



Enterprise Benefits of Wi-Fi Calling

A Case Study

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→ The Challenge:

When the economy went south in 2009, one of the world's largest entertainment companies knew it needed to make major changes to stay competitive...and profitable. Its businesses include a host of entertainment functions, along with a global managed data network and round-the-clock technology support.

The company launched a top-down, enterprise-wide project to decrease expenses, increase operational efficiencies and ultimately retain jobs. The objective was to dig deep into all expenditures and look for savings opportunities everywhere.

The company's director of global procurement explains: "This project was about keeping head count and saving money elsewhere. It looked at every aspect of the company. We left virtually no stone unturned."

The director's group was pulled into the project early because its work touches many areas of the company, including procurement, travel, auto fleet and cell phones.

Mobile phone expenditures quickly stood out as one area where the company was spending a lot of money.

Headquartered in the United States, the company has employees in nearly 60 offices across the country, along with facilities in 19 other countries. As a result, many employees travel regularly for business and work on-site at events. BlackBerries for employees were the norm, and at last count (pre-project) the company had more than 1,500 active devices.

Ironically, many of the division heads were totally unaware of their company's mobile phone expenditures. Many were "surprised, and shocked" at the costs associated with their departments' mobile phone usage.

→ The Solution:

An enterprise representative from T-Mobile was the first to highlight to the company the potential benefits of its Wi-Fi Calling solution. With T-Mobile's Wi-Fi Calling for enterprises, calls made or received over Wi-Fi are not counted against the corporate 'bucket' of minutes. This amounts to 'free calling' over Wi-Fi.

With many employees using their BlackBerries in the office and in company-managed off-site facilities, the vision of a seamless Wi-Fi network with no-charge calling began to take hold. The director spearheading the project had to ensure employees would be blanketed by Wi-Fi, in the office, at off-site facilities, even at home, to get mobile traffic off the cellular network. The director of global procurement sold the concept to his chief financial officer, knowing it would only work as a top-down approach.

Historically, the company was wary of Wi-Fi – it was seen as a security risk. So the plan was a bit hard to swallow, at first.

"Wi-Fi was the biggest obstacle with our IT department," the procurement director explains. "We conducted a multi-month test in the corporate headquarters first, to ensure it was stable and secure and that the IT team had confidence in it. Then, we rolled out Wi-Fi to the other offices and facilities."

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“We got people to understand that if call is originated on Wi-Fi, it’s free,” he said, “even if you leave a Wi-Fi calling area. Once we got them to understand that, it made the bigger picture a lot clearer.”

With a corporate-wide focus on cost-cutting, investing in new Wi-Fi infrastructure was definitely not in the budget. But the cost of implementing the necessary Wi-Fi equipment was ultimately justified by long-term cost savings they realized would come with Wi-Fi Calling .

With this strategic approach, his team knew they had to wrangle the support of the top-level executives. At the time, the company was supporting a variety of devices spread across all the major mobile service providers in the US. Achieving the desired saving required everyone to migrate to T-Mobile service plans. For some, it was a painful transition.

“We walked up to the president and other executives – many of whom loved their current phones – and we told them: we’re going to ask all the employees to use T-Mobile [with Wi-Fi Calling], so you need to be on T-Mobile as well.”

But the IT team made it as foolproof as possible for people to adopt Wi-Fi Calling. Beyond Wi-Fi in the office, employees were encouraged to use Wi-Fi Calling at home as a way to improve coverage while capturing the cost savings. When necessary, IT support staff even went to executives’ homes to set up their Wi-Fi and connect their devices.

With executive level support for the program in high-gear, the company instituted policy changes and moved hundreds of handsets/subscriptions from competitor providers to T-Mobile BlackBerries. There was some resistance from the employees, but in order to make the most of the new plan it was vital to have consistency across the company. Of course, people were hesitant to give up their phones, but what was at stake would impact the entire company.

“When we launched the new program, I told senior executives and other employees to call me personally with any problems, questions, whatever,” the director commented.

He adds: “One of the biggest concerns I kept hearing was people had no T-Mobile coverage at home. We literally spoon-fed them individually and overcame it all with Wi-Fi. Having Wi-Fi changed everything. And if anyone complained about service coverage, we worked with T-Mobile to check that area for service.”

To maximize the benefits of Wi-Fi Calling, the company also pushed Wi-Fi use aggressively in a revised corporate travel policy. The project team researched hotel chains worldwide that had Wi-Fi and negotiated with individual hotels to try to get free access to Wi-Fi. When employees travel internationally, they can bypass roaming flat rate and use Wi-Fi whenever possible.

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“The story is so compelling,” the procurement director explains. “The notion is that if you can pinpoint what your costs will be, it becomes something you don’t even have to worry about. From a financial perspective, that can’t be beat.”

→ The Results:

The results have been truly astounding. The switch to Wi-Fi Calling alone saved the entertainment company 30 percent off its mobile phone expenditure in 2009; 50 percent if you consider other changes to the phone policies. It cut spending on mobile phone service by about \$400,000 per year .

“Our employees have free Wi-Fi calling when they are at the office or at home,” the director clarifies. “We make sure all the facilities we work with have our Cisco Wi-Fi access points, so calls are free at all those locations as well. We literally changed the way people in our company do business.”

The project was rolled out in a 90-day period in the summer of 2009. The company is now almost exclusively a T-Mobile customer, having increased usage from 40 percent to approximately 85 percent and is looking to expand business with T-Mobile internationally.

For the most part, the project is complete. Employees are comfortable with T-Mobile and Wi-Fi Calling, and the service works great. The director reports that during the initial transition he was getting about 20 calls a day from people; today, he receives less than one a month.

The average corporate user spends about 50 percent of his time on Wi-Fi right now, and the goal is 75 percent.

With the new Wi-Fi Calling model for mobile phones, the company has also eliminated much of the fluctuation in mobile spending. The result has been a more accurate budget projection of mobile spending for the coming year, something they struggled with before.

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“This program was a fundamental change in how we did business,” he said. “Things will continue to change, and costs will continue to come down. We hope to see even bigger decreases in our spending.”