

The 7 Most Important Questions to Ask Your New Telephone Provider BEFORE You Switch to Them.

With scores (300+ phone companies and 500+ Internet Service Providers) operating in Australia and all competing very, very hard for your business, its no wonder that the Telecommunications industry has become a minefield of offers.

With such competition around, Australian Telco's are becoming masters at creating product offerings with "unlimited perceived benefits" that too often simply fail to deliver on their promises. The aim of this report is to arm you with a few simple questions that you can ask the sales person who is pitching to you, in order to help you clear the smoke and mirrors that are swirling around you.

Our bill analysis team provided the research behind these questions. They spend all day pouring over phone bills that people and businesses have provided to us because many people simply can't understand what rates they are on and what they are paying for. This team of analysts has seen it all – from bills that are just excel spreadsheets, to single page statements with no itemization. (The later is impossible to analyze of course and if you receive phone bills like this then you really have to ask yourself whether you are with the right provider if they aren't prepared to show you what you are paying for.)

In many cases – about 80% of the time, clients are able to save money on their phone just by altering a few things in their telecommunications structure such as dropping an unused line, converting the fax line to a fax to email service or using their mobile to call other mobiles rather than the landline. Many phone companies aren't keen to promote measures like these because they fear they may sacrifice some margin, however in the long term we feel that customer loyalty far outweighs a small sacrifice in margin. With this in mind we strive to provide the most honest and impartial assessment of a clients telecommunications structure. With the information you receive from asking these 7 simple questions, you can make an informed decision on where you want to send your telco dollars without the concern of whether you are going to get 'ripped off' or not. So without further ado....

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1. Is there a contract and what are the terms?

This is a must do. Please confirm the details on contracts – in writing! Every day our customer service line gets calls from consumers that have entered into a contract with a company – and they don't even know the company's name! They only remember that it was something....telco. They google the term telco and we come up first so they call in. Get it in writing please! There are many phone companies still using offshore telemarketing companies for their customer acquisition and a voice recording IS a legal contract if the right questions are asked. If you get it in writing, all is clear, you have a record of their obligations and a number to call. The same goes with Terms and Conditions. Many companies simply direct you to their website for these. This is so they can change them whenever they want. Get a copy of the terms and conditions for your own piece of mind and record it. We will be happy to take a look at any contracts for you, even if we don't have or get your business.

2. Can I have the rates in writing please and your name and direct line so I can call you if I don't understand my first bill?

Many sales people in the telecommunications industry are just that – sales people. They close the sale and then disappear over the horizon. Like the contract, I would encourage you to get the rates on offer in writing but also ask for the sales person's direct number (even mobile) so you can call them direct should there be a discrepancy with your first account. If they refuse, well then we know that they aren't prepared to back what they are offering. Nor should you.

3. Will I be remaining on the same network?

Telstra runs the country's largest fixed wire network. There are a growing number of telecommunications companies that are utilizing internet and VoIP technologies to create their own 'virtual' networks. Now, often these are ok and can help reduce your phone bill significantly, and with some pretty cool handset functionality thrown in. However it isn't always made clear at the time of the sale that to join these networks your number must be ported away from the Telstra network. If you then have a problem with your new provider then you must 'port' your number back to Telstra if you want to leave. This can take one month to six months to complete and will cost a new connection charge from Telstra (around \$300 for the first number) and perhaps other charges for a tech visit.

I'm not saying don't port away from the Telstra network, just be aware of what you are committing yourself to.

4. Who will manage my account? Can I call them directly? If not what is your average wait time on inbound calls?

If you have a problem with your account, who are you going to call and how long will it take. When you are at the negotiation table with a potential new provider, you have more power than you will ever have with them. They are fighting for your business! Ask the question – who will look after my account? Can I email them direct or do I have to go to a phone queue. If the later, ask for the stats. What is your average wait on your customer service line? If they don't know, then maybe it's not important to them.

5. Are the timed charges billed 'per second'?

Many telecommunications companies are coming up with sensational 'per minute rates', but then billing the rates in 30 or 15 second blocks. The effect of a 30 second block billing method is that if you make a 32 second phone call, you are charged for a 1 minute call because the time had gone into the next 30 second block. This will add around 15% to your bill. Don't get caught, just ask the question.

6. Are there admin fees – extra charges for altering your services, receiving a paper bill, late payment and paying using a credit card. These can really mount up!

Credit card surcharge, fee for paper bill, various administration charges. They are all creeping in and can make a difference. We often see \$50 credit card surcharges on larger accounts. Have a look at your bill from your current provider.

7. What's not included in the cap and what are the call costs for these services?

A great example of this is 1300 numbers. They aren't included in mobile caps anymore and are charged per minute. So where previously you thought it was included in your cap, now it isn't. Make sure there aren't any other nasty surprises in your new deal.

Well there you have it... The 7 Most Important Questions to Ask Your New Telephone Provider BEFORE You Switch to Them. Its just a few common sense questions that I hope will help you chart your way through the Telecommunications minefield. Whether you are with Telcotalk or not, I hope you find this information helpful.

As always, any questions you have, please feel free to ask. There is absolutely no obligation to join Telcotalk. We are just interested in what is out there and whether we get your business or not, we get to keep our finger on the pulse of this rapidly changing industry by the feedback we get, not just from our customers but also others that just want some help to understand a complicated industry.

Thanks for downloading this report and I look forward to being of service to you.

Best Wishes

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