

Stop Whining, Stop Losing - Get a Coach

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Competitive service providers often excuse their own poor performance by trying to blame the incumbents for non-cooperation. It was naïve for these companies to expect that this would be easy. However some CLECs are making it work – not by whining or taking the competition to court – but by working out effective processes and building positive working relationships. This article reveals how service providers might spend their time more productively.

Every week we read another article from one service provider or another bemoaning the fact that the incumbent seems to be deliberately blocking their path to success. We never read about that kind of whining from NFL teams, or even the local high school football squad. In fact, where else would we be surprised to hear that the competitor was actually playing to win?

This is not to say that the "rules of the game" are perfectly drawn, or that the "referees" couldn't do with a bit more training (and maybe even some new glasses). No doubt there is room for clarification and enforcement of the FCC and PUC rules.

However, a look at the whiners too often reveals that their "play book" is next to empty, the "players" are not in peak condition, "training camps" are not well attended, and the "coaches" frequently have never played the game at all.

So, is it not surprising that the "team" doesn't score well?

Time to get a new "coach" and develop a better "game plan".

In football parlance, the process of obtaining new customers by offering them services of value, and then meeting that service commitment, can be compared to executing the game plan. You must be equally well prepared to deliver on your promises to customers (the Offense) as you are to ensure that your opponent has the order for as short a time as possible (the Defense). In our experience, the Offensive "coach" often has not designed an end-to-end process that moves the customer smoothly from order through provisioning to billing, even without anyone else on the field. And, the Defensive "coach" has not studied the "tapes" and therefore doesn't have the right "plays" designed to contain inevitable problems.

Moving past the football analogy, let's take a real-life look at some of the complaints:

1. A competitive carrier was putting the finishing touches on a lawsuit contending that the incumbent missed their Firm Order Completion date almost 50% of the time. The incumbent countered that their tracking showed a hit rate of 98%, well within the legal limits. Analyzing the chain of tasks across the complaining carrier quickly identified that:
 - Many tasks, policies, and accountabilities critical to getting a customer into service had not been defined. Groups tended to focus inwards on their own responsibilities and no one had overall accountability for managing service delivery to the customer.
 - The process, such as it was, called for the customer commitment date to be the same as the hand-over date from the incumbent. "So what?" you might well ask. Well, 50% of the time, the incumbent's (de)installer would get the work done in the morning and the complaining company's installer would arrive in the afternoon - order commitment met;

customer commitment met. The other 50% of the time, the installer would arrive before the (de)installer.....order commitment met; customer commitment not met.

Pretty obvious, right? It sure would have been to a management team that had designed service delivery correctly.

2. The competing carrier complains that their application for co-location space was perfectly completed and yet rejected by the incumbent. They neglect to mention that they forgot to include the mandatory payment check that must accompany the application...
3. The DLEC hires a third party company to complete the pre-wiring in the collocation space but doesn't provide the contractor with wiring schematics or quality assurance procedures – and then discovers at service order processing that all of the terminations have been wired backwards. Of course the DLEC first blames the incumbent so much lost time and service delays occur while trying to get at the root cause.

There are definitely occasions when we could, and do, scream “cheap foul”, but in almost every case, the rejection is indeed legal. It could have easily and economically been avoided by being more prepared – having developed sound business processes and tested them – before trying them out on the incumbent with real customer orders at stake.

Eliminating this opportunity for service delays must be a priority for all companies.

What's the solution? Get a coach:

Hire or rent subject matter experts (coaches) who thoroughly understand the Federal and State rules, as well as the specific operating environment, people and processes of your competitor(s). Have them audit how things work today; design changes to eliminate gaps, establish measurements and escalation procedures; and meet with the competitor's team to get acceptance of the new system.

Winning a customer and transferring them smoothly to your service is critical to success. Yet the amount of effort spent designing an effective process for doing just that pales in comparison to the effort spent designing the network, implementing software applications, or arguing lawsuits in many service provider companies. There are success stories, and in every case, you will note the professional cooperation between the companies - by design, not luck.

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