

Making The Right Choice In Telephone Providers

(NAPSA)—With more choices in the marketplace than ever before, making a smart choice when it comes to selecting a telephone provider can be difficult. Consumers are constantly bombarded with messages of the lowest rates and best deals, but companies that only talk dollars and cents savings rarely talk about saving you time or simplifying your life. How do busy consumers make informed decisions about which service provider is right for them? And, is the low-cost provider always the best choice?

Think about the following when shopping for telecommunications services, regardless of which provider you choose.

Consider plans that save you a "bundle" of time and effort. One timesaving benefit some companies offer is the ability to manage all your communications needs, including wireless, Internet, local and long distance service through one company. This can simplify your life by allowing you to call one person for all your customer service needs and allow you to pay one bill every month, instead of receiving multiple bills for individual services.

Take a critical look at promotional offers. Many companies may offer cut-rate bargains during a promotional period, but you should be aware that those prices are often subject to change after the promotion ends. It's best to read the fine print, and ask questions that may help you uncover hidden fees.

Look for a dependable service provider. The remarkable technology boom of the 1980s and 1990s has given consumers greater choices when it comes to selecting a service provider. Reliability and financial stability, along with a company brand that you can trust, are key factors that should be at the top of every consumer's list when choosing a communications provider.

Conduct an audit of your communications needs. People use their phones for different purposes. You may take full advantage of technologies like the Internet, wireless e-mail and voice mail, while your grandmother may primarily use the phone for keeping in touch with

3 Questions to Ask Yourself

Simplicity—Can you get all of your communications services from one company and pay one bill?

Freedom—Do your calling plans restrict when you call your friends and family?

Economical—90 percent of customers use less than 300 minutes of long distance a month. Are you paying for a service you don't need or use?



family. It is important to evaluate when and how you stay connected to your friends, family and co-workers in order to ensure the company you select can meet all your needs.

Compare apples to apples. Now that you have an inventory of the services you need, you're equipped to make sound comparisons between different providers. It's important to understand that your existing company probably wants to keep you as a valuable customer. So, before making a hasty decision when presented with an offer from another company, ask your current provider if there are alternatives to your current solution that will better meet your needs.

Handy Checklist

Here's a handy checklist so you won't be caught off guard the next time a company calls asking you to switch your phone service:

- Seek a provider that can simplify your life.
- Prepare a list of services you frequently use or want to subscribe to.
- Determine which services you need and rank them in order of importance.
- Find out if these services are included in the offered price.
- Inquire about how long the prices offered will last to ensure the offer isn't just a promotional price.
- Investigate the company's customer satisfaction record.

To check on the reliability of a service provider, visit the Better Business Bureau's Web site at www.bbb.org or for advice on choosing a service provider, visit the National Consumers League's Web site at www.nclnet.org.