Q. We are committed to placing an Un-interruptible Power Supply between our Definity G3iV6 (MCC) and the public power grid. There is one big obstacle, however. The plug on the Definity is a huge 50-Amp monster, and an UPS that will accommodate it will cost in the neighborhood of $7,000.00. We only have two carriers in the MCC. Could we get away with changing the plug on the Definity to a 30-Amp connector? This would reduce the cost of the UPS to about $2,500.00.

A. Your reasoning seems sound for the power requirements of the Definity, and certainly from a cost standpoint. After having said that, I would caution you against it, as you will be left with a non-standard system that no maintenance company would cover in the case of power failure, and if you were ever to expand it's size by another carrier or two, you would more than likely experience some sort of failure. You are on the verge of down-designing a well designed system, and the results may or may not be what you wish or expect. Please let me know how it turns out if you choose to do it, as I'm sure other readers are interested in this one.

Q. Are there any reports in the Definity system that show the total daily amount of time a user is on the phone? I need help in defining job responsibilities, and this is an unknown that is key to the process.

A. There are two ways to do what you want, but unfortunately neither is "built-in" to the Definity. Both of them require adjunct PC's running applications that get information from the Definity. ACD (Automated Call Distribution) does that in conjunction with CMS (very expensive) or BCMS-Vu (not cheap, but not unreasonable) applications. This requires that the user log into the system every time they wish to take calls, and log off when they don't. This can raise additional management issues, and is quite expensive and time-intensive. Probably the easiest and least costly would be a good Call-Accounting application that gets it information from the CDR (SMDR) output of your Definity. Each time a call is completed, a line of information is recorded. Part of that information is time-online and the extension number. You can get a total of time-online by extension report from any good Call-Accounting application. I'm not an expert in that field, but a few I know of that claim to be good and full-featured are MicroCall, Callwhere, Review, and several others that escape my aging gray-matter. If you have a moderate Microsoft Access or Visual Basic programmer on staff, it's not that difficult to program either of them to collect the information from the CDR output and massage the data to provide a report to do what you are looking for. Some ten years ago I did that same thing and it wasn't all that hard to accomplish.

Q. A couple of times in the recent past you have mentioned the need to upgrade from our Definity G3iV1 (tape backup media) to at least a G3V4 for reasons of limited availability of the tapes and tape-drives. Shouldn't that be covered under our maintenance agreement with our service provider?

A. That's true in theory, but then there's practicality, isn't there? I'm not sure who may be still covering "tape media" versions of software, as the OEM abandoned them years ago. My company still does, but with the caveat that if the covered hardware is no longer available it will be replaced with hardware of equal or newer type. Which means that if I am presented with a tape or tape-drive failure on one of my client's systems, I will gladly replace it with newer equipment, but the HUGE problem is that without a good backup tape from which to stream the data to the newer (flash) media, the system will have to be programmed completely by hand. This takes days. MANY days. Maintenance Agreements are for hardware. Programming is software. That means billable hours; DAYS of billable hours. Keeping a good backup of translations is a System Administrator's responsibility, not the hardware-covering service company's, and when all copies have been lost or destroyed beyond usability, you will be faced with providing your service company all the information necessary to reprogram the system, plus explaining to your management why the system will be out for days. None of this is mentioned merely as a possibility. We had personal involvement twice in 2003 for this very situation, and neither time was it very pretty. Both times the system was restored from translation backups stored by us that were years old, so there was a lot of catching up to do. Do you or does your service provider even have any old backups? Probably not. If you don't choose to upgrade before it happens (notice I didn't say *if*), you will surely get an upgrade after it happens, but at the cost of days of lost time, and probably somebody's job.