

## **FCS NEWS**

### **Setting a new standard for billing**

***London 3 October 2012: Five of the country's top billing vendors have today agreed to commit to sending call data records (CDRs) in a consistent standardised file format, under the umbrella of FCS.***

Five of the UK's largest independent billing vendors have got together to design and agree one single standard for CDRs. Aurora Kendrick James, Dataflow, eBillz, PRD Technologies and Union Street between them provide the billing platforms for a large proportion of the channel's resellers. And all have now agreed in principle to offer their customers the choice to output wholesale CDRs in a consistent format from next year, using a standard which will be administered for the whole industry under the umbrella of FCS.

Over the years the UK telecoms market has matured and we now have a myriad of wholesale service providers to the telecoms channel. The lack of any standards for CDRs has resulted in every supplier providing billing data in their own unique format. With more and more new entrants to the market (for example hosted and SIP providers), there are literally hundreds of inconsistent CDR formats in existence.

This creates a big headache for Communication Providers (CPs) who need to receive and process these billing CDR files. Each new service requires them to interpret the data, and modify their billing platform to support the new CDRs. The specifications of many of these CDR files are not properly documented and open to different interpretation. This can result in hassle and time delays and even billing errors.

Having to write and re-write input processes to allow billing systems to receive CDR files in different formats from each different carrier slows down product development. It makes the process of adding new wholesale suppliers more long-winded and more costly than it needs to be. It's also a drain on development resources, since the work has to be individually duplicated by each individual billing provider.

Without doubt, the industry has been crying out for a standard for CDRs for a long time. Once the new standard is rolled out, any wholesale provider who adopts it will find it much easier for customers (CPs) to do business with them as the CDRs will immediately be compatible (importable) by most of the major billing platforms. Over time CPs will have to make little or no modification to their billing platforms in order to receive CDRs in the standard format.

"This is an exciting step forward for the industry," says FCS Chief Executive Chris Pateman. "The group has been working on this process for nearly a year: different companies have different requirements, and it was crucial that any standard format should not limit individual players' flexibility or tie them into unacceptable cost or performance constraints.

"The result is a standard which will suit customers' needs, both today and in the future. But in a technically simple format that anyone can use without compromising the normal commercial freedom of individual billing vendors to develop their own operating platforms and compete with one another for business. New entrants to the market will have the choice of becoming licensees of the common standard via FCS or paying the development costs to modify existing billing platforms to accommodate their bespoke CDR files

The launch version of the standard (Version 1.4) was signed off at the Convergence Summit South exhibition at Sandown Park on October 3. The industry should expect to start seeing it being implemented in the first quarter of 2013.

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

- 1 The Federation of Communication Services (FCS) is the trade association for the UK communication services industry. A full list of members may be found at [www.fcs.org.uk](http://www.fcs.org.uk)
- 2 Aurora Kendrick James provides telecoms billing services and call management solutions for UK communications providers. More information is available at [www.akjl.co.uk](http://www.akjl.co.uk)
- 3 Dataflow provides managed bureau billing services to UK communications providers. More information is available at [www.dataflow.net](http://www.dataflow.net)
- 4 eBillz is the billing platform of Shaftesbury Systems, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Chess Group of Companies. More information is available at [www.ebillz.com](http://www.ebillz.com)
- 5 PRD Technologies provides a range of data processing software solutions including telecoms billing. More information is available at [www.p-rd.com](http://www.p-rd.com)
- 6 Union Street Technologies provides a range of telecoms billing and WLR3 solutions for communication providers including the aBILLity billing platform. More information is available at [www.unionstreet.uk.com](http://www.unionstreet.uk.com)

**If you require any further information on this press release, please contact Chris Pateman, [cpateman@fcs.org.uk](mailto:cpateman@fcs.org.uk) or call 020 8249 6363**

**FCS Billing Providers Action Group – common standard CDRs: technicalities.**

Data can be transmitted electronically, machine to machine. But by using a technically very simple file format – a text file with the individual fields in a comma-delimited format – there are no costly technical barriers to entry, and no risk of legacy redundancy as a result of future technology improvements. This format also means file data can be read by humans as well as machines.

The individual fields have deliberately been configured to allow a lot of space. This means different companies' preferences can be maintained (some use short codes to identify customers, for example; others prefer to use the entire postal address. Either way, the format can accommodate it). And it allows room for those data fields or descriptions to be modified in future if customers ask for information in a different format.

New entrants to the market will have the choice of registering with FCS as users of an agreed industry standard (at nominal cost) or of bearing the development costs of customising their customers' billing platforms to accommodate their own peculiar formats.

**Typical file format:**

**RID\_Monthly\_Calls\_31012013\_SEQNUMBER\_RECRDCOUNT\_V1.txt"v","0","01999887000","017323  
53495","28012013","10:37:23","233","","","Hampton","UKLocal","Peak","0.8","0.8","654","019998  
87665","","UKL"."TalkTalk","","S","","","","","","","","77879"**

Is a report for a CP with RID code RID for a single call made in the month ending 31/01/13. The call is a voice call from a fixed line 01999 887000. The number 01732 353495 was dialled on January 28 2013 10.37.23, and the call lasted for a total of 233 seconds. The number called is at Hampton, the billing rate for the call is UK Local, and the Peak time band applies. This rate is charged at 0.8p per second, and no bundle discount applies. The caller's extension is 654, and his direct-dial number is 01999 887665. The carrier was TalkTalk, the bill attracts standard rate VAT and the CDR provider's unique internal reference is 77879. The number of blank fields ("") can be used to contain additional data for mobile data calls, refunds or country of origin data, or for recording ring-times or diverted number details.

**(Note: the file itself is a single stream of characters and numbers, with no spaces. In order to fit the entire file on to the paper, it was necessary to insert hard returns.)**