



## **The Facts About Wireless** *What you don't know could hurt you*

Due to the surge in popularity of wireless (cellular, PCS) service, customers are being inundated with advertising, marketing, and information touting all the advantages wireless offers. Despite this saturation of information, wireless plans and how the service works remain unclear to many. While wireless has made significant progress since its introduction some time ago, the lack of details about pricing, coverage area, and availability tend to leave customers confused. Often, wireless plans and offers that look attractive can be misleading.

We think consumers should be educated about wireless, so they know exactly what they're getting. Canadian Valley has drafted this fact sheet in response to questions and comments we frequently hear from customers regarding wireless service. We hope to clarify some of the issues and misconceptions that frustrate and perplex customers.

By now, most of us are familiar with the "Can you hear me now?" ad that seems to run non-stop on prime-time TV. This clever slogan was intended to promote the reliability and availability of wireless service. It's not by accident, however, that you don't hear this phrase used to describe traditional telephone (wireline or landline) service. The traditional telephone network strives to assure customers that service is available at all times, in and to all places; no one needs to question or worry about whether service will be available in a certain area when you pick up your phone to make a call. The public telephone network truly was built and is maintained to serve all users and its performance is unparalleled. The country's commitment to this national network assures all callers access to a dependable communications system that works no matter what time of day it is, how many people use it, or where the calls are placed.

Wireless, or cellular service, on the other hand, is provided in specific geographic areas, called *cells*. Each cell contains a tower, or towers, which transmit and receive radio signals to complete and carry calls. As you travel, your call is handed off to the next and nearest cell in your carrier's serving territory. *Roaming* occurs when your call is handed off to another carrier's cell tower because your provider does not serve a certain geographic area. Simply put, roaming means *using another carrier's network*. In order for roaming to work, wireless carriers must have agreements to share calls between their networks and equipment. Some wireless calling plans *do not include* roaming as part of the base price. While roaming frequently takes place with no hindrance, or obvious notice to the customer, additional charges, which are typically much higher, may apply.

As a result of the advertising blitz and the proliferation of wireless providers and plans, many people have come to believe their calling plans are "all-inclusive" or offer "free" minutes or long-distance. Upon closer examination, however, customers find they can quickly incur unwanted, and perhaps unnecessary, charges if not fully informed about their wireless service. Canadian Valley wants to help educate customers about all the considerations, including additional fees and charges, they must take into account when using their wireless phone to serve their communications needs. The bullet points below highlight some key aspects of wireless service.

## Did You Know?

- In most cases, wireless plans charge for both the calls you make (originating) and the calls you receive (terminating). Some carriers do allow you to call other customers on that company's network (mobile-to-mobile calls only), and others are now not charging for incoming phone calls. But for the most part expect to use minutes for most calls, including those that aren't connected, get busy signals, or are dropped. Checking your messages from your wireless phone also may count against your total plan minutes.
- Wireless plans are generally time-of-day sensitive. Most plans offer a certain number of minutes for specific times of the day, which are broken into two categories. These categories are designated with labels such as daytime (for example, 7:00 a.m. – 6:59 p.m.)/nighttime (7:00 p.m. – 6:59 a.m.); peak/off-peak; weekend/anytime, and so on. And, most plans include more nighttime or weekend minutes than daytime. Just like they sound, "anytime" minutes can be used during the day, night, weekends, or whenever you choose, until all the anytime minutes are used. Be mindful, though, of other types of minutes that have certain time restrictions, and the number of minutes allowed for that time period.
- If you use more than (or go over) your plan's allotted number of minutes, charges for each additional minute cost a much higher per-minute rate, ranging from \$0.10 to \$0.50 per minute. Some plans have begun adding blocks of additional minutes for a flat rate if you go over your monthly allotment so that you're not surprised by a huge bill at the end of the month. But even these extra blocks of minutes could become costly if you only go over by one or two minutes.
- Most wireless plans are "use or lose"—if you don't use all your minutes, you lose the ones you don't use. Some plans have begun to offer "rollover" minutes, which allow you to keep your unused minutes and actually roll them over to the next month for use.
- Wireless phone signals may "fade" or "cut out" in buildings, underground, or in other areas where the landscape (mountains, thick trees) interferes with service. In addition, users may experience "dead spots," resulting in service interruptions or dropped calls, usually caused by interference from other radio and electronic signals or equipment, or occurring in areas where the towers signals don't reach. Because of dropped calls and dead zones, customers may not experience the same continuity and quality they do with their home telephone.
- Most wireless carriers impose a penalty or fee for early contract termination. Be sure to check the rules when signing up for a new plan, in the event you might need to discontinue your plan (early) in the future.
- Many popular wireless plans and rates *are not* available in rural areas. As is often the case with long-distance service, wireless carriers *choose* where they want to offer their discount and promotional plans. Special plans, including those widely advertised on national television, may only apply to select areas.
- In addition, customers cannot choose a preferred long-distance provider with their wireless service; your wireless carrier requires that you use it as your long-distance service for all long-distance calls (outside your plan calling area).

- Most carriers now provide nationwide calling, in which long-distance calls are included in your calling package. Others provide *regional* plans, which have a defined *footprint* or calling area within which customers can make calls. Calls to and from outside that footprint or calling area are subject to long-distance charges. Carriers are now required to provide maps that detail what areas of the region and country their cell phone service covers. Review service area maps closely, so you are familiar with the calling areas included in your plan, what areas represent roaming, and what areas represent long-distance.
- Additional charges apply for “roaming.” These rates can be as high as \$0.60 per minute. Most wireless phones can be set to signify roaming with the letter “R” or the word “roam” or another code. Make sure you enable this feature, so you know when you are using the roaming function. Otherwise, you may have a signal and make a normal call that you think is included in your plan, without knowing that you are roaming. Also, be aware that it is possible to be charged both roaming *and* long distance, for a call not in your carrier’s area or on its network.
- Likewise, when roaming on another carrier’s network, there is no guarantee of service quality. The quality of the network, or your phone call, may not be what you are accustomed to with your current wireless provider, or your landline phone. Some carriers’ networks may not be as widespread, and you may experience poor service quality.
- Because wireless service is mobile, it is not held to the same standards as traditional wireline service. People take for granted the reliability of the traditional network and depend on their dialtone no matter what; few people expect wireless to have service quality comparable to the wireline network.
- Analog wireless phones can *not* be used in areas where digital networks are deployed. Digital is a newer, more advanced technology used to provide wireless service. Analog is not compatible with digital technology. Phones *must be* dual-mode or dual-band in order to work on *both* types of networks.
- Analog wireless systems do not afford as much privacy as digital networks, which are more secure because they use packetized signals and digital codes. While both analog and digital calls travel over radio waves, analog calls are more susceptible to be intercepted, compared with digital calls that are encoded and harder to decipher. A cross in radio waves or signals can pick up another person’s call, which is why occasionally you hear someone else’s conversation on your call.
- To build a far-reaching, robust wireless network, cell towers must be strategically placed to send and receive signals. Tower placement has garnered much attention recently, especially in areas where tower sites interfere with the natural landscape, parks and recreational zones, scenery, or beauty of an area. By contrast, most wireline telephone distribution facilities are buried underground.
- Customer service with wireless carriers may sometimes be hard to reach. Customer service may be provided on a regional, or even national, basis, rather than locally. Because your call may be queued nationwide, it may take longer to get through to a customer service representative.

- Fees usually apply to 411, directory assistance, or other information calls, and to automatically connect to those numbers.
- Wireless phone providers have not yet deployed complete enhanced 911 (E911) services. E911 service allows emergency service operators to identify the name, number, and location of the person calling for assistance. When using a wireless phone to call for emergency assistance, service interruption or the inability to communicate your precise location can become a life-and-death situation. Please be aware of the benefits and limitations of wireless service when calling for emergency assistance.
- Similar to other telecom providers, wireless providers also impose specific taxes, fees, and surcharges – advertised rate plans usually exclude these additional charges, which may include federal, state, and local taxes, 911 (state and local) fees, federal universal service funding, user charges, and required regulatory fees. Many wireless carriers have initiated other “regulatory” or “cost-recovery” fees, *in addition* to the aforementioned fees, to help recoup the costs used to support and implement changes, such as 911 and telephone number portability (the ability to keep the same phone number when changing providers).

Due to continuing service problems and complaints in the wireless industry, the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association (CTIA) has instituted a *voluntary* 10-point code of standards for wireless carriers. The code is intended to help ensure that customers fully understand the terms and conditions of their wireless service, including specific pricing, coverage area and service availability, roaming, and other terms, and to help them choose the plan that will best suit their needs.

Specifically, the code designates that wireless providers will:

- ✓ Disclose rates and terms of service
- ✓ Provide maps showing where service is available
- ✓ Provide contract terms and confirm any changes in service
- ✓ Allow a trial period for a new service
- ✓ Provide specific disclosures in advertising
- ✓ Separately identify carrier charges from taxes
- ✓ Allow customers to terminate service if changes to the contract are made
- ✓ Provide ready access to customer service
- ✓ Respond to consumer inquiries and complaints from government agencies
- ✓ Abide by policies to protect customer privacy

For more information about the 10-point code, visit CTIA’s website, at [http://files.ctia.org/pdf/The\\_Code.pdf](http://files.ctia.org/pdf/The_Code.pdf).

Because wireless service is so varied, we strongly urge customers to scrutinize providers, explore various service plans, ask questions, and thoroughly read all literature and material associated with their wireless service and provider. When armed with the proper knowledge about wireless service, customers will not be caught off guard by service features, fees, or charges they thought were included with their original service plan.