



CASE STUDY



CLIENT >

Consolidated Communications

Consolidated Communications Holdings, Inc. is an established rural local exchange company (RLEC) providing voice, data and video services to residential and business customers in Illinois and Texas. Each of the operating companies has been operating in their local markets for over 100 years. With approximately 241,000 local access lines and over 43,000 digital subscriber lines (DSL), Consolidated Communications offers a wide range of telecommunications services, including local and long distance service, custom calling features, private line services, dial-up and high-speed Internet access, digital TV, carrier access services, and directory publishing. Consolidated Communications is the 17th largest local telephone company in the United States.

CHALLENGE >

The company had experienced tremendous transition. In 1997 the privately held company was acquired by a publicly owned firm and migrated its billing functions to the new firms' system. In 2003 the acquiring company divested Consolidated (including a few additional services) and sold it back to its original private owner. The divestiture necessitated that Consolidated reestablish an independent billing system.

Consolidated considered repurposing the billing system it had used prior to 1997, but its limitations made it an inappropriate option. The aging RPG technology used to

generate invoice data offered little flexibility in customizing the invoices in accordance with differing state and changing industry regulations, and was an incompatible format for its invoice processing vendor.

Consolidated needed greater invoice flexibility and the ability to provide information to its invoice processing vendor in a universally understood XML format.

While reestablishing itself, Consolidated was also anticipating a strategic merge with yet another private telecommunications firm that would significantly increase the volume of invoices generated as well as pose challenges in combining two different systems into one

new billing system. The software solution needed to be as 'soft coded' as possible to accommodate changes with the invoice with a minimum of programming modifications.

Consolidated Communications needed to >

- Replace its former customer billing software to accommodate the complexity of customer billing information, multiple state requirements and changing industry regulations in which they operated
- Develop new software, using Java programming to generate XML documents

- Use the new Java-based invoice engine to extract billing information to a XML format that could be transmitted to their billing agent for processing
- Provide scalability and future integration of the merged company's system into the newly developed system
- Complete the transition to the new billing system prior to their anticipated merge

SOLUTION >

First Option developed a custom, soft-coded Java-based billing engine that allowed Consolidated Communications to generate XML invoice documents and make future changes with a minimum of programming updates.



...First Option developed a custom, soft-coded java-based billing engine that allowed Consolidated Communications to work more productively...





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Consolidated Communications can now easily manipulate the complex customer billing data in the DB2 database to accommodate their multiple locations, industry regulations, and future growth. They can then update that information on customer invoices in a way that is clear and easy to understand.

Initially First Option consulted with Consolidated Communications to help organize data in a way that would allow it to be extracted from the billing database using Java instead of RPG as the programming language. They then used their expertise in telecom billing to create the new XML invoice schema and provided visual mockups of what the invoices would contain and what the layout would look like.

Using best practices and most current technology, First Option created an XML interface between Consolidated Communications and its bill processing vendor. Information is

now extracted into an XML format that is transmitted to the company's billing agent who prints and mails the invoices to Consolidated's customers.

First Option then trained the Consolidated Communications in-house team on the new Java application and XML formatting to streamline the migration to the new billing engine. Since time was a critical factor, First Option accelerated the timeline while maintaining the integrity of their proven application development process.

RESULT >

The solution gave Consolidated Communications an advanced billing engine, and scalable system that could accommodate future growth. It made room for multiple locations, industry regulations, and complex customer information with trouble-free customization moving forward. With a new XML billing agent interface, customer invoices are more

flexible to change, easy-to-read, and work seamlessly with the billing agent for smooth billing function.

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