive services, including Internet access, home shopping and telephony, billing becomes more complex. There can be dozens of transactions for several different services, each day, for every customer.

As the competition increases, so operators will want to differentiate their services. A company's relationship with its customers can enhance the level of business. A bad reputation is a barrier to developing the business and costly to put right. Customer Relationship Management, CRM can help overcome this barrier by tracking communications between customer and operator, and setting up prompts and reminders to ensure that the highest level of customer management is maintained.

### **WEALTH OF CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT OPTIONS**

Alongside CRM and billing, the Internet has a major role to play in customer relations. As operators look to maximise returns on their investments the Internet will be key in producing business efficiencies while maintaining a good standard of customer care. Customers will be able to arrange service calls, obtain information, see video trailers and access their accounts via the Internet. This in turn will free up call centre staff for outbound calls and customer care functions.

There are many potential new services and new directions for operators to take, but it is the ability to bill the customer as a primary point of regular contact that opens up a wealth of customer management and customer care options. Coupled with the move to interactive services, the use of a flexible billing solution will provide the way forward for innovative operators and allow them to develop their businesses efficiently.

### **INTELECABLE**



Intelecable is the leading-edge customer management and open billing system that supports video, voice, data, and interactive services from a single, integrated database. It is recognised as one of the fastest-growing convergence solutions in the market. With an open architecture and range of distributed APIs, Intelecable enables flexible, scalable solutions with rapid deployment of custom features and capabilities. Billing is not just billing any more. There is much more at stake than receiving money after sending a statement to a customer. Customer management and billing now entails managing the entire customer relationship to build customer loyalty and satisfaction. Customers are more informed and have more options than ever before, so it is imperative that operators achieve the highest possible level of customer satisfaction.

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