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CARRIER SERVICES PROCUREMENT SERIES

WLNP

....Wireless Local Number Portability

What is WLNP? Beginning Nov. 24, 2003 the Federal Communications Commission granted U.S. wireless customers the option of keeping their phone numbers when they switch from one wireless carrier to another. The change, known as wireless local number portability (WLNP), was forced on a mostly reluctant carrier community.

How many customers decided to take advantage of WLNP? The first day, about 100,000 people went through the process. Since then conversions have dropped to about 30,000 a day.

Has WLNP been a smooth transition? In one recent survey, all of the six major U.S. carriers (Verizon Wireless Inc., Sprint PCS Group, Nextel Communications Inc., T-Mobile USA Inc., Cingular Wireless Inc. and AT&T Wireless Inc.) lacked agreements with one another to define the rules for porting numbers. None of the six had completed business process testing with fellow carriers.

What is a prudent action for business?

Businesses should stay with their current wireless provider until the end of the first quarter of 2004. They should be reviewing their current contracts and soliciting offers from other carriers to determine how to best exploit the new competition. Some users may be better off negotiating a better deal with their current carrier; but often they will need alternative market-based numbers (both pricing and terms) that only a well thought out solicitation can provide.

Are wireless carriers offering great deals? Yes, starting even before the WLNP cut-date. Carriers were giving longer night and weekend periods, giving away phones and cutting prices by 5% to 10%. Often with the free phones, etc. buyers didn't realize that they were also committing to a two-year or three-year long contract extension.

What is on the upside for businesses? WLNP will lead to a more competitive environment, which will mean lower prices, more reliable customer care and better networks. This also shifts the relative bargaining positions of buyer and seller. Businesses really need to start looking for service-level agreements. Begin looking for metrics, such as dropped or blocked calls and voice quality. Also add the ability to void a contract if the carrier is not providing adequate levels of service – as is now common in the wired business.

What is on the downside for businesses? Carriers want long contract terms - most businesses are better served with a one-year contract; anything longer than two years is rarely advisable. WLNP is also likely to lead to wireless operator consolidation – thus carrier stability is an important selection criteria.

What's a prudent course of action? The following list will get you started on a positive path to success.

- Generally wait six to 12 months after the WLNP cut-date before changing wireless carriers.
- Only change after a through solicitation process which has yielded the appropriate savings and increased service levels
- Be careful to fully negotiate any potential early termination fees, should you decide to end current contracts prematurely
- Obtain service levels for the required WLNP port service to numbers within four hours (in the middle of the night). Thus ensuring that your users do not need to “carry two phones for days - one for calling and one for answering!”
- Get pooled minutes for all your users, preferably 24x7 with long-distance and roaming capabilities
- Ensure user training is part of the new contract
- Audit your new invoices very carefully.

Call Data Site for the best Telecommunications WLNP support 602.265.9003