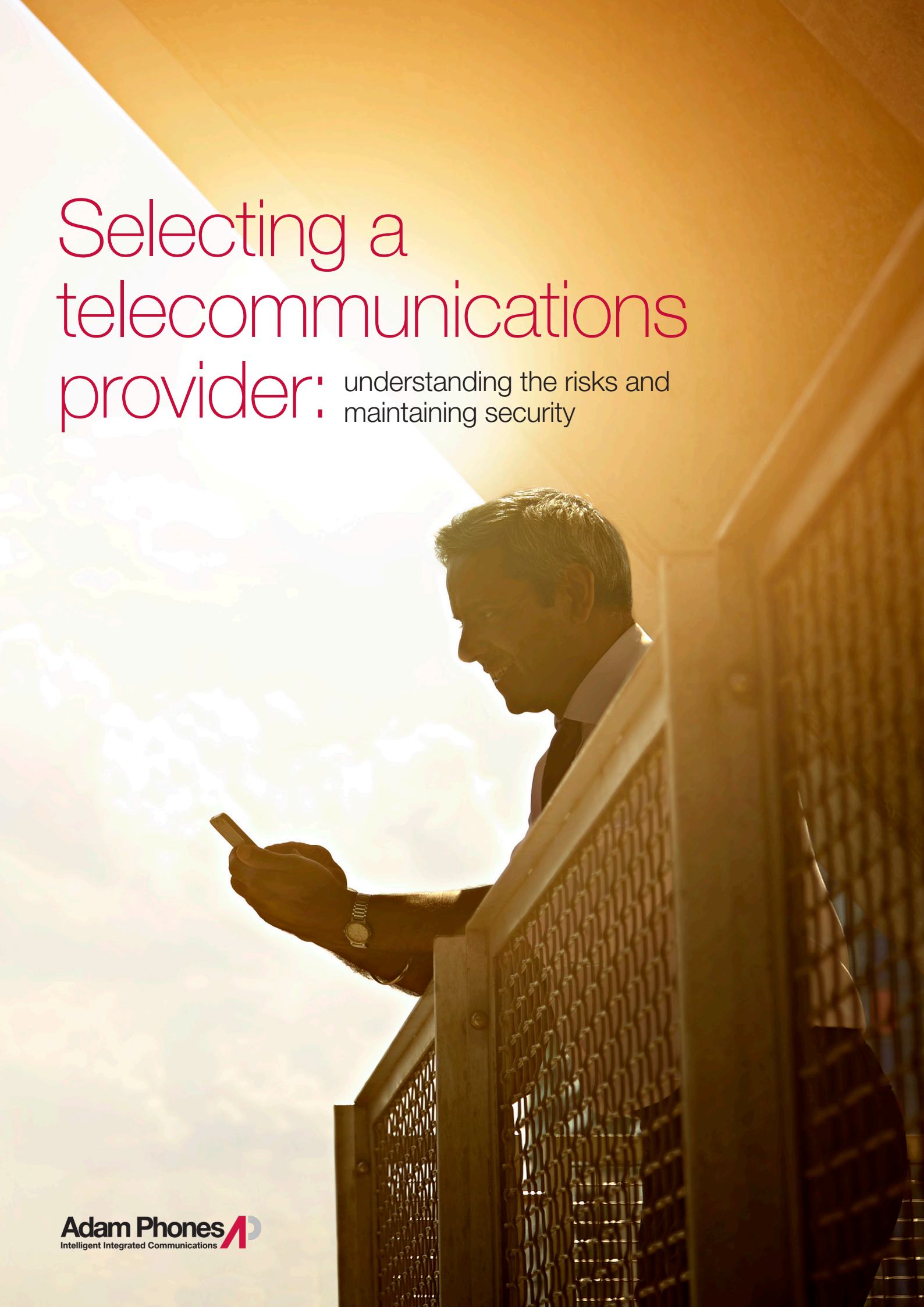
Selecting a telecommunications provider: understanding the risks and maintaining security



Adam Phones
Intelligent Integrated Communications

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In today's connected mobile society, we increasingly carry a significant online footprint – larger than perhaps we realise. We're continuously communicating and storing information online and connecting on the move through our smartphones and tablets.

Today's security landscape

While advances in technology make communicating easier, they also put the security of our information at risk. Preventing some of these threats has become easier; for example:

- We secure our mobile devices through the use of Mobile Device Management or Enterprise Mobility Management solutions (such as BlackBerry or Airwatch)
- We keep our smartphone and tablet software up to date, and
- We avoid the use of public WiFi hotspots that track our browsing usage and sell our user behaviour data to marketing and analysis companies

There are, however, less obvious threats - especially to those for which security is of the utmost importance - that can have a bigger impact. Most notably how your data is stored, managed and used by your telecommunications network or provider.

We often neglect to consider how much information about who we call and where we are passes through the mobile networks we use. To provide you with your service, your telecoms provider is likely holding your:

- Call data records (used to generate your invoices by every network or provider). These detail all the numbers you call, the time each call takes place, the duration of the call, the country you are in and the country you are calling
- Contact information for your own personnel/staff that manage your account (such as names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses)
- Billing information

Considering your supplier

Holding data like this poses a risk to any organisation, and therefore it is crucial to select a supplier that ensures your sensitive information is handled securely. Some key factors to consider when choosing a mobile network or provider are as follows:

- A telecoms network or service provider will hold all of your call records, and there will be a legal requirement for them to retain those records for a minimum period (typically five years). A reputable telecoms provider will store these records securely in Tier-1 data centres that reside in the country native to the mobile network.
- Outside of the call data, client information should be stored in a secure 'Customer Relationship Management' system, and access to it limited only to the staff employed to support the family office. This ensures an 'eyes only' approach to protecting contact information, client addresses, contractual information, legal documents, etc.
- You may wish to censor information on your telephone invoices, and to achieve this you will need a provider who maintains their own billing system. This ensures that private, fully redacted billing for sensitive lines can be provided to you.
- Outsourcing, and specifically offshoring, should not be permitted for any element of the service - this only introduces risks to the security of client data. Therefore use a provider who delivers and supports your connectivity services from within the UK.
- Providers with 'call centre' help desks are not advised for family offices and HNWIs. High staff turnover figures and influxes of junior/inexperienced staff introduce risks to the safety of client information. Small, dedicated 'concierge-style' teams where the client has named contacts for support are recommended.
- Your provider should have a rigorous and documented approach to security. This should encompass staff training, contracts of employment, internal documentation and threat workshops/assessments.

It is important to spend time performing due diligence on any provider you are considering entrusting your telecommunications services to. A reputable provider will have heritage in your sector, and will be able to supply examples of how they deliver on these requirements.

About Adam Phones

Adam Phones is an award-winning provider of leading-edge connectivity solutions. For nearly 30 years it's been creating bespoke, high performance connectivity solutions for clients worldwide; integrating advanced products and services from the best carriers and networks.

These clients are from a wide range of industries including high net worth individuals, family offices, hedge funds, wealth managers, embassies and government agencies. Its customers regard Adam Phones as a flexible, responsive, discrete and invaluable extension to their management teams - entrusting it with their critical communications.

To discuss how we can help you, call us on 0800 123000