



Introduction

Before choosing a mobile-phone service 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 rates that will be applied to various call types.
- Whether the mobile phone (handset) is offered at a subsidized price or offered 'free' as part of a package.
- Whether the mobile-phone, offered together with a line, can also be used with alternative network-providers.
- Whether or not insurance against loss or theft is included.
- The quality of reception of the cellular operator's signal in your area.

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-cards' are often provided on the card.

Note: Users purchasing a mobile-phone as part of a pre-paid package should enquire as to whether it is 'locked into' a specific 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 also 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 thus charged 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.

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 different billing schemes offered by a network-provider. They include:

- 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.