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# **The Business Guide to Successful and Strategic Telecoms Migrations**

## Introduction

Any migration of customers is a tough task, fraught with technical pitfalls, significant drains on internal resource and adoption delays. Getting it wrong risks customer dissatisfaction with implications on churn and brand reputation. Getting it right extracts valuable synergies and enables rapid competitive advantage.

This guide explores the issue of how and why service providers and resellers can expect to address customer migrations in the future. It maps out a different approach to confronting these issues that safeguards the benefits of strategic transformational change while minimising its risks.

## The Strategic Need for Customer Migrations

### Mergers and Acquisitions

Demand for UC services continues to drive opportunities for service providers and resellers. The natural shift away from traditional PBX platforms, and soon-to-be-obsolete technology like ISDN, promises strong organic growth in subscribers and revenues. In the UK, the climate is perfect for increased consolidation as eagle-eyed entrepreneurs look to accelerate market share and private equity investors flock to the compelling returns on offer.

Even in companies that are not looking to merge or attract PE investment, strategic questions remain around the future of their platform which also could result in the need to migrate customer bases.

### Platform Evolution

M&A transactions are not the only big strategic decisions on the agenda for service providers and resellers. Many are also concerned with evolving their platform strategy to ensure future competitiveness and guard against margin erosion. What to do with customers on legacy systems which are expensive to maintain? Is it viable to continue relying on a third-party platform when there is no control over its evolution?

Cisco's recent takeover of BroadSoft is a case in point. BroadSoft is the UCaaS platform of choice for many service providers and has earned a market leadership position based on its product innovation and commitment to customers. It remains to be seen whether this will continue under Cisco's ownership, but some will undoubtedly not wish to hang around waiting to find out.

What both of these strategic imperatives have in common is the thorny challenge of complex customer migrations.

## What Makes Customer Migrations Difficult?

There is much anecdotal evidence to support the fact that some strategic opportunities (i.e. to acquire another business and its customer base, or migrate existing customers to a better platform) are missed because of fear that the necessary customer migrations carry too many problems. There is no getting away from it: sometimes the anticipated timescales and costs mean that customer migrations aren't deemed 'worth it'.

So why are they so difficult?

### You probably haven't done this before

No transformation project is 'business as usual', so it is unrealistic to expect your existing team to have the appropriate skills and experience to pull-off a large customer migration. In any case, your people have enough on their plates already without having to prioritise this over everything else, and end up compromising KPIs somewhere along the line. If you reassign a Tiger Team internally to drive this project, you'll need to backfill their existing roles with temporary resources from elsewhere.

### There are competing priorities and stakeholders – and not much time

Company A buys company B and all its assets and people. So, who handles the consolidation onto a single platform? Does it depend on whose platform is being migrated to, or from? What if there are multiple platforms and the migration needs to be staged? And besides from the technical considerations, what about the customers? What's the plan for telling them about the change and delivering support? Some customer migrations are going to throw up some organisational sensitivities and put a few noses out of joint.

### There are human factors to consider, not just technical ones

If only customers could be relied upon to understand why you are migrating them to a new service, how to follow any specific instructions to ensure the change goes smoothly, and – crucially – to carry on happily staying loyal even if hiccups arise during the migration process... Customer behaviour is a major consideration in any migration project with the onus on minimising churn, ensuring uptime and giving a great experience. Customers are people, not data fields in a spreadsheet. You need a plan for communicating with them, addressing their issues, solving their problems, helping them make the most out of any new functionality and showing them that the migration is good news for them.

### Migrations hinge on much more than just a good switchover day

Lots of work goes into a successful customer migration and there are so many things to make sure are planned in advance. For example, ensuring all customer data has been captured accurately and that sites are adequately prepared. A technically successful migration will be for nought if users are not adopting the service, being offered assistance were necessary either via reactive first-line support or proactively produced training and documentation.

## The Benefits of a Successful Customer Migration

There are numerous horror stories of poorly executed customer migrations that went over time and over budget, or in some cases were abandoned before they reached their conclusion. However, it's worth reflecting on the fact that there are customer migrations which do achieve their intended goals, while others even reap additional unexpected benefits. These include:

### Increase Valuation

It is fair to assume that a service provider or reseller with a proven capability to achieve a strategic transformation of its customer base constitutes a smart investment proposition. At the very least, it validates the organisation's agility and capacity to successfully manage change. Customer migrations are frequently executed in order to support an investment thesis for M&A. Enabling the intended synergies of an acquisition unlocks projected cost savings and margin growth and puts the business on a firm path to growth.

### Minimise Churn

Migrations present customers with a chain of opportunities to bail-out and switch to another provider. Of course, the migration itself is less complicated for the customer than going through with such a switch, but the general sense is that any disruption is unwanted and that any wrong moves on the part of the provider could result in losing the customer forever. Keeping the customer onside is critically important so that the costs of running the migration can have any prospect of delivering a return.

### Enhance Reputation

The nature of providing telecoms services means that often "no news is good news" as far as customer interaction is concerned. In other words, customers expect their services to just work, and so encountering their provider more than necessary would typically infer a problem has arisen. But because migrations require a certain amount of interaction with customers, each of these can be seen as opportunities to make a good impression and reinforce positive assumptions. This is increasingly important in cases where customers perceive services to be commoditised; enabling the provider to differentiate on high standards of service and support rather than just a competitive price.

### Upsell Premium Features and Services

Another opportunity presented by greater customer interaction is cross-selling and upselling services associated with the migration. Depending on the pre- and post-migration support offered as part of the project, it may be possible to showcase the value of premium features or offer them free-of-charge on a trial basis. The migration could also be a chance to renew the contract period or other terms.

## Reset Customer Loyalty

Any technology change is liable to provoke unease among customers, many of whom will have direct experience of avoidable IT-related business disruption suffered elsewhere. As detailed above, successfully navigating them through a telecoms migration should serve to reduce churn and enhance reputation. It may even inspire confidence that future migrations or other changes will go just as smoothly again. However, one of the more closely observed effects of migrations is psychological: people don't want to go through them again, no matter how well it went. The upshot here is more positive than it might appear. A customer that wishes to never migrate again is a customer that will balk at the thought of putting themselves through the anxiety of switching to another provider (logically, a process more complicated and riskier than staying put) anytime soon. Whatever natural limits there are to their loyalty will have been reset to day 1.

## A New Approach to Achieving Customer Migration Success

There is no getting away from the fact that migrating users between platforms, or indeed any other kind of migration, can be a challenge for any business:

- Even when organisations possess the skills and expertise to execute the technical steps, the human aspects of change are frequently overlooked.
- Even large organisations will not have a permanent migration project team on standby to execute projects and will need to divert resources from business-as-usual operations.
- All migration projects take time, but the uncertainty of project delays and potential customer churn can undermine strategic imperatives and disrupt key business decisions.

## An End-to-End Turnkey Migration Solution

A new approach, leveraged by large service providers and agile reseller businesses alike, is to contract a specialised migration partner to deliver the migration as a complete and customised end-to-end solution.

This should incorporate, sequentially:

- An initial needs analysis and discovery of the challenge and underlining strategic objectives
- A comprehensive data capture exercise to fully determine the technical parameters of the project and identify any gaps
- A migration and implementation plan comprising all technical and human aspects, bespoke to the needs of the migration and in direct response of its unique scale, architecture and strategic context
- The full technical migration build
- Porting management of all customers and their specific requirements
- User migration with defined time periods and SLAs
- Fulfilment of all applicable training requirements
- Execution of transition phase and decommissioning of legacy service
- Full early-life management including handling of inbound queries, first-line support and ticket escalation
- Professional handover back to business-as-usual teams

## Partner Selection

Critical to success is selecting a migration partner with the right cross-vendor, cross-technology skills and experience. The right migration partner also needs to demonstrate:

- A track record in the telecoms market. Not just understanding technologies but also the market dynamics and drivers.
- Comprehensive support infrastructure, including inbound capabilities and white-label customer engagement.
- A compelling appreciation of the user perspective, and how users and administrators view their telecoms services.
- Good understanding and multidisciplinary experience of skills training and personal development around telecoms services.
- Hands-on experience with a variety of migration projects large and small; platform to platform, network to network, on-prem to hosted or TDM to IP.

## Summary of Benefits

By partnering with a specialist migration partner, service providers and resellers can:

- De-risk their decision making with the confidence that platform strategies and customer base consolidation programmes run to plan
- Optimise customer revenues from existing customers
- Work with an independent third-party that can work with all stakeholders without any 'baggage'
- Increase business agility in response to market challenges and opportunities
- Continue to operate streamlined internal support function focused on BAU activities
- Avoid the cost of hiring additional headcount and investing capex in support infrastructure
- Minimise user disruption and maintain a great customer experience that enhances your brand.
- Take greater advantage of customer engagement opportunities around migration.