



**BT's new package adds to the confusion for consumers**

# Yet another option in the phone jungle

By Toby Walne

**P**HONE tariffs have just become even more complicated and confusing for consumers. BT's newest payment deal is touted as cutting through the complexity of phone billing to offer customers better value.

But while the marketing is slick, the BT Option package is just one more deal in what is an already bewildering and crowded market.

And despite the claims from BT, it offers worse value for some customers.

Utility comparison firm uSwitch says the average person makes three calls a day. This means £264 a year in phone bills under Option 1, one of three available in the Option package.

This works out at £17 a year more than under the old BT Together scheme. Analysing your call patterns and needs before choosing a telecoms package is vital, says uSwitch.

When, how often and where do you call? Do you frequently call mobile phones and overseas numbers and do you spend a lot of time on the internet?

Allan Williams, a senior researcher at the Consumers' Association, publisher of Which?, says: 'The problem with BT is that it actually benefits from customers being too confused to move to another supplier.'

About 70 per cent of all phone users still use BT for their entire phone package even though its monopoly on the industry was

broken more than 18 years ago.

Half the population has access to cable, so these households have the additional choice of using phone services from NTL or Telewest.

There are also a score of provi-

ders such as Telco and One.Tel that automatically re-route calls using the cheapest provider, but where the BT phone line is still rented.

The days when customers required a PIN number or box

to access non-BT services are being phased out to make it easier for customers to switch providers.

Industry watchdog Ofcom says: 'We are trying to make it simpler to compare deals, but we accept that it is still a minefield for consumers.'

'One of the problems is that deals in terms of value for money change so quickly.'

Kay Harvey, 31, of Anston, near Sheffield, shopped around for a deal using uSwitch, one of a number of internet-based outfits that offer comparison services.

Kay, a control room operator for South Yorkshire police, says: 'I found BT too expensive for international calls. I make a lot of overseas calls because my partner is working in Angola.'

'Then I tried out NPower but was disappointed with its customer support. I am now with Telco.'

She reckons the switch will save her about £100 a year on what she paid with BT.



**Switcher:** Kay Harvey will save £100 a year after finding a cheaper phone deal on the internet

## DON'T GET YOUR WIRES CROSSED – LOOK AT THE CHOICES

**BT OPTION 1:** Local/national calls 3p a minute daytime, 6p maximum evenings/weekends. Min 5p. Rental £11.50 a month.  
**BT TOGETHER:** Local 3p a minute daytime, 1p a minute evenings/weekends. National 4p a minute daytime, 2p evenings/weekends. Minimum 5p. Rental £2.40 a month of calls free. Rental £11.50.

**TISCALI EVERYTIME SAVER:** Local 2.5p a minute daytime, 1p a minute evening and 0.9p a minute weekend. National 3p a minute daytime, 1.5p a minute evening and 1p a minute weekend.

Minimum call charge 60 seconds. Rental £9.50 a month.

**POWERGEN RESIDENTIAL:** Local 3p a minute daytime, 1p evenings/weekends. National 4p a minute daytime, 2p evenings/weekends. Minimum 5p. Rental £9.50.

**BRITISH GAS EVERYCALL 240:** Local 3p a minute daytime, 1p a minute evening and weekend. National 3.5p a minute daytime, 1.5p a minute evening and weekend. Minimum call charge 5p. Free 240 minutes off-peak a month. Rental £11.49.

**TELEWEST 321:** Local/national 3p a minute daytime, 2p evenings and 1p weekends. Minimum 6p. Rental £10.

**NTL TALK:** Local/national 3p a minute daytime, 2p evenings and 1p weekends. Rental £11.50.

**CARPHONE WAREHOUSE TALK70:** Local/national daytime 2.7p a minute, evenings and weekends up to 70 minutes 5.5p total. Minimum 5p. Rental £9.50.  
**ONE.TEL:** All local and national calls free at any time. Rental £9.50. Monthly charge £13.99.