

BUDGET STRETCHING IDEAS TIPS TO HELP YOU

Dialing Directory Assistance: A Lose-Lose Proposition

(NAPSA)—Do you ever dial 411 or 555-1212 to find a phone number or get an address? Do you know how much you are being charged for these calls? Take a look at your next phone bill. You may be shocked to discover that telephone companies have quietly raised directory assistance rates, tapping your pocketbook for an additional \$5.6 billion annually.

Since the 1996 deregulation of the telecommunications industry, telephone companies have been attempting to gain revenue by increasing the cost of other products and services, such as directory assistance.

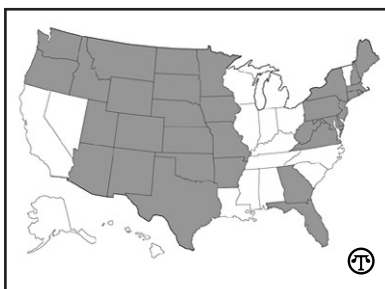
In fact, within the last 10 months, local and regional carriers in more than 30 states increased directory assistance fees to as much as \$1.25 per call. Likewise, national providers, AT&T, MCI and Sprint raised fees to \$1.99.

Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) stated, "If people knew that it was \$2.00 to call directory assistance, rather than a dime or a quarter, they might look it up themselves."

Fortunately, customers have a variety of choices in how to find a phone number, such as pay to call a directory assistance operator, use a print directory or go online.

According to an NUA Internet survey, more people are online in North America than in any other region of the world. Industry analyst Parks Associates reports that by summer 2002, more than 15 million U.S. households will have an always-on, high-speed connection.

Customers, clearly motivated to save time and money, are racing to online directory services as their directory assistance replacement. Consumer advocacy groups nationwide are also recommending online directories because they offer national coverage and unlimited free use.



States (in gray) experiencing 2001 directory assistance increases: average cost per call now \$1.35.

"Avoid paying high prices for minimal services such as directory assistance—look up numbers yourself or use a Web site such as www.switchboard.com," states Holly Anderson, Director of Communications for the National Consumers League.

What can be done?

With telephone directory assistance costs up to \$1.99 per call for a single listing, consumers and businesses across the nation continue to search for solutions or alternatives. Here are some tips to help you save:

- **Scrutinize your phone bill**—Understand exactly what you are paying for.

- **Call the state Public Utility Commission (PUC)**—Find out if your service provider has applied to increase rates in your area.

- **Break the "411" habit**—Encourage employees and family members not to dial directory assistance.

- **Utilize online directories**—Switchboard.com provides users unlimited look-ups, national coverage, reverse look-up, maps and directions.

Money magazine editor Jean Chatzky states, "The cheapest way to look up a number...is by using a service like Switchboard.com on the Internet. It's free."



Editor's Note: Map Data Sources: PUCs and telephone service provider Web sites.