TrendzOwl

Telecom Expense Management 2020:

A Strategic First Step Toward Transformation

A TrendzOwl Executive Brief

In Partnership with Sakon

Stephen Loynd

TrendzOwl Opinion

Internal technology management teams face a host of strategic, mission-critical organizational requirements that must be prioritized. When it comes to telecom expense management (TEM), many enterprises have long engaged with assorted vendors to fulfill this critical need.

Too often, however, enterprises have struggled with ineffective legacy TEM implementations. There are too many nightmarish stories featuring disillusioned technology managers facing intense internal workloads, processes that require heavy lifting over long periods of time, and failures to deliver process updates or any short-term business value during engagement.

But organizations are not fated to endure such well-worn struggles. Truly strategic partnerships sharply define project parameters and ensure rapid, agile, and seamless execution. Ultimately, the enterprise stands to gain significantly more from the proper implementation of TEM than has long been assumed.

TrendzOwl notes the following key takeaways:

- **Committed Engagement.** Leading vendors map out projects comprised of iterative plans to satisfy unique process requirements. In engaged vendor-client relationships, incremental workstreams that break down processes based on specific needs achieve immediate and tangible results.

- **Delivering Value.** Effective TEM is about more than cost optimization – it improves business process outcomes. Flawless TEM implementation is 100% focused on user experiences and business outcomes rather than "checking off boxes" to satisfy vendor requirements.

- **A Focus on Strategic Tech.** While TEM is a mature market, it's extending into new areas, offering visibility and extending control across an ever-expanding telecom estate. In that sense, TEM is nothing less than one of the first essential steps toward digital transformation. But to fulfill on that promise, it needs to deliver strategic technology objectives rather than simple costs savings.

The Sakon Solution: Three Differentiators

Sakon (www.sakon.com) is a telecom and network technology provider that has helped global enterprises organize, understand, and intelligently manage their communications ecosystems since 2003. It serves over 200 enterprise customers and its technology is used by the world's top systems integrators and outsourced services providers. The company has over 700 employees with offices in the United States, Canada, the UK, and India, and is headquartered in Concord, Massachusetts.

What follows is a consideration of Sakon's TEM implementation process, which aims to accelerate business value and return on investment (ROI).

1. Agile Project Methodology

Sakon's TEM implementation process is unique. Unlike traditional TEM vendors, Sakon merges longstanding project management waterfalls with agile practices to break the implementation process into manageable workstreams that increase visibility, simplify individual processes and responsibilities, and accelerate the delivery of improved business results.

An Engagement Heavy Methodology

- **Trust.** Sakon focuses on project acceleration starting before any sales contract is signed. Customers are pressed to explore why they need TEM and what project success would look like, with conversations focusing on the overall implementation process and accompanying steps. The client's unique end-goals and ROI metrics take center stage, defining success criteria and creating workstreams to solve additional business challenges. Client implementation processes not only save money but satisfy critical business needs like greater process efficiency and reduced issues around compliance. The goal is to satisfy project objectives, achieve success, and deliver value as soon as possible, not simply stand up a TEM solution.

- **Data.** Sakon then starts collecting all necessary data. At the same time, performance pressures for customer project management teams is removed. Sakon then isolates required data into individual buckets and uses a combination of portal access and Letters of Authorization to gather key information – maximizing each customer's project resources and bandwidth. If additional data is needed along the way, specialized workshops allow Sakon to satisfy these requests by working directly with the specific teams/owners who possess the required access and insights.

- **Sprints.** Rather than embarking on a massive project that leaves customers in suspense as to proof of value or ROI until the solution goes live, Sakon's methodology breaks up TEM implementation into workstreams (sprints) associated with individual success criteria. Critical-path dependencies are removed such that a lack of progress in one area doesn't delay another or bring the entire implementation's timeline to a halt. All other workstreams

can continue to advance regardless of where one process sits. Customer's project teams stay motivated and energized throughout the process because they see the benefits of their work much sooner than they would in a traditional model – ensuring these solutions live up to the value that was initially promised.

2. Hands-On Configuration

Configuration can be a daunting and overwhelming process. Sakon therefore breaks it down into individual workshops to identify exactly what customer and human resources will be needed to complete each stage. These workshops also allow customers to demo smaller aspects of the overall solution before they go live – helping them view components in the context of Sakon's overall TEM implementation.

Workshops that Expand the Horizon

- **New Perspectives.** More than half of all organizations have been dissatisfied with a TEM provider's ability to demonstrate an understanding of crucial internal resource requirements. Sakon's approach addresses this problem head-on by calling out any upstream commitments involved, as well as the downstream business results that occur once resources have been committed. Workshops play a crucial role in changing project teams' perspectives, allowing them to look at implementation environments through a new lens rather than continuing to view them through a previous solution's scope.

- **Singular Approach.** A hands-on configuration style lets Sakon address specific customer success criteria and business needs by showing how tweaks to workflow enhance ROI once implementation is complete. A workshop driven TEM implementation also helps Sakon map out its processes and better align with a customer's existing TEM processes. Such an approach creates more satisfying solutions that accelerate value delivery by attaching specific people, dates, and documentation rules to individual aspects of the project. A mindset focused on a singular set of processes creates a more comprehensive TEM solution that not only fits together, but removes the potential for errors, reworks, and missed project timelines/objectives in delivering business value.

- **Ongoing Consultation.** Sakon structures its entire TEM implementation process according to industry best practices. Workshops allow customers to sign off on everything being planned and discussed as changes occur – ensuring planning, documentation, audit trails, and business rules are being performed up to customer standards at every step. Workshops also eliminate all ambiguity where performance and ROI are concerned, giving customers the ability to ensure satisfaction throughout rather than once complete. Customers are more likely to move with agility and be ahead of the game once the solution goes live. Unlike many other TEM providers, the relationship isn't over when a solution is standing, as Sakon provides expert consultation months after any TEM project goes live to ensure business objectives are being met.

3. Visibility & Engagement

Sakon emphasizes the importance of customer visibility and engagement throughout the implementation process. It delivers specific customer tools to report progress and resource allocation, such as: customer dashboards powered by Smartsheet; individual project plans; Risks, Assessments, Issues, and Dependencies (RAID) breakdowns; milestone tracking; a Sakon project scorecard (similar to traditional four-quadrant project management scorecards); ongoing project objectives reporting; accomplishments since the last reporting period; and risk/issue assessments inhibiting migration plan progress.

Enriched Project Management

- **Online Access.** Clients have online access to every project plan, giving executives and important stakeholders a single, easy-to-understand snapshot of progress details. A clear and thorough timeline of everything involved in a TEM implementation allows the client to see what's going on in their environment whenever they need to.

- **Anticipating Risk.** Too many TEM providers are hesitant to admit things aren't going as planned, making it impossible to take appropriate corrective action. Considering this legacy mindset, it's no surprise that almost 60% of today's organizations aren't satisfied with their TEM implementation partner's lack of proactive guidance. It's essential to conduct regular meetings with identified customer project leaders to make issues visible before they occur, to talk through processes and what's needed from the customer to resolve potential pitfalls. That way, both parties can manage project risks proactively to create solutions before issues arise.

- **Five Easy Pieces.** Sakon's implementation experts track five key project management metrics to ensure all teams are engaged and making progress throughout the process. Such an approach prioritizes team member involvement by naming owners for each specific task, giving customers visible engagement paths and open lines of communication. The "lessons learned" meeting at the end of the implementation process closes the circle on a continuous feedback loop that guarantees business value and positive ROI. In other words, commitment to engagement continues beyond the "Go Live" date – the implementation team is involved with every client for at least two months after a TEM solution goes live as a means to ensure a successful transition that maximizes individual user experiences.

Actions to Consider

Today, enterprise communications encompass everything from TEM and mobility management services (MMS) to network transformation. All aspects of the enterprise share vital themes, from information integration to user experience and the democratization of data. Companies therefore stand to gain significantly more from the proper implementation of TEM than has long been assumed. TEM is nothing less than the first essential step on the road to digital transformation.

TrendzOwl therefore suggests companies take the following approach to their TEM engagement:

Take a Holistic View

- Enterprise communications and other communications-related services are often fragmented across scopes and geographies. To help optimize dispersed estates through increased visibility and control, think strategically when it comes to TEM, rather than dismissing it as unrelated to the larger technology environment. TEM, MMS, and network transformation are all of a piece, so look beyond a "niche view."

Value Business Intelligence

- Remember that your engagement is about more than legacy TEM. It's about automating invoice acquisition, validation, and payment while driving cost savings, and tools should capture and interact with data in such a way that key trends and anomalies are revealed. Aspire to a comprehensive and fruitful view of lifecycle management and the entire telecom estate.

Forge Strategic Relationships

- Work with a partner that understands both the importance of a comprehensive view, as well as the nature of our rapidly changing world; their offerings need to be broad and deep, such that the partnership positions your organization for the inevitable disruptions of exponential technological change. Agility will be everything in tomorrow's world.

TrendzOwl provides market intelligence services on a set of overlapping areas that are key to the enterprise: business process outsourcing (BPO); enterprise mobility management (EMM); the customer experience (CX); the employee experience (EX); and digital transformation. The common theme animating our research is that we're living in extraordinary times. Exponential technologies and increasing expectations are super-charging an era of techno-consumerism. But even as the information and communications revolution spreads across the planet, globalization is coming under increased pressure. At a time of rapid change, our ability to anticipate the future seems limited. Are you prepared for our New Normal, whatever form it may take?

For more information, contact us through www.trendzowl.com or at 978.430.4307.