

Tips for Choosing a Cellular Phone Provider

There are many cell phone service providers looking for your business by advertising their reliability, customer service reputation and cell phone deals. How do you choose the right one for you?

Compare cell phone companies

Look at customer satisfaction, turnover rate, and digital network. Can you roam on other networks? Make sure the basics of your cell phone service are covered before you start discussing special deals or gadget phones.

Ask your friends around your neighborhood and city what phone company they use and if they are satisfied.

Questions to ask before signing any cell phone contracts:

- *Which areas can I use my phone without having to pay roaming fees?* Ask for a map showing your "home areas" and "roaming areas."
- *What areas does your company provide service?* Ask the salesperson to note, on a map, where you can have enough signal strength to make and receive calls.
- *Do I have a free trial in which I can try the phone and service out?* Most cell phone companies now offer a free trial where you can make sure you have the service and coverage you need. If you don't like the service, you can back out of your contract without having to pay a stiff penalty, although you may be responsible for an activation fee and minutes used during the trial period.
- *How long am I contracted to do service with this company?* The average contract is between one and two years. Ask about any Early Termination Fees (fee for canceling before the end of your contract.) The average cost of an ETF is between \$175 - \$200.
- *Can the company extend my contract for any reason?* Cellular companies may extend the terms of your original contract or obligate you to a new contract if you modify or change your pricing plan, add additional features, or upgrade to a new phone. Make sure you ask if you will be extending your contract when you make the changes to your account.
- *How many minutes are included in my calling plan and when can those minutes be used?* Different types of minutes include Peak (daytime), Off-peak (night and weekend), Shared, and Rollover minutes. It is common to be billed later for calls placed using a third party cellular tower.
- *What additional fees will be included on my bill?* It is not uncommon for your cellular bill to have an additional \$10 - \$20 worth of fees and surcharges. Examples of these additional taxes, fees, and surcharges include City, County, State, and Federal Taxes, Number Portability Recovery Fee, and E911 Recovery Fee.

Steps for Successful Cell Phone Ownership:

- Read the contract, along with the terms and conditions before signing. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something in the contract. Also, if the representative promises something that's not in your contract, make them put it in writing. This will help avoid future "he said, she said" arguments.
- Check your monthly billing statements closely. If you don't think you are being billed correctly, call customer service immediately to clarify the terms of your plan. If the bill is still incorrect, ask for the representative's name and ID number, and ask them to put a note on your account detailing the dispute.
- It may seem cheaper to work with a dealer or reseller of the phone service, but it can cost you money in the long run. The consumer is usually required to sign an additional agreement with the dealer or reseller, as well as one with the service provider, forcing you to pay two Early Termination Fees if you cancel service before your contract ends.
- Be cautious when considering the purchase of cellular phones or service via the Internet, auction sites or third party resellers. Numerous third party dealers state they can offer cheaper discounts on phones, but you may pay in the long run. The phone you purchase may not end up working with your service or there may be hidden activation and termination fees involved.
- Consumers are strongly encouraged to research the company before doing business with them. Useful information may be found from Internet search engines, the Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.com) or the Kansas online business entity search (<https://www.kansas.gov/bess>).

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