

Preparing for Choice

Barbados will soon be moving from a situation where one telecommunication company provides residential, business, international and mobile telephone service. The consumer will soon have choice, for the Government is encouraging and seeking to attract other companies to operate in Barbados so that consumers can have access to a greater variety of services.

This change will not happen overnight but will take place in steps over the coming year. To facilitate this, the licensing arrangement of Cable and Wireless Barbados Ltd. will be changed and they will no longer have the exclusive right to provide residential, business, international and mobile services.

Let's look at mobile service. Barbadian residents should be quite aware that they will soon be able to choose between the current company and three other companies that are expected to start providing cellular service within the coming months.

But change are also going to occur in the provision of residential and business telephone service

Right now C&W is responsible for providing everything, but in the future, when you apply for telephone service, C&W may only be responsible for bringing the phone line to a point outside of your home or property. You would then be able to choose to install and connect your house wiring yourself or to select a technician who does it on your behalf. In addition you will be able to purchase your telephone set from any authorized supplier.

Choice of technician— Currently the provision of phone service involves the installation of inside house wiring which is then connected to the public telephone network. With the removal of C&W exclusive licence other technicians will be licensed to do this installation of inside wiring. The Telecommunications Unit in the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities will identify the criteria that will apply for persons seeking to be registered as licensed technicians. Consumers would be responsible for ensuring that there wiring is done by a licensed technician especially the installation of business systems.

I mentioned earlier that consumers would be able to **choose their telephone set**. Subscribers should however only use equipment that has been approved by the Telecommunications Unit. Also retailers should only offer for sale equipment that has met the required standards. These standards are being developed and when finalized, the public would be able to obtain details from the Telecommunications

Unit and the Commission. In order to avoid any damage to the public telecommunications network or injury to consumers it is very important that consumers only use approved phone equipment.

Repair and Fault Reporting

Cable & Wireless will gradually relinquish its responsibility for repairs of faults that are caused by equipment or wiring within the customers premises but will maintain responsibility for networks faults that are under their jurisdiction.

So customers would have to:

- check to determine if their phone set is faulty;
- hire a technician to check and repair wiring within the home or office

So before you make that call to report a fault, we as consumers, would have a measure of responsibility to determine if the fault is within our premises. It is expected that customers will receive further information on this and that the transition would be a smooth one.

International Service

The final phase of the liberalization of the telecommunication market will allow the public to choose between alternative service providers for their international calls. One of the responsibilities of the Fair Trading Commission is to promote and cultivate a competitive environment which will encourage these new companies.

What should the Consumer look for when making the choice between phone companies that will be offering mobile or international service??

- Prices / Contracts – are they based on individual services or combination of services;
- Billing or credit arrangements;
- Customer Service
- Variety of services being offered ;
- Conditions and terms of service

The company that offers the cheapest price may not provide the variety or standard of service that you require. Alternatively you may prefer to use the services of an operator that offers a more relaxed billing or credit arrangement. Each consumer should seek to make full enquires and obtain as much information as possible about any service before making their choice.

As the telecommunications sector opens to competition, there may be other changes, possibly in the billing arrangements.

Users of mobile phones are accustomed to paying for each minute (in fact each second) of a call that originated on their phone. Also when you make international calls you are charged by the minute.

But what about when you call your friend in St Thomas or call the radio station to express your opinion on “Tell it like it is” or “Brass Tacks”, these calls are not charged by the minute. Barbadians enjoy a flat rate system so every household pays the same basic rates regardless of the number of minutes they actually use.

The flat rate system is exclusively used only in a handful of countries. Generally, in other countries, consumers pay for two components of their telephone service:

- **Access ; and**
- **Use**

There is usually a recurring monthly rate for access (that is the ability to have dial tone) and as well as a monthly charge based on the time spent on the telephone. This charge may incorporate:

- **A rate based on the length of the call or based on the number of calls; or**
- **A prescribed amount of free minutes after which there is a per minute charge;**
- **Various packages based on high, medium or low use of the phone determined the average amount of minutes per month;**
- **A rate based on the time of day that the call is made;**

- **A flat rate option;**
- **Variations of any of the above**

We do not know if there will be any changes but consumers need to become conscious of how they use the phone so that if they are presented with choices of pricing structure, they would be in a position to make an informed decision.

Ask yourself the following questions –

- Do I make lots of short calls or a few long calls?
- Is the phone for emergencies or companionship?
- How many people are in the home?
- Do I use the internet often?

If you are conscious of how you use the phone, you will be able to determine the effect that any such changes would have on your telephone bill.

I hope that I have stimulated interest in some of the developments in the telecommunications sector. If you need any additional information, members of the Utility Regulation team would be happy to talk to you during your tour of our office.

Thank you

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