Top 10 Lessons Learned for Corporate 3G Mobile Broadband Deployments

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Introduction

After initially floundering for a number of years, mobile broadband technology has finally come into its own. Maturing in its capabilities and dropping in price, mobile broadband connectivity has become a mainstream method for staying in touch with people and data while on the move. In fact, according to Strategy Analytics' report "Beyond 3G: Looking for True Mobile Broadband," global mobile broadband usage is forecasted to hit 500 million users by 2010. Business subscribers will undoubtedly comprise the largest segment of this projected figure.

In the interest of helping ease corporate deployments to these business users, iPass has assembled a list of the top ten lessons learned when incorporating 3G mobile broadband into the enterprise. Our methodology involved selecting a few choice enterprise customers and interviewing their IT staff to learn what they discovered when deploying mobile broadband and what advice they would give to companies considering doing the same.

The term mobile broadband is used in different ways by different people to mean different things. At iPass, we refer to mobile broadband as:

> **Wireless high-speed Internet access delivered through 3G cellular networks to a user's notebook or mobile device. Devices are equipped with a carrier-provided mobile broadband radio (PC Cards, ExpressCards and USB devices).**

Unlike Wi-Fi access, which requires the user to remain within 50 to 100 meters of the Wi-Fi access point, 3G mobile broadband is available anywhere users can receive a mobile phone signal—from taxis, trains or remote stretches of road.

Is your company interested in deploying mobile broadband to its workforce? Are you looking for a winning strategy for doing so? Read on, as we reveal the lessons learned by companies just like yours—and best practices for your own custom deployment.

1. Establish Corporate Mobile Broadband Policies

First and foremost, the process for obtaining mobile broadband access needs to be organized. Establish corporate policies that determine who receives access and how they obtain it:

Which Employees Should Receive Mobile Broadband?

It used to be that mobile broadband was reserved for only top executives. Now that the costs have come down, companies are finding they can deploy mobile broadband to an even wider user base and reap additional productivity gains. Today every employee with a notebook is a candidate for mobile broadband. At a minimum, key traveling employees should have mobile broadband and Wi-Fi access, including sales reps, field service technicians and executives. Likewise, on-call staff should have mobile broadband, as you never know where they'll be when their services are needed.

Automate Approval and Deployment Processes

Next, decide how service request approvals will be handled. For most companies, it makes sense to follow the same approval process used for mobile phones.

Maintain Visibility over Unknown Mobility Expenses.

Make sure you have a policy in place that indicates whether or not users are allowed to purchase their own mobile broadband cards and service and then expense them back to the company. Most companies have strict policies against this. And there are good reasons. Companies lose many benefits when they allow their workers to buy their own mobile broadband hardware and service. Chief among these are manageability, corporate discounts, and true visibility and control over mobility expenses.

2. Customize Mobility Services for All Employees

Mobile broadband services vary—and not all users fit nicely into a given carrier's service plan. For example, coverage differs between regions among carriers. Also, some carriers limit 3G access to their own network, while others have roaming agreements for international travel. Some plans let you bundle 3G and Wi-Fi roaming. For example, iPass lets you roam globally and make unlimited Wi-Fi connections. Do your users need support for both notebooks and handheld devices? Do they prefer 3G cards, ExpressCards or USB devices?

Coverage Areas and Plans Vary

For some users, nationwide mobile broadband coverage on a given 3G network is fine. Those who travel internationally may need 3G coverage in other countries. An aggregator such as iPass allows mobile broadband access in 130 countries, however 3G roaming fees will apply. Many companies choose to avoid global 3G roaming charges by promoting the use of Wi-Fi during international travel.

To make smart decisions about service choice, give users the information they need. They will likely have questions about the different carriers your company typically works with, the coverage maps for those carriers, and whether they will have unlimited access or share a pool of minutes with other employees. Make all pertinent information available to employees and those who approve requests for service on your company intranet.

Do Employees Also Need Wi-Fi Roaming?

It often makes sense for employees to have both mobile broadband and Wi-Fi access types, as there are unique benefits to each: Wi-Fi has faster throughput while mobile broadband coverage is available anywhere you can receive a cell-phone signal. People tend to use Wi-Fi when it's available—in hotels and restaurants, for example—and mobile broadband when it's not.

Wi-Fi roaming can prove very valuable to employees who travel across borders. Mobile broadband cards often vary between carriers and 3G roaming is very expensive in some countries. Therefore, a strategy of using 3G mobile broadband in your home country and Wi-Fi when you roam works well in these circumstances. iPass, for one, provides access to over 100,000 hotspots around the world, so traveling users can easily access their corporate networks and email wherever they are. And a client like the iPassConnect™ mobility manager connects users through either access method using the same procedure.

Insist on Flexible Pricing and Usage Options

Have you or your children ever exceeded the terms of their mobile phone service agreement? If so, you're no stranger to the financial shock that ensues. This same issue can sometimes affect 3G mobile broadband users. To address this issue, some 3G providers are offering flat-rate pricing plans, allowing enterprise customers to accurately predict their mobility expenses. iPass takes this measure a step further, allowing flexible "pooled megabyte" pricing options to balance usage among a pool of mobile employees. Also, if certain employees don't require nationwide coverage, they may qualify for more affordable pricing plans. Local sales reps, for example, may only need 3G access in a limited territory. Some providers now offer inexpensive "local mobile" price plans to serve these users. Shop around for the best pricing plans.

When it comes to contract length, most companies choose two-year contracts, as they typically include a free mobile broadband card. Tracking card issue dates can be confusing, given that card orders occur frequently. Consider a contract that makes all of the cards co-terminus with the start of the contract to simplify this process.

> **"Mobile broadband has really helped our sales and service forces. For example, our service personnel spend two or three days each week in doctors' offices and hospitals. With mobile broadband, they can connect, check email, order parts and more without issue."**
> **–Remote Access Consultant for a major healthcare research company**

3. Keep Compatible Hardware on Hand

Almost as important as service type is the type of hardware you choose. Decide early on which hardware your company is going to support. Today, most companies maintain a fleet of standardized laptops and handheld devices that interface with the company's back office.

Travelers abroad will undoubtedly need specialized devices for use overseas. You might consider maintaining a small pool of these devices, complete with mobile broadband cards and services for those regions, and checking them out to employees on an as-needed basis for the duration of travel. Most people, however, opt to simply use Wi-Fi service internationally when they learn of the cost and complexity of using mobile broadband overseas. As mentioned earlier, it often makes sense for employees to have a combined mobile broadband and global Wi-Fi roaming plan.

4. Set a Process for Deployment

Once a user's request for service has been approved and the service and hardware types have been determined, the service client and any software updates are usually sent over a company's intranet. You will still need a process to get the physical cards into users' hands.

Companies often choose to let users pick up their cards from the help desk, which will issue and track the cards. Alternatively, the cards can be sent through the intra-office mail system. Again, the help desk should be the central point for tracking the cards.

In the case of new employees, their supervisors typically order the cards, and the new employees pick them up on their first day of work.

When a person exits the company, they will need to return the mobile broadband card. If they don't, the help desk will need to disable the card remotely. Consider putting a process in place to handle this, too.

For remote-based or work-from-home employees, iPass can greatly simplify the process by shipping pre-configured cards with customized quick-start guides directly to employees.

> **"The iPass service drives people to use a single client. This has not only improved the end-user experience, but also reduced our number of help desk calls by 75 percent. And we haven't had to hire a single additional staff member to manage our remote access—even as our company has quadrupled in size."**
> **–Richard Wagner, Director of IT Infrastructure, Hexion Specialty Chemicals**

5. Make Your Help Desk Your Central Point of Control

When you have a centralized point of control, you have order instead of chaos. Make your help desk responsible for issuing and tracking mobile broadband hardware, enabling the service, handling service issues, replacing lost or damaged hardware, and providing end-user support.

A mobile broadband service aggregator, such as iPass, provides a single point of contact for your help desk, simplifying the process of replacing damaged, lost or stolen cards. In addition, only iPass Mobile Broadband Service collects useful information about each connection, including success or failure, card details and signal strength. This valuable data is available to help desk staff and helps to streamline troubleshooting, improve customer service and proactively address many user connectivity issues.

6. Enable Device and Service Management

Decide if you're going to take advantage of distribution software to push security and software updates to end-user devices. Consider the advantages of an automated device management service for mobile system updates, such as the device management capabilities offered through iPass Mobile Office. Also determine your software and security update policies for mobile devices. Under which circumstances will you update systems? Some companies provide updates over all access types, while other companies limit updates to certain broadband connections or only when users connect locally. A mobile device management service provides specific capabilities to ensure timely updates while maintaining mobile worker productivity.

> **"Our sales and service employees find they are able to get work done between appointments with mobile broadband. They can tackle administrative tasks, file expense reports, order parts, and stay in touch with coworkers and team members. This way, they don't have to play catch up when they get home at night. It really helps our employees strike a work-life balance that works for them."**
> **–Remote Access Consultant for a major healthcare research company**

7. Monitor Service Usage

Many carriers today have a 5 GB per month transmission limit. Spell that out clearly to end users when they begin the service, as these carriers will typically shut off service if a user goes over their monthly limit.

A service like iPass' is incredibly beneficial in this area. iPass monitors service usage and sends weekly alerts to IT staff of problem usage. For example, if a user goes over 1 GB of bandwidth in a week, they will send an alert. You can then forward this alert to the person and remind them what the card should and should not be used for. Encourage them to download music and movies through their home broadband connection. Generally though, you will find that if someone goes over their allotment, it's usually just a training issue.

You also want to monitor your mobile broadband cards to make sure they are being used at all. Employees who travel infrequently may be holding onto unused cards that you're paying for each month. Establish a 90-day window. If there hasn't been any usage in 90 days, suspend the service for 90 days while you determine why the employee isn't using the card and if they might be using it in the near future.

8. Bolster Security

Mobile broadband is another point of entry into the enterprise network that must be effectively secured and managed. To help maintain network perimeter security, enforce the use of VPNs every time a user connects to the Internet. Again, the iPass Mobile Broadband Service already has the solution ready for you. Through integration with your corporate network security solutions, iPassConnect can enforce the consistent use of your VPNs, firewalls and anti-virus software as part of the connection process.

> **"Today, we know people are connecting via secure VPN links without being vulnerable to the more common Internet threats."**
> **–Bernard Lannan, Chief Technology Officer for Robins Air Force Base**

9. Upgrade When It Makes Sense

Periodically, review your contracts to see how long each card has been in service. Upgrade if it's within the terms of the contract and if there's a reason to—tougher security provisions, for example. If not, stick with the cards you have. They're probably serving you well. When you upgrade a card, determine whether or not a new contract period starts.

> **"Mobile broadband has really been a life-changer for a lot of our employees from a work-life perspective. The company has seen productivity gains as well."**
> **–Jeanine Stephens, Director of IT for iPass**

10. Work with the Right Service Vendor

Look for a service aggregator. Working with a company such as iPass frees IT staff from having to maintain multiple relationships with many different providers. It also simplifies service updates and billing.

And speaking of billing, if you allow employees to procure their own mobile broadband service and cards, find a vendor that can enable users to pay for the service through a company credit card and track these charges for you. It's extremely time-consuming to review individual billing statements and perform internal chargebacks.

Final Words of Advice

People new to mobile broadband are often surprised by its speed and the convenience of everywhere connectivity. With technologies like EV-DO and HSUPA coming online and 4G technologies on the horizon, mobile broadband is making its mark on the business world. For these reasons, mobile broadband is a tool that every company should make use of sooner rather than later to lower connectivity costs and gain productivity increases.

For more information about the iPass Mobile Broadband Service, visit www.ipass.com/services/services_mo_mobilebroadband.html today!

About iPass

iPass unifies mobility management for global enterprises. Our services combine worldwide remote and mobile broadband access with comprehensive management control over connectivity, devices and costs. iPass customers benefit from a single global solution that easily integrates with existing systems, simplifies IT management and reduces overall connectivity expenses. More than 3,500 enterprises and more than 400 Global 2000 companies rely on award-winning iPass services.

The company has been recognized as a leader in Mobile Device Management by IDC in 2007. iPass is headquartered in Redwood Shores, California, with offices in North America, Europe and Asia.

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