

What is Convergent Billing?

Assume an operator is providing different services mobile voice, fixed voice, data, IPTV, broadband, pre-paid and post-paid, etc. A customer can have one or more of these services from the same operator. A typical customer would definitely like to have single invoice and single view of his account.

A convergent billing is the integration of all service charges onto a single customer invoice and a unified view of the customer. Customer should call a call center and should get complete account information for all the services opted. Customer receives a single bill and makes a single payment for all the services.

A truly Convergent Billing System should be able consolidate any number and combination of products and services onto a single bill, regardless of the type of product and market segment, i.e., prepay and postpay services.

Another important parameter contributing in convergent billing is a single product and price catalogues for pre-paid as well as post-paid customers.

Benefits of Convergent Billing:

Convergent billing would help operators in achieving the following major benefits:

- Single product and service catalogue gives better time to market and reduced cost of implementation.
- A unified bill enables cross-service discounts, so that customers who order multiple services can receive preferential pricing.
- Convergent billing enables multi-service packaging and pricing, whereby existing customers are enticed to add new services and new customers are attracted by innovative service bundles.
- Centralized customer care and support for both type of customers *pre – paid and post – paid*.

Major Bottlenecks:

So far it has been a dream of all the big telecom operators to achieve true convergence. May be tomorrow some billing system would come which will support true convergence of all the product and services but today it has following obstacles to achieve real convergence:

- Real time Charging Systems like Ericsson IN or Nokia Siemens Charging System are very popular systems to provide solution for pre-paid product and services. These systems are not flexible enough to handle various functionalities required for post-paid customers for example: complex customer hierarchies, CDR re-rating, volume discounts, flexible reporting, roaming charging, interconnect charging, etc.
- Post paid billing systems like Convergys Infinys or Amdocs Billing Systems are great for post-paid product and services. These systems are not capable to handle pre-paid traffic and charge the calls in real time. Importantly these systems can not be made highly available because of their base architecture.

Keeping two above mentioned constraints together, if we merge both the systems by doing a kind of interfacing between pre-paid and post-paid systems then it may be possible to achieve a true convergence. Companies like Convergys and Ericsson are working in the same direction to merge the two systems and use required functionalities from both type of systems and make them single Convergent Billing System.