

10 Tips for Selecting a TEM Provider

As an agent, you are urged to offer a TEM solution as part of your business model. The question is, where to begin? Below is a checklist of considerations you can use when evaluating a TEM company with which to partner.

1. Is the TEM company or the agent handling the customer help desk?

It is very important to determine up front which company is handling help desk functions. If you have a customer with a BlackBerry e-mail issue, who is going to troubleshoot it? Who is going to handle the ESN swaps, ports, etc. Be aware, however, some TEM companies claim to offer help desk services, but only provide a help desk e-mail address for you to use.

2. Does the TEM company have an SaaS, BPO hosted solution or licensed service?

There is a distinct difference between these methods — software as a service, hosted and licensed — for delivering TEM services. Each has its pros and cons. I would recommend you carefully research these different methods and

decide which would be the optimal solution. For example, a SaaS typically has more robust capabilities, like allowing customers to upload their own invoices, audit their own bills, do specific expense allocations, etc. In contrast, a hosted solution doesn't typically offer this functionality. In addition, a licensed solution may require an install at your customer's location. Who will be doing this — you, your customer, or the TEM company? What is the additional cost for the installation?

3. Can the TEM company work with invoices that aren't electronic?

Some TEM companies only focus on enterprise accounts and only work with electronic billing. What happens when a subsidiary of your enterprise account is on a separate billing platform and only receives a paper bill? Your customer isn't going to be happy only being able to process a portion of its invoices.

4. Does the TEM company "normalize" their data regardless of carrier?

Let me explain: Some TEM platforms don't have the ability to commonly handle multiple carrier invoices. Their TEM platforms

were built specifically for one operator and typically don't work with other operators that group items differently on their invoices. For example, AT&T Wireless puts its credits under the "Other Charges" section while Verizon Wireless puts them under the "Monthly Service Charge" area. The last thing you want when analyzing and optimizing a customer's telecom environment is to go through a series of reports trying to match apples to apples. A good TEM platform should produce "normalized" reports regardless of carrier.

5. Who is managing the wireline/wireless inventory updates — the agent, their customer or the TEM company?

When a mobile user relocates to a new location/department, or an MPLS circuit is cancelled, who will be handling these types of moves/adds/changes? Some TEM companies have feature-rich platforms to handle this, but others don't even have an inventory management component in their solution. If this is important to your customer, be sure to understand how this will be handled.

6. Can the TEM company handle international invoices/inventory?

Some platforms don't have the ability to handle international invoices and inventory. If your clients have international offices, make sure this international ability is inherent to the platform. Some TEM companies claim they work with dozens of international carriers, but this doesn't mean they have experience in handling the invoices or auditing the bills.

7. Will the TEM company train the agent's customer on their specific software or processes, or is the agent expected to handle this responsibility?

TEM companies are still in an infancy stage; no company does more than \$50 million in TEM revenue, so their resources are limited. Most TEM companies do demos, presentations and training via webcast. The small amount of time allocated for the training is never enough for you to become an expert on the TEM platform and processes. Be sure your contract with the TEM company allocates a certain number of hours of free training/help desk per month, particularly during the first 90 days.

8. Does the TEM platform provide a workflow approval process for ordering/procurement?

Be sure you understand the platform's ordering/procurement capabilities. TEM companies handle this very differently. Ask how many approval levels there are and how rejections are handled, etc. For example, Joe, the truck driver, orders a specific mobile device. It then routes to Joe's manager, then up to the vice president. Can the vice president approve or reject the order, or does he/she have the ability to reject the first mobile device and approve an entirely different one without stopping the workflow? Also, you should ensure this activity is tracked and is part of the reporting.

9. Who is responsible for the billing for the TEM service?

Many agents get their revenue from carrier commissions and are not equipped to handle monthly detailed invoicing. If you don't have billing ability in-house, be sure to understand how the invoicing is handled and how much it will cost to have the TEM company process invoices for you.

10. Is the TEM company an agent too?

To nobody's surprise, some TEM companies now have indirect agreements with the carriers. If you are going to partner with a TEM company, be sure to understand upfront who is getting the commission from the carrier. TEM companies will now give a large discount on their professional services or platform costs if they get the credit under their carrier base. Some claim that their agreements with the carriers will allow you to get paid on an existing MSA, but only if you bring them into the deal. Remember, this is just a third-party company you are partnering with to bring an additional value to your solution — don't let them dictate your business model.

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