

1 When and Where

Ask yourself where you will be using your phone. At home? At work? While traveling? Also ask when you will use it. During the day? Nights? Weekends?

2 Your Coverage Area

No wireless company serves all parts of the state. So look for one that serves where you want to use your phone the most. You can find maps of their coverage areas at their stores, websites, or ask the sales person about the specific places where you can use the phone.

3 Choose the Right Calling Plan for You

Most companies offer several different calling plans such as local, regional, or nationwide. Some plans include one set you can use any time or



only at peak times. The other set is for nights, weekends, or off-peak times.

Study each plan carefully. Bring your cell phone bill, if you already have one, and compare prices.

4 Your Trial Period

Most companies have a trial period for testing the service and the coverage area. This is the only time that you can cancel your contract without paying an Early Termination Fee. Give your phone and all its features a good test.

5 Alternatives to a Long-Term Contract

If a contract is not for you, look for a month-to-month, flat rate plan, "pay as you go" or "prepaid" plans.

If you choose a prepaid plan, find out when the minutes will expire. Find out if it covers long distance or international calls. Find out how to buy more minutes and if you must buy them before you run out of minutes.

6 Know about Roaming

Roaming is making a call by using another wireless company's service. It may happen when you are outside your company's coverage area or if your company cannot handle any more calls inside its area.

Find out: 1. If there are roaming charges. 2. How you will know when you are roaming. 3. If all your services are available while roaming.

7 Long Distance

Long distance fees may be charged when you call outside your local area. Find out how you will be billed for long-distance calls.

8 Features Other than Voice Service

Other services may include Internet browsing, and text messaging. Find out how you will be billed and how to block or cancel them if you want. Other features include "mobile to mobile," meaning calls made from one cell-phone to another.

9 Keeping Your Phone Number

If you switch phone companies, you can keep your phone number. If you are still under contract with your current carrier, you may have to pay an Early Termination Fee for canceling service early.

You may need to purchase a new cell phone because many cell phones can be used only on a specific carrier's network.

10 Understanding Your Charges

Ask to see a sample bill with an estimate of what you will be paying each month.



Here are examples of things you should know:

- Activation Fees to start service.
- Taxes and surcharges.
- Charges: for long distance, roaming and airtime.
- Text messaging and other charges, including how you will be charged if you share minutes with someone else.
- Dropped Calls: Will you receive a credit for calls that are cut off due to poor coverage areas?
- Early Termination Fees: What are the charges for ending service before your contract expires? If you have more than one phone in your plan, will the charge apply to every phone?



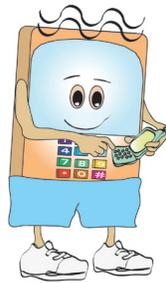
How to Buy Cell Phone Service: Ten Tips

Before buying cell phone service, be sure to shop around to get the best plan for your needs and budget. Study all offers carefully.

Before you sign-up, be sure you understand what you're buying and what's in the contract. Ask questions about anything that is not clear to you. You can also look up the company's website for more information.

 **calphoneinfo**
California's Consumer Education Initiative
www.calphoneinfo.com
1 (800) 649 7570 – CPUC

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT:
www.cpuc.ca.gov
www.fcc.gov
www.ftc.gov



Kid Keypad © 2006 Charles Boyce • Compu-Toon Characters

"I'm the Keypad Kid bringing you information about cell phone service"

If you have an unresolved dispute with your cell phone company, you can file a complaint at www.calphoneinfo.com or call the CPUC hotline at (800) 649-7570

Plain Talk Series
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