

## Hammerman: Third-Party Services Can Help Protect Telcos From 'Slamming' Claims

VoiceLog uses an automated system to ensure you switch only customers who really want you.

By [Ted Hammerman](#)

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March 14, 2001— Adding subscribers is a major part of growing a telephone company. But before you go running off to convince every Tom, Dick and Harry to switch to your service, know the rules. The FCC requires companies to obtain clear permission from new customers.

For example, a company might send a prospective subscriber a letter of agency, or LOA, to verify that he or she wants to adopt your service. The LOA is only valid if the subscriber signs and dates it.

A company also might solicit telephone business over the phone or electronically. It might confirm authorization by asking the subscriber to confirm the order by calling a toll-free number used exclusively for verification purposes.

Still another option: hiring a third-party verification service, or TPV, to confirm requested service changes. This may be an easy, cost-effective way to comply with FCC regulations in this area.

A leader in automated third-party verification services, VoiceLog LLC uses its applications to confirm long-distance, local-toll-, toll- and international-carrier changes; carrier freezes; and electric and natural-gas service changes. VoiceLog documents a customer's decision to change providers and uses an automated process instead of human operators.

VoiceLog claims to offer savings of up to 75 percent over its competitors, while providing immediate connections, 24/7 availability and instant digital-recording playback.

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Larry Leikin, VoiceLog's VP of sales, identifies several benefits for companies working with independent TPV providers:

- Compliance with state and federal regulatory requirements.

- Protection against false charges of slamming.
- Protection against costly civil and criminal penalties.
- Documentation of every customer agreement.

"The most important issue a customer should consider when entering a contract for TPV is stability and reliability of the vendor," Leikin says. "It's like medicine. You wouldn't knowingly go to a cheap, inexperienced doctor."

The TPV provider should have a thorough knowledge of federal and state regulations that are already on the books, as well as those being proposed.

What's more, the FTC and FCC have guidelines that the third-party services must meet. Make sure the service you choose is in good standing with these two regulatory bodies.

The TPV provider also should be large enough to handle your projected customer growth. Of course, it also should be stable financially: A TPV vendor that shuts its doors will disrupt your operations.

Choose your company carefully. The TPV provider's technology should be state-of-the-art to keep pace with its telecommunications clients. "Most importantly," Leikin adds, "a TPV vendor has to be up, running and accessible every time you need them."

The growth rate for third-party verification in telecom mirrors that of the residential long-distance market. In other words, it's pretty flat right now. But I believe this area has potential because of growth in the energy sector and continued telephone deregulation by the states.

Outsourcing work to a TPV provider may help your company reduce related operating expenses, and should help you to remain focused on your core business.

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