

Cell Phone Portability

Take your number and run!



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Remember when you used to have to give up your current cell phone number if you wanted to change carriers? Times have changed!

In order to promote competition in telecommunications industry, the Federal Communications Commission has given you, the consumer, the option to change your cellular phone provider, such as AT&T, Sprint or Verizon, and bring your current number along with you to your new provider. The goal is to give you greater freedom and flexibility to select the carrier of your choice without having to forfeit the cell phone number to which you, your friends, family and co-workers have grown accustomed.

This principle of cell phone portability has been extended. First, you can now also move, or “port,” your home landline number to your cell phone so you can go completely wireless if you so choose. This may not be an attractive option for those using DSL since high speed internet over a cell phone is slower and runs about \$80 per month. Second, cell phone companies must also allow for customers to port a cell phone number to a landline if so desired. However, portability does not apply to pagers.

The only qualification on portability is that customers can only transfer numbers within the same local calling area, not when moving to another city. Determining the local calling area can be tricky because wireless calling areas are much larger than those set up for landlines.

There are some significant drawbacks. Although you now have various options, taking

advantage of them could be a costly proposition. First, you are still obligated to pay any early cancellation fee if you are terminating your contract with your carrier early, usually a hefty expense. Second, by switching carriers, you may well have to incur the cost of buying a new phone compatible with your new carrier's network technology. Carriers often put "locks" on their phone so that consumers cannot use them with another carrier. Third, you may end up obligating yourself to another long term contract that you may be tempted to break so make sure to check the fine print before unwittingly signing on another two year contract. You may want to make sure that your new plans includes unlimited nights and weekends. Fourth, your old carrier can legitimately charge you a reasonable one-time fee for leaving with your current number. Fifth, most carriers are now charging all consumers a monthly blanket fee to cover their costs in making number portability available to those who want it. This fee can range from 40 cents to more than a dollar.

If you do choose to take your cell phone number to a new carrier, do not terminate service with the old carrier before signing up with your new carrier. Your new carrier will take care of this for you when it ports the number over from your old carrier which usually takes just two and a half hours. Also, make sure to present a copy of your current cell phone bill to your new provider in order to save yourself from some headaches. In order for the porting process to go smoothly, you must give your new provider the same exact name and address that is on your current bill.

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