

How to Choose a Telephone Company

As new telephone technologies continue to emerge, there are more and more choices for consumers to pick from when it comes to telephone service. Gone are the days of just one telephone company providing service in an area. Now, competitive wireline telephone companies, wireless, Internet and cable providers are offering telephone service packages to consumers all across Ohio. Because everyone has different calling needs, it is important to make sure that you pick the package of services that will best fit your telephone usage.

How do you decide which company is best for you? The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) would like to help you make the call. Here are some tips on how to select a telephone provider:

Analyze your calling needs

Before looking at the telephone options your area, make a list of the services you need. Ask yourself:

- How many telephone calls do I typically make each day? Each month?
- What telephone numbers do I call most?
- What time of day do I typically make telephone calls?
- Do I need call waiting, caller ID or voicemail?
- Are there packages available that can provide services like Internet or cable in addition to telephone?

Research and compare plans

Once your calling needs have been identified, research all the telephone companies offering service in your area. There are several factors you should consider when researching and comparing telephone plans:

- *What is the monthly telephone service charge?*
Many companies offer deals where several services like local and long distance calling, call waiting, caller ID, Internet and cable service and more are packaged together at discounted rates. Depending on your needs, a service package may or may not be the most cost-effective option. If you are only interested in basic telephone service, please keep in mind that the traditional local telephone company is required to make this service available by itself, not packaged with any other services. Competitors may not offer this option. In addition to charges for telephone service, you will also want to make sure that you understand any additional charges or fees including any surcharges, taxes and early termination fees for ending service before the end of a term agreement.
- *What calls are included in the monthly telephone service charges?*
Most telephone service is based on some type of calling area, and you will want to make sure that the places you call the most are included in the calling plan that you sign up for. Consumers may have to pay an additional charge for calls to phone numbers that

fall outside of the calling area. Other plans offer unlimited local and long distance regardless of location.

- *How is the company's customer service and reliability?*
Telephone reliability is important for everyone. If you are looking into a new company, be sure to ask about the company's maintenance, repair and outage policies. It is also important to find out the hours for the company's customer service line. Traditional local telephone companies and their regulated wireline competitors are required to follow Minimum Telephone Service Standards established by the PUCO, including local disconnection and reconnection policies. Wireless companies and Internet phone providers are not regulated by the PUCO.
- *Is 9-1-1 service included?*
Not all wireless, cable and Internet phone companies are equipped to offer 9-1-1 service where the callback number and location are automatically provided to emergency responders. Ask about 9-1-1 service capabilities before signing up with a telephone provider.

The PUCO understands that choosing from the many telephone service options available can be a confusing task. To learn more about your telephone options and how to choose a telephone supplier, visit the telephone section of www.PUCO.ohio.gov or contact the PUCO Call Center at (800) 686-PUCO (7826).

If you would like to know more about the PUCO or have utility-related questions or concerns,

contact the PUCO at:

(800) 686-PUCO (7826)

(800) 686-1570 (TDD/TTY)

In Columbus only:

(614) 466-3292

(614) 466-8180 (TDD/TTY)

www.PUCO.ohio.gov