

Tips on managing your mobile spend

Managing any budget requires careful planning and monitoring. This guide is designed to help make your job as easy as possible, with some useful hints to help you ensure you're in control of your spend.

1. Consider pre-paid

If you are concerned about how much you will spend on your mobile, are not sure what exactly your needs are, and do not want to sign a long-term contract, consider the pre-paid option first.

Getting a pre-paid first will help you understand how much you'll use your mobile. You can always change to a plan at a later date, and your experience using a pre-paid can provide you with useful information to help you evaluate what type of plan would match your needs. Note that some pre-paid plans tie you down for a minimum period of time. This may mean you can benefit from cheaper call costs, but be aware that if you leave before the specified time, you pay a penalty. Look for details in the terms and conditions. You may see the phrase 'SIM unlock' fees. Also be aware that many pre-paid phone cards have an expiry date – you use them until all your credit is used, or until the card expires (whichever occurs first).

2. Choose a plan to suit you

Whether you opt for a pre-paid or post-paid contract, you'll find there's a huge choice of options available to suit many different needs. The following points will help you choose one to suit YOU.

a) Cost of calls. Going for the plan with the lowest basic call costs may not necessarily be the best or cheapest option for you – it'll also depend on how much you use other services, such as SMS, voicemail, etc. If you use SMS more than voice, you might find, for example, that there is a plan which charges slightly more for voice, but less for SMS – providing a cheaper service for you overall.

It's also worth taking the time to consider when you use the phone, and whether you can benefit from plans which allow you free or cheaper calls at certain times of day, or to certain people.

b) Select a service that allows you to check your mobile credit

Some mobile companies have options to help you keep track of, and manage, your spend – examples include:

- **Spend alerts** - you get a message to let you know if you've reached your nominated 'spend' within a given time period (eg a month). Applies to post-paid contracts.
- **Free call number to check account balance.** (Applies to pre-paids and post-paid contracts)
- **Call barring** - keep your bill down by limiting the numbers called from your phone by using call barring. For example, you might want to bar international calls, or calls to premium rate numbers. Some carriers also allow you to preset certain numbers to allow your phone to be used to call only certain numbers – talk to your carrier about the options.

c) Consider the cost of the whole package. Be wary of phrases such as 'Free', 'costs zero dollars' - is it really free, or are you paying for it somewhere else? If you see the words 'conditions apply', read what conditions apply – the offer may not sound so tempting once you understand what it excludes.

Remember: **If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.**

3. Stop others using your mobile phone

Minimise the risk of losing your phone and/or someone using it without your permission by:

Treating your phone as you would any valuable item; even if you got your handset as a '\$0 upfront deal', this does not reflect its true cost. Handsets are expensive: they can cost more than \$1000.

- Never leave your mobile in the car;
- Keep your mobile on you - never put it down in a public place or leave it unattended;
- Switch to vibrate mode in circumstances where a ring tone might attract the attention of a thief;
- Make use of your mobile's security features to stop others 'borrowing your phone' (eg PINs, SIM locks, code locks – see your user guide for details);
- Limit the amount of damage someone can cause by borrowing your phone without permission by utilising call barring (see above);
- Don't assume your phone is covered in your home contents insurance – check, and consider insuring it separately, if necessary. Remember that even if you got the phone for '\$0 upfront', this doesn't mean it was free – it means the cost was absorbed in the overall contract price. You may not be able to get a replacement phone for \$0 upfront.

Reducing your phone's appeal to thieves, and assist in its recovery if it is lost or stolen, by:

- Notifying your network carrier AND the police immediately in the event of loss or theft;
- Engraving your initials and driving licence number on the phone;
- Recording details of your phone, including its make, model and its International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number, and keeping the details in a safe place. The IMEI number is a 15 digit number independent of your phone number, and is usually written underneath the battery or on the back of the handset. You can also find your IMEI number by dialling *#06# on your mobile handset. Your carrier can use this number to block your phone from all networks once you report the phone lost or stolen, rendering it useless to any thief.

4. Don't sign a contract for someone else unless you're prepared to pay all their bills

Remember that whoever signs a contract is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the terms and conditions of the contract are met. That means if you sign a contract for a friend (or child), and they don't pay their bills, it's YOU who must cover the costs.

So unless you're completely happy to cover someone else's costs, don't sign a contract for them. Help them choose an appropriate pre-paid service instead.

5. Other tips to save you money

- Clear your voice mail quickly. Every time you re-listen to old messages, it's costing you.
- SMS messages are usually charged at a flat rate per message of up to 160 characters. If your phone allows you to write a single message over 160 characters, be aware that you'll get charged for an additional SMS. (So an SMS with 161 characters will cost you twice as much as 160 characters.)
- Consider whether it might be cheaper on occasions to call someone rather than SMS them. Or visa-versa.
- If using a pre-paid, make sure you know if and when the credit expires, and whether you can extend the credit period by 'topping-up'/re-charging the card.

6. A problem shared is a problem halved

If you are having any financial or contractual problems, contact your carrier. It is not in their interest to have customers in financial difficulty any more than it is in yours. Discuss with your carrier any advice they have for you to help control your spend before the problem becomes too big.