



# Choosing a Local Telephone Provider

You have probably heard by now that you may have a choice in what company provides your telephone service.

## What does this mean for you?

Think about how you select a home, car, bank or long-distance company. Most likely these decisions required some thought and careful consideration. You may now be able to choose among local telephone service providers as well.

## How should I prepare?

Prepare yourself by doing your homework and using the following guidelines provided by the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC).

Review recent telephone bills to determine your usage patterns. By discovering how you and your family utilize the service, you will begin to see which services you need and you can decide whether it makes sense to consider switching providers or plans.

## Questions to ask yourself

- ▶ How many local calls does your household make each month?
- ▶ What is the duration of those calls?
- ▶ Are calls frequently missed due to a busy line?
- ▶ How many active telephone users are in your household?
- ▶ Are calls made for business or personal purposes?
- ▶ Are you an Internet user? Do you use dial-up service or broadband service?
- ▶ How many telephone lines are in your household?
- ▶ What services do you currently have?
- ▶ Are you on a flat-rate calling plan (unlimited calls at a set monthly rate), yet you make only minimal calls per month?
- ▶ Or are you a message-rate consumer (a limited number of calls at a fixed monthly rate) yet you

exceed the designated number of calls per month?

- ▶ Or are you a measured rate calling plan (with rates based on the number of completed calls, distance, duration and time of day)?
- ▶ Are you paying for services that you do not use?
- ▶ Are you penalized for exceeding the limits placed on a particular service?

Share the information you have gathered from analyzing your monthly bill with other members of the household. Find out what their needs are and discuss frequently used features and desired services. Decide which ones are most important by ranking them and then make an informed decision based on your findings.



Then request information from all carriers providing service in your area (including your current provider). Ask specific questions about costs and services and pay attention to information communicated by company representatives. Tell them that you are considering switching your telephone

service and would be interested in what their company has to offer. It's best to get the information in writing. Internet sites also provide useful information.

If you know friends or family who are customers of the company, ask for their opinions and experiences.

Compare the information provided by all providers, including your current carrier. Remember that it is important to reference recent information provided by that carrier. Take care to fully compare similar plans and services.

## Be sure to get answers to these questions:

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- ▶ Are you free to change providers at any time?
- ▶ Is there a fee to change providers?
- ▶ Is there a cost to sign on with the company?
- ▶ How will you be billed?
- ▶ Does the company offer calling plans that meet your needs?
- ▶ Does the company provide services and features that meet your needs?
- ▶ What differentiates the company: Price? Added benefits? (Remember that added benefits, if not used by your household will be money wasted).
- ▶ Have you ever contacted your current carrier for repair service? How long did the company take to respond to your request? Were you satisfied with the service?
- ▶ Are customer service representatives available 24 hours a day or does the company utilize an automated service?
- ▶ Are representatives helpful and educated about the services?
- ▶ Do they make suggestions that apply to your household?
- ▶ Are they courteous?
- ▶ Do they act as though they want your business?
- ▶ Does the company have procedures or policies to address billing discrepancies?
- ▶ Are there penalties, such as early termination fees, for discontinuing your service?
- ▶ How many consumers does the company serve and how large is the service territory?
- ▶ If you or a family member needs financial assistance, does the company have a program in place that will provide discounted service?

- ▶ Is there a program for customers with medical needs, such as a repair priority program?

## Switching service providers

Remember when switching from one local telephone provider to another, contact your long-distance service provider. If you sign up for a different long-distance service with your new local company, contact your old long-distance company to close your account as well as letting your old local telephone company know of the long-distance switch. If you do not sign up for new long-distance service, you still need to contact your current long-distance company to advise them of the switch to your local service and make sure your long-distance calling plan follows you.

## Additional Notes

Although you may ultimately decide to stay with your current provider - based on convenience, loyalty, service or price - the OCC recommends researching your options. If you decide to switch to a different local telephone company, **do not cancel your current service**. Most companies will not pick you up as a customer if you are not already with a provider. AT&T Ohio and Verizon customers may want to refer to the OCC's fact sheets "[Comparing Your Local Telephone Choices](#)," to see what other telephone companies are offering services to them. Consumers may access this fact sheet online at [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org) or by calling OCC toll free at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622).

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts. The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues and resolves complaints from individuals. To receive utility information, brochures, schedule a presentation or file a utility complaint, residential consumers may call 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free in Ohio or visit the OCC Web site at [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org).

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**For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel:**

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