



Robert Carrigan,  
Chairman of the Chairmen's Committee

Ron Milton,  
Vice-Chairman of the Chairmen's Committee

Dan Morrow,  
Chief Historian

## CINGULAR SERVICE

### 2005 COMPUTERWORLD HONORS CASE STUDY

#### BUSINESS & RELATED SERVICES

A NATIONWIDE WIRELESS PHONE COMPANY PROVIDES CUSTOMIZED CALLING PLAN INFORMATION, FEATURE DETAILS, CALLING AREA MAPS, SAMPLE FIRST-MONTH BILLS, AND HANDSET DETAILS FOR ALL CUSTOMER ACCOUNT ACTIVATIONS AND RENEWALS IN ONE COLORFUL AND EASY TO READ DOCUMENT – GIVING CUSTOMERS THE INFORMATION THEY NEED MOST WHEN THEY NEED IT MOST. [20055403]

#### SUMMARY

Cingular Wireless sought to rollout an industry-unique solution to increase customer satisfaction, decrease calls to customer support related to questions about cellular service and features, and differentiate itself in the highly competitive cellular service industry. In this vain, Cingular developed the Cingular Service Summary (CSS) and has deployed it in over 1,000 Cingular retail stores. The CSS provides customized calling plan information, feature details, calling area maps, sample first-month bills, and handset details for all customer account activations and renewals in one colorful and easy to read document – giving customers the information they need most when they need it most.

#### APPLICATION

For cellular service providers, like Cingular Wireless, dealing with a high volume of calls from new customers asking about their phone bills, calling plan features, and handsets is normal. Cingular averages approximately three million new customer activations per year, and estimates that 60 percent of those customers will need to call customer service within the first 60 days of their service for assistance with their calling plans and features like voice-mail.

Cingular estimates that each phone call into their customer service center averages about 10 minutes and costs Cingular approximately six dollars – the strain this volume of activity placed on their staff and costs was overwhelming and demanded attention. Even more concerning, Cingular believed that some of those customers didn't wait to have their question resolved with a customer service representative, or at worst cancelled their service altogether.

Cingular analyzed the possible sources for this trend, and centered in on the customer's experience at the point-of-sale in Cingular's retail locations. Upon selecting a calling plan and handset, new customers were handed their service contract along with a number of different brochures with details on the features of their handset, customer support contacts, calling area map, voice mail, and other optional features. This proved to be an overwhelming amount of information for new customers to process at the point-of-sale, and customers were not retaining the pre-printed black-and-white brochures for later reference. When customers had questions about their service, their chosen source for information was to make the call to customer service. Cingular realized these brochures, which were meant to educate their customers on their plans and how to use them, were not doing the job.

Cingular saw an opportunity in the documentation it provides new customers at the point-of-sale. Focus groups and research were conducted within its customer support staff to identify the information that is most regularly needed by new customers. By pinpointing the most often asked for information, Cingular could begin creating a new way of delivering documentation at the point-of-sale that would more effectively communicate the most relevant information for customers, and would be more likely to be kept handy for future reference. Cingular quickly realized this document would need to be highly customized – delivering information specific to the customers calling plan and optional features. It would need to be easy to read and well organized. The document would also need to be color – as color documents tend to increase memory retention and be saved for future use. Lastly, the document had to be printed quickly – Cingular did not want to add time to the customer's visit to deliver this customized document.

Cingular developed the CSS with these key attributes in mind. As the Cingular representative works with a new customer to select their calling plan, handset, calling area, etc, the selections are entered into the point-of-sale terminal. When the selections are complete, the CSS is automatically tailored to the customer's selections and is printed on a Xerox Phaser 6250 network color laser printer. Able to print 26 pages per minute, and to

print on both sides of the page, the Phaser 6250 had the capabilities Cingular needed at a price Cingular could afford to deploy on a wide scale. On average, once the Cingular representative hits print, it takes between 30 and 45 seconds for the Phaser 6250 to print the full-color four-page CSS (two pages, front and back) and for the CSS to be retrieved from the printer and delivered to the customer.

From April to July 2004, Cingular rolled out the CSS solution to over 1,000 company-owned stores in the United States and Puerto Rico. Hard data on the effect of the CSS on calls to customer service will not be available until early 2005, but early indications are that the deployment has been a success in the areas Cingular focused most on. The CSS is quickly and reliably being produced at over 1,000 locations, and anecdotal evidence from customers has been very positive.

## **BENEFITS**

Before the deployment of the CSS, Cingular handed new customers a stack of pre-printed, black-and-white brochures to cover the various details of their new cellular phone and service. This included everything from the specific calling plan selected by the customer, calling area map, customer support information, voice-mail instructions, and optional features like Internet access or PC connectivity. The only customization involved was to make sure the customer got each brochure that applied to the service selections they made. These brochures did not inspire new customers to thoroughly read them, or keep them on hand to refer to them if they had questions.

By developing and implementing the CSS, new Cingular customers are being better equipped to quickly get up to speed on how to use and what to expect with their new service and handset. Initial feedback from customers who have received the CSS has been positive – they recognize the convenience of receiving an easy to read document tailored to the plan and handset they have just purchased, and feel armed with the information they need to understand their features and their monthly bills. The CSS has not been deployed long enough to report on its effects on calls into the call center and whether they have decreased, but the initial indications of customer satisfaction have been encouraging to the CSS project manager.

## **IMPORTANCE**

Information technology was at the heart of this project. In developing the CSS, Cingular found a way to take the information that its in-store representatives input into their terminals as part of all activations and combine it with information from the billing system to automatically build a customized document for the customer. This solution could not be implemented – and deployed to over 1,000 locations – without a solid IT staff and the use of rich client hardware and software, fast connectivity between retail locations and the home office, and fast color printers.

The importance of the project for Cingular was clear. With an average of three million new activations per year, and a per-call cost of six dollars, 60% of new customers needing to call customer service with basic questions was a model that was too inefficient to continue with. Further, with Cingular's merger with AT&T Wireless coming in late 2004, the number of new activations Cingular was going to process was expected to increase sharply – and the corresponding service costs would increase as well.

The cellular service industry is a competitive one, and vendors are constantly looking for ways they can maximize their own efficiencies, and create competitive differentiators in an effort to get a leg up on their competition. Cingular recognized the opportunity they had to win customer satisfaction and loyalty while decreasing their internal costs, and went for it with an industry-unique solution.

## **ORIGINALITY**

By taking a new approach to the documentation customers receive with new accounts and activations, Cingular is seeking to change and dramatically improve their customers' experiences. The CSS is a solution that is unique to Cingular among cellular carriers and the broader retail industry. As a solution for customized, print on demand customer documentation, it is the first solution of its kind to be deployed into a retail environment by any cellular carrier. In fact, Cingular had a hunch that this solution would be one that they had to get right the first time, because they expected other carriers to follow suit. As Cingular was considering its options and the specs it wanted to deploy for the CSS, one issue that came up was the use of color. Debate raged internally on whether the document should be printed in color. Ultimately, Cingular decided to print the CSS in color for a couple key reasons – color was key to positively impacting retention, the cost of color was not prohibitive, and they felt if they deployed the CSS in black-and-white, one of their competitors would soon upstage the CSS with a similar solution and that printed in color. Cingular was committed to getting the CSS right the first time, and not giving their competition a chance to easily improve upon their solution.

## **SUCCESS**

The CSS has been fully deployed to 1,017 Cingular Wireless retail locations in the US and Puerto Rico and is already in use at all of those locations for all new cellular service activations – the CSS was rolled out and adopted in a three month span from April to July of 2004. Cingular has gone on to make the CSS solution available to its network of agent sellers –independent companies that look and act like Cingular locations. Additionally, Cingular will be deploying the CSS to retail locations it has acquired as part of its merger with AT&T Wireless.

As mentioned earlier, statistical analysis on the effect of the CSS on the volume of calls going into customer service is not yet available. But, early reviews from employees and anecdotal evidence from customers has been overall very positive. Some of the anecdotal evidence has shown that customers are willing to spend a few additional minutes as part of the transaction to let the salesperson walk them through the CSS and explain their cellular plan and terms – an unusual circumstance in the retail environment where the customer’s time is precious and the goal is to minimize the time a transaction requires.

With three million new customer activations per year, and more to come with the merger with AT&T Wireless, Cingular knew they had to do something about the “60/60” rule. At six dollars per call into customer support, the cost of those calls adds up quickly. Cingular is betting that the CSS will impact the 60/60 rule, saving on Cingular’s customer support costs and increasing the satisfaction of their customers.

## **DIFFICULTY**

One challenge to the CSS project was to gain the support of Cingular regional executives. The CSS represented a significant investment in terms of development time, deployment logistics, and technology. John Hedges, the leader of the project team that developed and implemented the CSS, felt that the team was onto something with the correlation they had made between the bland product brochures Cingular distributed and the volume of calls they received that were not related to actual product or service support issues. Convincing the senior leadership at Cingular that investing the CSS solution would lead to savings in the form of decreased call volumes into their call centers was not a simple task – but was one that the CSS team was up to and was successful in accomplishing.

Deployment also proved a challenge that Hedges and his team were up to. Installing a solution that involves deploying client software, network printers, and in many cases specialized furniture to hold the printer in over 1,000 retail locations in the U.S. and Puerto Rico was a huge project. The CSS required extensive teamwork between Hedges’ staff at Cingular, the sales team at Xerox, and the VAR who was involved in the deal – ProSys IS. The close teamwork by the team at all three companies helped Cingular avoid major issues and execute a smooth development and deployment process for the CSS.