

**Promoting competition in telephone services
New 'Line and Calls' services**

A consumer guide

October 2002

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New 'Line and Call' services - introduction

Telephone companies can now provide new 'Line and Calls' services using existing BT lines into customers' homes. This leaflet explains how the 'Line and Calls' services work and how they could benefit you.

Widening choice

With 'Line and Calls' services, customers can get their bill for line rental from the same company that they choose to carry their calls. For some time, you have been able to choose different companies to carry some or all of your calls, while keeping your BT line. You do this by selecting these companies in advance or by dialling a prefix before the telephone number. But if you use these services, you get two bills - one from BT for your line rental and one from your chosen company for your calls.

In parts of the country, you can also choose cable television companies to supply your telephone line and calls.

All these options will continue to be available. The new 'Line and Calls' services will bring extra choice and encourage more competition.

'Line and Calls' only applies to standard 'landline' telephone services. Other telecoms services are unlikely to be affected (such as broadband, mobile and Internet services).

'Line and Calls' services – your questions answered

How can I benefit from these new services?

Different phone companies are likely to offer a choice of packages. Prices will vary for line rental and calls, and for additional services. By shopping around and comparing prices, you may be able to get a deal that is better for you. For some tips, see **'What to look for when you shop around'** below. .

What happens to my telephone line if I take up a new 'Line and Calls' service?

If you choose a 'Line and Calls' service, your telephone line and number will not change, but your contact about your whole service will be with your new telephone company. It will send you your phone bill, and if you have problems making a call, or wish to report a fault, its customer service section should be able to solve the problem.

All telephone companies will provide:

- free emergency calls to '999' and '112';
- access to operator assistance;
- directories and directory enquiry services.

If you have more than one telephone line, you can choose different packages and different telephone companies for each line. However, all extensions on the same line will be on the same package.

My phone line is with a cable company – can I get the new services?

Yes, but there may be an extra cost on start-up. You need a BT line into your home to get the new services. If you used to have a BT line, it may be possible to reactivate your old line at low cost. The cost will be higher if a new line has to be installed.

Do I need to get a new phone or any special equipment?

You can use 'Line and Calls' services with any approved phone equipment, whether bought, rented or leased. This includes, for example, telephones, fax machines or extra loud bells.

If my alarm system is connected to my phone line – will it still work?

Usually there is no problem about alarm systems, but you should make sure by checking with the new phone company.

Will I still be able to get additional services on my phone line?

Popular additional services include last caller's number, voice messaging, call forwarding, selective call barring, and finding out the amount spent on calls since the last bill.

With 'Line and Calls', companies are likely to offer most or all of the additional services currently available; and there may well be some new ones. Make sure you can get the additional services you want by checking with the company you are considering before you sign up.

Will I still be able to choose other companies to carry my calls?

Yes, you will still be able to choose other companies to carry all or some of your calls by selecting the companies in advance or by dialling extra digits in front of the number. You can get information on these services from our separate guide, 'CPS Consumer Guide'.

Will special arrangements for disabled customers still be available?

All telephone companies must provide the following to eligible customers:

- for people with sight problems: free directory enquiries (with onward connection on request), and contracts and bills in large print or in a form they prefer;
- for people with hearing problems: a text relay service that costs the same as an equivalent voice service, with short codes for textphone users to call emergency services, operator assistance and directory enquiries;
- for people dependent on the phone: a priority fault repair service and a protected service scheme (where someone you have chosen deals with your bills) – both at no extra charge.

How can I get this new service?

To get this new service you need to make an agreement (written or spoken) with your chosen new company. The new company and the company you are leaving will then write to you to confirm the transfer. You only need reply to these letters if you decide not to go ahead with the transfer. It is a good idea to keep all the paperwork safe for future reference.

There is always a 'cooling-off' period, when you have the right to change your mind about the transfer. If you do change your mind, you should contact your new telephone company straight away. If there has been a mistake about ordering the

transfer, or you do not have contact details for your new telephone company, you should contact your current telephone company. If you need more help, contact Oftel's Consumer Representation Section (see '**Contacting Oftel**', below).

How do I complain if I have a problem with my telephone service?

To complain after you have transferred to your new telephone company, you should first contact your new telephone company. If you are not happy with its response, contact Oftel or the appropriate national Advisory Committee on Telecommunications (for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland). See the contact details below.

Can I change my phone company again?

Yes.

What to look for when you shop around for a telephone service

When deciding whether to change telephone companies, it makes sense to compare the different prices and services available.

- Compare the likely cost of any alternative telephone service with what you are now paying for your line rental and calls. Take account of how you currently use your phone:
 - How often do you make calls?
 - When do you tend to make your calls?
 - Where to?All these things affect how much you pay.
 - Check the prices:
 - How much do different call types cost?
 - Will there be discounts?
 - Are there different prices for different times and days of the week?
 - How will call charges be worked out; for example by each second, each minute or part-minute?
 - Are there minimum call charges for each call?
 - The packages on offer may differ substantially. As in the mobile phone market, these are likely to get more varied and some may be complicated. For example, some may allow unlimited national or local calls at certain times of day in return for a monthly fixed fee. Others may offer a low rental but high call charges – these could suit people who make few calls.
 - If you normally make few calls, you should also consider alternative low-cost schemes such as BT's 'Light User Scheme' or 'In Contact' before deciding which is the best deal for you. You will not be able to use these special BT schemes if you change to a new 'Line and Calls' service.
 - If you are considering signing up for a package incorporating telephone and another service, for example gas, electricity, or a supermarket loyalty scheme, then compare your combined current payment for all the separate services with the cost of the package that is being offered.
 - Read the small print in the contract. Check:
 - What sort of contract is it?
 - If it is fixed-term, how long will it last?
 - In particular, what are the arrangements for ending the contract?
 - Are there any penalties for ending it before the end of its minimum period?Remember also to check your existing contract in the same way.
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- Be sure to choose a company that sends bills as often as you want (perhaps quarterly or monthly), and with a payment method that suits you (such as monthly direct debit).
 - Check whether there is any initial fee for being connected to the new service.
 - Check what will happen if you have difficulty paying the bill, and whether there are any fees for disconnection or reconnection.
 - Ask which additional phone services or benefits you will gain or lose by changing companies.
 - Find out when and how you can contact your customer services department.
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Where to get more information on choosing a telephone service

We cannot recommend companies, but we can give you more information and advice about telephone services in the UK. As the market develops we may also be able to offer more information to help you decide on the best company and package for you.

Several other leaflets and factsheets may give you further helpful information. These include:

Your rights and choices as a telephone customer

CPS Consumer Guide

The best deal for consumers: a guide to Oftel and its work

Getting the best deal from your mobile phone service

How to access the Internet at home

These are all available on Oftel's website at www.oftel.gov.uk

Contacting Oftel

Our address

Oftel
50 Ludgate Hill
London
EC4M 7JJ

Our website

www.oftel.gov.uk

Research and Information Unit

phone: 020 7634 8761
fax: 020 7634 8946
e-mail: infoцент@oftel.gov.uk

If you have a complaint – in England, Scotland and Wales

Consumer Representation Section

lo-call rate number: 0845 714 5000
phone: 020 7634 8888
fax: 020 7634 8845
textphone: 020 7634 5370
e-mail: advice@oftel.gov.uk

- in Northern Ireland

NIACT Secretariat

22 Great Victoria Street
Belfast BT2 7QA

lo-call rate number: 0845 714 5000
fax: 028 9024 7024
e-mail: niact@acts.org.uk

The Advisory Committees on Telecommunications (ACTs), which give advice to Oftel, were established by the Telecommunications Act 1984. They aim to ensure that the regulator and the companies supply telecoms networks, services and equipment; and take account of all users' needs.

The other ACTS

Please note these committees cannot give advice or help with complaints.

CCE, DIEL and CfB

CCE – Communications for England represents the interests of consumers in England.

DIEL – The Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for Disabled and Elderly represents the interests of disabled and elderly people.

CfB – Communications for Businesses represents the interests of small businesses.

ACT Secretariat

50 Ludgate Hill
London EC4M 7JJ

phone: 020 7634 8773

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e-mail ACT Secretariat: actsec@acts.org.uk

e-mail CCE: cce@acts.org.uk

e-mail DIEL: diel@acts.org.uk

e-mail CfB: cfb@acts.org.uk

Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications (SACOT) – represents the interests of consumers in Scotland

Secretary to SACOT
28 Thistle Street
Edinburgh
EH2 1EN

phone: 0131 226 7275

fax: 0131 226 4181

e-mail: sacot@acts.org.uk

Welsh Advisory Committee on Telecommunications (WACT) – represents the interest of consumers in Wales.

Secretary to WACT
4 The Science Park
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 3AH

phone: 01970 636 413
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This explanatory leaflet was produced in October 2002 by Oftel with representatives from consumer groups and telephone companies.

