

How to Choose the Best Local Telephone Service



Communities for Telecom Rights

There are many telephone companies and telephone services for you to choose from.

You can save money by choosing the best local phone service

Compare prices. Local phone service prices will include the following:

Set-up Fees: A one-time fee for starting up your service may apply.

Flat or Measured Rate: Usually, you have two choices for making local calls, either a flat rate or a measured rate. With a **flat rate** you pay a higher monthly fee, but you can make unlimited local calls. With a **measured rate** you pay a lower monthly fee, but you have a limited number of calls, and you pay for each minute after you go over the limit.

Tip: Which is better for you, a flat rate or a measured rate?

- ◆ If you make many local calls, a flat rate would probably be cheaper.
- ◆ If you do not use your telephone much for local calls, a measured rate would be cheaper.

Toll calls*: Toll calls are calls to nearby cities. They are not local calls, even though your local phone company handles them. Toll calls are more expensive than local calls, and they can even be more expensive than long-distance calls. It may be more expensive to call a city twenty miles away than to call all the way across the country!

Tip: It may be cheaper for your long-distance company to handle your toll calls instead of your local phone company. Compare the prices for toll calls. If it is cheaper, you can ask your long-distance company to take over toll calls. (See the Fact Sheet about "Long-Distance Service.")

Choose only the additional features that you need

Ask yourself: Do you really need a particular feature?

Additional features, like Call Waiting, Caller ID, etc., usually cost extra. You can choose to pay for the feature every time you use it or pay a monthly fee for unlimited use of the feature. Ask yourself: Will you ever use it and how often will you use the feature? Compare the prices and services.

Samples of additional features:

- ◆ **Call-Waiting** - While you are on the telephone with one person, Call-Waiting alerts you about another incoming call with a tone sound. You can then answer the incoming call while placing the first call on hold, and switch between the two calls.
- ◆ **Caller Identification (ID)** - Caller ID allows you to see the phone number of people calling you before you answer the phone. **You must have a telephone that has Caller ID technology to be able to use Caller ID.**
- ◆ **Caller ID Blocking** - Caller ID Blocking lets you block your phone number from being identified by people with Caller ID when you call them. **By law, this service must be provided free of charge. Be careful!** Caller ID Blocking does not block your phone number when you call toll-free ("1-800") numbers.
- ◆ **Last Call Return** - Also known as "Star 69." When you dial * - 6 - 9 your phone calls the last

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number that called you, even if you did not answer the call. **Be careful:** There is usually a charge each time you use the *69 feature.

Telephone features you use by dialing “* ” often have a per-use charge.

You can use many features by dialing a star (*) and then the code for the feature, even if you have not ordered the feature from your phone company. However, every time you use the feature, you will pay a charge. You can also choose to pay a monthly charge for unlimited use of some features.

Do not pay for features you do not need. Some companies offer special packages of features. You need to decide if you really will use these additional features that cost more than basic services.

Tip: Sometimes phone companies will try to sell you a “package” of features, claiming that buying the package is cheaper than paying for each feature separately. **BE CAREFUL!** Do you really need all the features? If not, you may be paying more than you would if you bought only the services that you need.

Would “bundled services” be better for you?

Bundled services means that many different telephone services (local service, long-distance service, wireless service, Internet service, etc.) are provided by a single company, usually with just one bill.

Ask yourself:

- ◆ Which would be better for you, bundled services, or receiving different services from different companies? Compare the prices and services.
- ◆ Do you really need all these services?

You may also be eligible for low-cost local telephone service.

Universal Lifeline Telephone Service (ULTS)* is available to provide low-cost local telephone service to eligible low-income households. (See the Fact Sheet about the “ULTS” program).



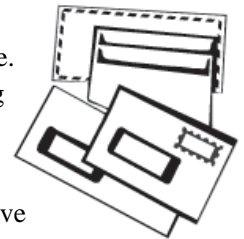
Glossary

ULTS- ULTS is a discount on local phone charges for low-income households. See the Factsheet on Universal Lifeline Telephone Service.

Terms of service- These terms control how your telephone service works, how you are charged for your service, and other issues related to your telephone service.

General Tips

- ◆ **Read the fine print.** Look at the fine print on any written materials related to telephone service. It may contain terms of service* that you do not know about. Ask questions if there is something that you do not understand.
- ◆ **Immediately check and save your bills.** As soon as you receive your bill, check it over carefully to see if there are any charges for services you never ordered or calls you never made. Save your bills for several month, in case you need to dispute charges.
- ◆ **It is your right to question charges.** If you think there is a charge on your phone bill for something you did not do, you have a right to question the charge.
- ◆ **Be careful about giving personal information over the phone.**
- ◆ **Ask if the company offers information in your native language.**



*refer to the glossary