



Counting on Better Backhaul

With Tellabs' help, a major MSO upgrades its network inventory system to target the cellular market

By Joan Engebretson

Providing high-speed backhaul connectivity to cell sites is a major opportunity for cable MSOs. By 2015, cable's share of the U.S. backhaul market will top \$3 billion, according to a recent Visant Strategies report.

To capitalize on that opportunity, MSOs must recognize that mobile operators have much higher expectations about service levels than their traditional target market of consumers. That's why one major U.S. MSO recently sought to make better use of the network inventory system it purchased in 2009.

The MSO enlisted Tellabs Global Services for help to achieve that goal. Tellabs audited the MSO's inventory database, gathered missing information and uploaded it into the system. Tellabs Global Services also established a consistent methodology to ensure that the operator's technicians would properly update the system moving forward.

The net result is an inventory database that the MSO can use to enhance customer service. For example, it's now better able to notify customers of any scheduled or unscheduled service disruptions.

Detailed and accurate information also enables the MSO to rapidly provision new services and enhances the inventory system's ability to support network capacity planning. And although improving backhaul QoS was the main goal, the benefits also extend to other business and residential customers.

Upgrading for Growth

The MSO undertook the inventory update project knowing that as its mobile backhaul business grew, its existing database couldn't provide the level of detail customers expect.

“The cable operator had grown its cell tower backhaul systems rapidly,” said Denise Turner, Tellabs executive account manager. “They would win business, then rush to fill the orders.”

In that rush, information about the equipment installed at the site was not well-documented in the inventory system. Management was concerned about the potential long-term impact.

“Backhaul customers expect to be able to call one place and find out what’s going on with a circuit, and there is no way to do that without updating the database,” said Jay Tallmon, Tellabs professional services manager. “If a particular piece of equipment were to break down, technicians need to be able to see what was built on top of it and what circuits were built on it.”

“It was a conscious effort to step up their game,” Turner added.

The MSO also realized it would be difficult to complete the project without outside assistance. It lacked sufficient staff and skills needed to complete the process of identifying, gathering and inputting missing data in a timely manner.

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Rapid Return

The first phase of the project was to conduct an equipment audit for one of the MSO’s markets. Tellabs Global Services personnel met with the operator’s staff at the corporate and regional levels to get information about the cable modem termination systems, ROADMs and metro Ethernet equipment.

Detailed information about these systems was missing from the inventory database. In some cases, an entire piece of equipment was missing, making it impossible for technicians to enter information about individual circuits configured over that equipment.

Consistent record-keeping methodologies weren’t established, so some records were available only locally. And in some cases, documentation was entered into the inventory management system in the form of tabs, without easy means of retrieval.

Tellabs auditors gathered the information that needed uploading into the inventory system, compiling it based on

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