

# Taking the B.S. Out of Bill Shock

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It seems that everywhere you look, there's a story of a wireless subscriber opening up his or her monthly mobile bill and seeing numbers that would make most people's jaws drop. This is the case of bill shock, the unwanted (but not uncommon) trend that continues to plague the mobile data-driven world.

In addition to regular text and video messaging and video and music streaming, web browsing and app downloading has risen to mammoth proportions. Consumers' increased appetite for data signals the need for wireless usage monitoring services to help them stay in-line with their data allowance, and to help operators avoid inflicting a bad case of bill shock on unsuspecting customers.

There are several million wireless subscribers who use mobile devices for data-intensive tasks, so data usage has really grown in the last few years. 2012 was the first time in history where consumers in some parts of the world spent more on mobile data than on voice, confirming that how consumers use their phones has reached a long-expected tipping point. Mobile activity grew with dramatic speed, and some policies and service-provider plans have yet to catch up. Sometimes, service or roaming territories are unclear leading subscribers to unknowingly access data out-of-range, costing them way more than imagined.

The problem is so pervasive that regulators in countries worldwide have taken steps to address it. The UK regulator Ofcom recently recommended that UK mobile providers enable their subscribers to set spending caps and usage notifications. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has mandated similar measures around usage alerts in the U.S.

Such notifications are important, but they are only the first step. Bill shock can sneak up on customers in many ways. People forget to set limits in the stress of preparing for a trip. A child ignores incoming data-usage warning messages, while

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Published on Wireless Design & Development (<http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com>)

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watching movies on a smartphone. Even subscribers who turn data roaming off can be surprised when they find their phone's location services, push notifications, or apps switch data roaming back on beneath the surface.

For many subscribers, there are only three options present: leave the phone at home; leave the phone in "airplane" mode only; or manually turn off the phone's cellular network service, location services, push notifications, fetch-data features, and email.

This is a lose-lose situation. Operators lose potential revenue and subscribers lose connectivity. It is better when operators are able to dynamically engage with subscribers to provide complete control over their usage and spending. The empowered users will be less likely to churn, and operators can enjoy fewer write-offs, fewer customer service calls, and more differentiated services.

It's in operators' best interest to help subscribers prevent bill shock by providing real-time visibility and control over their data service usage and costs. Controls have been around for several years, but operators are now extending them to introduce a concept called Dynamic Services, which is used to upsell value-based services, as well as provide bill shock controls.

Dynamic Services is built on the premise of real-time data collection, charging/billing, flexible policy controls, and a BSS (business support system) that enables rapid product development and time to market. Operators experimenting with Dynamic Services consistently report increase in profit margins and churn reduction.

With Dynamic Services, customers have a wide range of flexibility for managing their data usage with personalized policy control options to suit every need; for example, customers who like having access to data at any time, but still want to control their usage may choose the time-based access to specific data services as a form of cost insurance. For those who prefer to have the ultimate control over data consumption, Dynamic Services offers a pre-paid model, which allows one to "pre-buy" as much (or as little) data upfront.

Best of all, these services are not limited to "in-network" usage and can be expanded to roaming customers, if needed; for example, if you are traveling in Europe and need momentary access to Google Maps without breaking the bank, these services allow you to purchase access to a selected app for 24 hours for a set monetary amount (24 hours of Google Maps access for 2 Euros, etc.). This way, you can choose to roam, but know exactly how much it will cost.

There is a lot of pressure on operators to ensure bill shock doesn't happen. Having customers spending much more than they intended on data services typically only has one result - the customer reduces usage and spending. In order to encourage customers to continue using data, operators must ensure they are doing everything they can to make users aware of their data usage habits and how much it's costing them so their bill is never a surprise - most importantly - never a shock.

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When subscribers have this level of transparency in data monitoring, they can control their usage staying within contract and in budget. This results in a win-win for operators and subscribers, alike.

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*About Martin Morgan: With 25 years' experience in mobile communications software, Martin has worked in mobile billing software since the early days of the industry. In that time he has spoken at over 50 telecoms conferences worldwide, had a similar number of articles published in the telecoms trade press and served on trade association and company boards. At Openet, Martin is responsible for marketing thought leadership and market interaction. Martin can be contacted at [Martin.Morgan@Openet.com](mailto:Martin.Morgan@Openet.com) [1].*

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