

HOLD THE LINE

USING STRICT SCOPE DEFINITION,
TURKEY'S LEADING MOBILE PHONE
COMPANY ANSWERS THE CALL
FOR A NEW BILLING SYSTEM—
EVEN AS COMPETITORS CIRCLE.

BY JANET LIAO



The Turkcell team (from front to back):
Sibel Ocal, PMP, Sercan Madak, Ebru
Yeldan, Zafer Sirin, Ugur Kizer, Cemile
Kaya, Erim Yagci, Oguzhan Ozunder,
Burak Baris Burkan

It was all over in a matter of hours—10.5 to be exact.

Turkcell Communications Services plc, Istanbul, Turkey, had switched 8 million of its 32.2 million mobile phone customers over to a new, simplified billing system without a single glitch. And, the project closed at approximately US\$270,000 under its original budget of nearly US\$1 million.

Much was on the line. Any problem could have sabotaged the company's 60 percent share of Turkey's digital cellular phone market. That advantage is huge as Turkcell and its rivals battle it out for their slice of the second-largest telecommunications market in Europe. And that market is growing fast—with more than 50 million consumers going mobile, according to *Business Monitor International*, a London, England-based business information publication. Not surprisingly, those numbers have pulled in some major international players, including Berkshire, England-based Vodafone Group plc and Dubai, United Arab Emirates-based Oger Telecom.

Looking for a competitive edge, Turkcell launched its Real Time Community Charging (RTCC) project in June 2006. The main goal was to streamline the way the company billed its community subscribers, a subset of the Turkcell's customer base that receives special discounts, promotions and cheaper intra-community calls. Before the project, customers who prepaid for their service had to wait from several minutes to several days to find out account information, such as balance updates.

"The variation was so huge that customers were getting really confused," says Sibel Ocal, PMP, RTCC project manager at Turkcell. This destroyed their perception of the advantage of community memberships. To truly see the benefit, subscribers had to realize the savings immediately, she says.

The 64-member project team turned to Ericsson's Charging System 3.0. The real-time telecommunications technology allows subscribers to instantaneously see how many minutes they've used via end-of-call notification messages on their phones, explains Nil Balek, multimedia account manager at Ericsson Turkey, Istanbul.

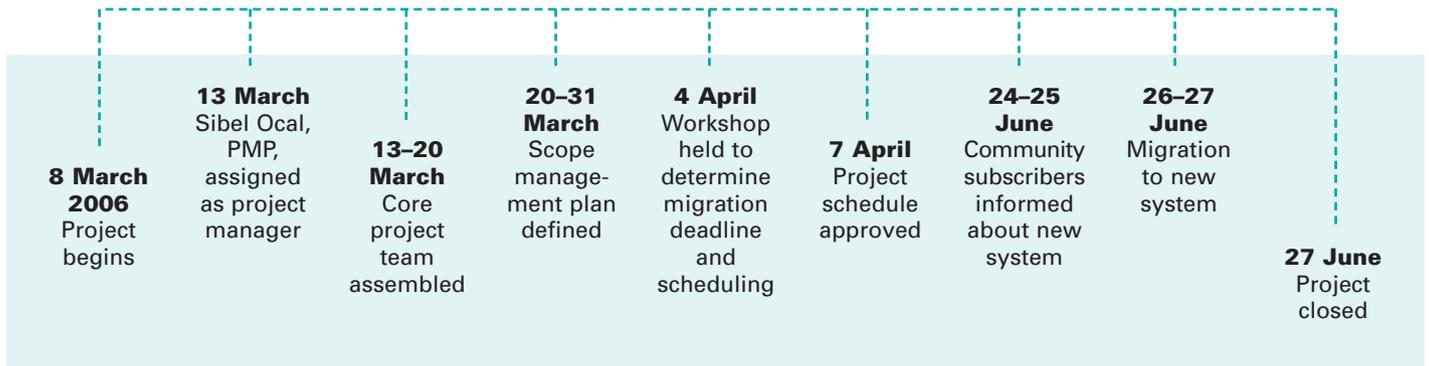
There was just one small problem: The technology had never before been implemented.



“This wasn't like previous times where we implemented a new technology after many countries [had done so]. We produced the first and only worldwide sample of its kind.”

—SIBEL OCAL, PMP, TURKCELL COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES PLC, ISTANBUL, TURKEY

CONNECTION TIMES



“This wasn’t like previous times where we implemented a new technology after many countries [had done so],” she says. “We produced the first and only worldwide sample of its kind.”

Community Outreach

When Ms. Ocal started implementing the RTCC system, she worked to eliminate variations in project management processes. Given the uncertainties, she defined a project plan based on *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*. “Since it would be the first worldwide implementation of the solution, no templates or guides were available,” Ms. Ocal says.

Turkcell wanted to have all customers migrate to the service by 26–27 June. Any later could mean a disruption to the billing cycle. But launching the new RTCC platform meant changes throughout various systems, including the ones that manage how customers are charged. The company would also have to alter the way it maintained call data records to accommodate the real-time feature.

Ms. Ocal formed a group to analyze the affected systems. Based on those findings, she requested additional resources to ensure both old and new architectural systems fused together without any problems.

The team knew too many changes could throw the project off schedule and risk disrupting service, so its scope definition list was divided into seven phases

that were crucial to the work breakdown structure:

1. Initiation
2. Business analysis
3. Technical analysis
4. Development
5. Test and acceptance
6. Implementation
7. Close out.

“[Because] the migration date was determined through several conflicting constraints, to change it would mean not only a shift in the [schedule] but extra development and test work, especially on the subscription systems,” Ms. Ocal says.

The project team also needed to allot time for the three-day process of notifying community subscribers via text message about the new system. The company planned to publicize the new billing system to its customers over the weekend of 24–25 June 2006. That way, should migration to the new system need to be postponed, subscribers wouldn’t receive conflicting messages.

Despite all the deadline pressure, Ms. Ocal still had to consider that team members were working on other projects. “Several projects go on simultaneously, and their priorities are subject to change according to a large set of parameters: the moves of rival operators, foreign operators, government, market changes,” she says.

Turkish regulations, laws and economic market conditions make the country an especially tough project environment.

“From a project management perspective, running projects in emerging countries such as Turkey is more challenging than in developed countries,” says Gulay Ozkan, managing director at consulting firm GEDS Business, Istanbul, Turkey. She is also Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region chair for PMI’s Information Technology and Telecommunications Specific Interest Group. “Limitations like time and budget, fierce competition and new players puts pressure on companies and project managers.”

For Ms. Ocal, getting the team to focus on just one project was a major challenge. “Fortunately for RTCC, we

Turkish regulations, laws and economic market conditions make the country an especially tough project environment.

had full support of upper management, and it made it a bit easier to deal with the variation in priorities,” she says.

To stay on schedule, the team informed Ms. Ocal of any issues that might lead to a delay. Team members recorded questions or problems through an online issue log. Stakeholders were kept in the loop through a communications management plan that included weekly status and performance reporting, presentations to upper management, and project updates and reports.

At the end of each project phase, the team conducted a gate review process to ensure deliverables met quality and cost requirements and that changes were kept to a minimum. Systems were tested well in advance for quality control. “Core project team members and managers of relevant departments obtained pre-paid test cards with community memberships to test if the calls and messages were being charged correctly and if the end-of-call notifications were functioning properly,” Ms. Ocal says.

A Swift Migration

On 26 June at 11 p.m., the RTCC switchover began with the closing of existing subscription channels. New billing features were activated, new call records were checked and the first data files were processed under the new systems.

“As the project manager, I did not have any tasks directly assigned to me because the migration was too technical for me,” Ms. Ocal says. Still, she stayed

up all night with the team members, not to micromanage, but to share the experience.

By 4:30 the next morning, the team opened up the new channels and began monitoring for any problems. Five hours later, the project was declared a success.

Serkan Ozturk, PMP, project sponsor and head of Turkcell’s project management office gives the team’s efforts a ringing endorsement. “RTCC was one of the best examples at Turkcell of projects that utilized [the] *PMBOK® Guide*” he says. “Under the guidance of a [Project Management Professional] PMP®-certified project manager, the entire project team got involved in the management and showed a sincere interest in learning about the project management profession and realized their importance as team members.”

Ms. Ocal helped foster that teamwork through informal meetings and social events outside the project environment.

Even now—more than a year after the project closed—the camaraderie is helping team members work more efficiently on other projects. “The team members today still refer to one another as ‘teammate,’ and the bonds formed during the RTCC project are still in effect,” she says.

That can’t hurt as the Turkcell team gears up for yet another new technology implementation. The next go-round: 3G networks, which will offer better and faster services and mobile bandwidth capable of providing video calls.

Just when they think they’ve mastered one technology—along comes another one. **PM**