

This brochure has been developed as part of the Consumer Education Programme of the Communications Commission of Kenya. It was compiled as a result of a review of material from various sources and presents the current perception of the information available on the choice of mobile-phone services in Kenya.

Introduction

Before choosing a mobile-phone service and signing a contract for its use, potential users are advised to consider the following:

- The type of contract offered inclusive of; the duration of the contract, the various methods of payment; and the amount of notice required for termination.
- The charge rate that will be applied to various types of calls, especially calls that are made to other networks.
- How often, by whom and when the mobile-phone is likely to be used.
- Whether the mobile phone (handset) is offered at a subsidized price; whether it is being offered 'free' as part of a package; or whether the price of the handset will affect the monthly rental or call-charges.
- Whether the mobile-phone that is offered together with a line, can also be used with alternative network-providers.
- Whether or not insurance against loss or theft of the mobile-phone is included.
- The quality of reception of the cellular service prevalent in the area in which the mobile-phone is to be used.

Types of service agreements

There are four basic types of service agreements for mobile-phone services. They are as follows:

A fixed-term contract

Fixed-term contracts are usually based on a term of specific duration, which is usually 12 - 36 months. During this period the network-provider typically commits to; the provision of network-access, the provision of a handset, and the provision of a certain number of 'free' calls and/or text messages for a set fee per month.

A monthly agreement

By virtue of this agreement, the user owns the handset while the network-provider provides him/her with a network-connection.

A pre-paid 'Pay-As-You-Go' agreement

With a pre-paid agreement, the user can either use a handset provided by the operator or purchase an alternative one. The service is activated when financial credit ('air- time') is loaded on to the line – thus registering it. Loading is usually accomplished by means of 'scratch-cards', which are offered in a wide range of monetary denominations and are widely available. Instructions on how to use the 'scratch-card' are often provided on the cards.

Note: call-charges for pre-paid services differ between network-providers, thus the relative benefits should be examined in advance. Users purchasing a mobile-phone as part of a pre-paid package should enquire as to whether it is 'locked into' a specific network and will, therefore, only work with that network. In some cases a small fee will be required to 'unlock' the mobile-phone so as to enable it to work with another network.

Lease agreements

Users requiring a mobile-phone only for a limited period of time may consider leasing or renting one. Leasing/rental agreements vary according to the supplier.

Tariffs and billing

Per-second compared to per-block billing

Most Kenyan mobile-phone tariff plans use the 'per-second' billing system, which means that the user is charged for the exact duration of the call in seconds (calculated from the time of connection to the time of disconnection). Other tariff plans are based on a 'per-block' billing system, which means that the user is charged for the duration of the call in 'blocks' (which are usually calculated in 'blocks' of 60 seconds (or part of a minute), or one minute).

Flag-fall (connection fee)

Certain tariff plans incorporate a 'flag-fall fee' (also known as a 'call set-up fee'). This is a fee which is charged for the initiation of every call made and is charged for before any conversation takes place. It is, therefore, charged in addition to the charge levied for the duration of the call.

The cost of calls

Calls are charged at varying rates and users are advised to weigh up their relative merits before entering into a contract or agreement.

Variable-rate calls

Variable-rate calls are typically applied to fixed-term contracts and operate on the basis of a 'trade-off' between the monthly access charge and the offered call-rate. In general, a user who elects to pay lower call-charges will pay a higher monthly access charge – and vice versa. Note: some tariff plans offer additional services, such as voicemail, or the allocation of a certain number of 'free' calls/text messages.

Flat-rate calls

Flat-rate calls are charged at a constant 'flat' rate which does not vary with the time of day or national destination.

Tariff plans

Tariff plans are the differing billing schemes offered by a network-provider and relate to the price the user will be charged for the use of their network of choice.

Some tariff plans are based on a fixed-rate – regardless of whether the call is made at peak times or not. Others operate on a dual-rate basis: peak rate and off-peak rate.

A number of tariff plans are offered in Kenya, they are as follows:

- Flat-rate or dual-rate (one rate only or peak rate and off-peak rate).
- Those that allow the user to select a specified number of people to whom they will make 'frequent calls' - such calls being charged at a lower rate than all other calls.
- Those whose rates reduce in direct relation to the duration of the call.

Special offers

Same-network calls

Some network-providers offer cheaper rates for calls that are made to other users of their service. It therefore makes sense for the user to check which network-provider is used by the majority of their clients/family/friends – and to join that network.

Need to know more?

For further information on the above topic or any other aspect of health and safety with regard to communicational equipment, please contact:

Disclaimer: while every attempt has been made to ensure that the information included in this document is accurate, it is intended ONLY as a guideline towards the safe operation of communications equipment and should not be regarded as (or used in lieu of) legal advice. The Communications Commission of Kenya will not, therefore, accept any liability for the consequences of any actions taken, or decisions made upon the information offered.

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Choosing a Mobile Phone Service



Communications
Commission
of Kenya

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mawasiliano unayostahili

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