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About Phone Service: Why Use the Major Players?

By Jonathan Kraft

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There are currently 6 major players in the local and long distance phone market in the US: Sprint, AT&T, MCI, Verizon, Qwest, and SBCI. Most people are ignorant of the fact that when they sign up for their local phone service and long distance, that they can do something other than automatically let the company that sets up their phone line(s) be the one to actually run the service.

But they should become more educated about it. Why? Because according to recent reports, going with any of the major players (mentioned above) is often more expensive than signing up for a local carrier.

When it comes to saving money on your phone bill, it is true that across much of the US, going with one of the major players' competitors will save you money. This is not true in all areas—namely rural areas with less access to multiple phone companies. (In Qwest's 14 state region, Qwest competitors have access to about 312,000 lines, compared with Qwest's 2.6 million lines.)

However, in many urban and sub-urban areas, there are a variety of smaller carriers who can often help you save money every time you pick up the phone. But with so many companies and different promotions in every advertisement, how do you find out which company will save you the most?

The first step in saving money on your phone bill is to look for the best possible rates on your long-distance and local service.

Consider these tips:

Know your calling habits— when you call and where most of your calls are going to. If you make many long distance calls, find a plan with a monthly fee, but a low charge per minute. If most of your long distance calls are made in the evenings or on weekends, then find a plan where the rates are specific for those times. If you want to make calls to Europe, decide whether it's cheaper to use a phone card, or to switch to a company which offers more affordable rates. If you make most calls within your own area code, look for a plan that offers the lowest rates for instate service and instate toll calls.

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Shop around periodically. It's up to you to stay informed. Look at the newest calling plans and compare rates among companies often. You can find information about various calling plans on long distance telephone company web sites.

However, if you don't want to spend hours surfing through site after site with no side-by-side rate comparison, the best source of information is through a rate calculator site. These sites often allow you to enter the first 6 digits of your phone number, or your state, and your calling habits. They then compare rates and service from as many as 50+ phone companies offering service in your area.

Be aware of the scams and fine print. Among these are "slamming," where a person's phone service is switched to another carrier without permission. It is also important to understand the fine print. If you are at all uncertain about a plan being offered via a telemarketer, ask to have information outlining the

plan sent to you, or ask for a web address that you can look at on your own time. If the sales representative is hesitant to give you more information, you should probably thank the salesperson for their time and promptly hang up.

Offers of free phone cards or limited-time, super-low rates should also ring a warning signal. There is nothing illegal about these kinds of offers; they can just be confusing to a consumer who does not read carefully or fully understand the details.

Finally, remember that phone companies are out there to serve you. You are, after all, the customer. If you are being a good customer and paying your bills on time (and giving your repair person a hug, or a beer/coke/iced tea whenever they fix your lines), then the company should be providing you with a high level of service and support, as well as affordable and competitive rates. If the company is not, then you should let them know by switching your phone service.

Even if you think that you are receiving good service, you should keep yourself educated on the rates and services available to you, because part of a company offering good service is a company that offers a competitive rate.

There are many other ideas for keeping your phone bills low, but really, the best way to know if you are getting the best rate is just to check regularly on a rate comparison site. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, many people are ignorant of their own ability to search for less expensive phone service.

Jonathan Kraft worked for one of the 'Major Players' mentioned in this article for over a year before launching his own web businesses. In addition to a variety of other projects, he currently helps people save money on phone cards, local phone service, and a variety of other telecommunications through the web site: www.phone-call-advice.us

Cellular Phone Deals

By Levetta Rivera

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People are flocking to cell phones these days like bees to honey. The many cellular phone deals being offered by most of the major cellular phone companies are helping to fuel the fire. Many consumers might not have jumped on the cell phone band wagon so fast were it not for the great cellular phone deal they received.

Cellular phone deals make it more affordable for consumers to join the wireless phone revolution. Many of the mobile phone companies are offering such deals as free phones, free mobile phone accessories, free minutes or cash-back. Deals such as these can save you hundreds of dollars on your new cell phone service.

One of the best ways to find a great cellular phone deal is to do a search on the internet. This way you can compare all of the deals being offered from the comfort of your home with no pressure from a salesperson. In most cases you will be able to sign up for your service plan and have your free phone and other specials included in the deal delivered right to your home!

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