



# Comparing your local telephone choices for AT&T Ohio service area

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This information is updated on a biweekly basis.

*The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, has prepared this guide to help you compare local telephone service plans and prices. Local service includes the ability to make local calls in your area and have access to services such as Caller ID, Call Waiting and many other features.*

## What is local telephone choice?

For decades, you didn't have a choice of local providers. While the long-distance market developed and many consumers began to see choices for cellular telephone providers, most Ohioans had few, if any, choices for their local service. Now customers in AT&T's service area have several choices.

## Where should I begin?

You can prepare to choose a local provider by reviewing your telephone bills to determine which services are most important to you and by researching current offers from different telephone companies.

As a first step, you can evaluate your current telephone usage. Ask yourself:

- How many local calls do I make each month from my home telephone?
- How many long-distance minutes do I use each month from my home telephone?
- What features currently appear on my monthly bill? Which of these features do I actually use?
- Are there any features that I want for privacy and/or convenience but have not ordered from my current telephone company?
- Do I use a cellular telephone for local calling? Long-distance calling?
- Do I use my home telephone line to access the Internet?
- Do I receive separate bills for each telecommunications service (local, long distance, Internet access, cellular telephone)?
- How much do I currently pay per month for **local** service?
- How much do I currently pay per month for **all** home telephone services (local and long distance)?

Next, share the information you have gathered from analyzing your monthly bill with members of your household. Find out what their needs are and discuss frequently used features and desired services.

Using the answers to the above questions and your discussions with your family, you can prioritize the services you want from your telephone provider.

## What are my choices?

The OCC recommends regularly evaluating available offers using resources such as the comparison chart provided in this publication. You may ultimately decide to stay with your current telephone company or switch to a competitor based on

[To view the Telephone Comparison Chart CLICK HERE.](#)

convenience, service or price. Either way, doing comparisons and research will give you peace of mind that you have picked the telephone plan that's right for you.

The OCC offers information on Voice over Internet Providers (VoIP) plans in its fact sheet ["What You Need to Know About VoIP."](#) These providers use a customer's existing high-speed Internet connection instead of the traditional telephone lines. To see a list of VoIP providers, click [here](#).

Additionally, the OCC offers information about prepaid telephone plans in its fact sheet ["The Facts About 'Prepaid' Local Telephone Service."](#) Prepaid service requires consumers to pay for all portions of local telephone service before the service can be used.

You can request a copy of these fact sheets by calling 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622), or view them online at [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org).

## Am I ready to sign up for service?

The OCC recommends that you contact a local telephone provider directly to confirm the details of the plan and read all the terms and conditions before signing up for service. You also should ask what other services and packages the company offers that may not be shown on the chart. Have your current telephone bill in front of you to compare each charge.

Be sure to get answers to these questions:

- Is there a sign-up fee?
- Are there any promotional offers?
- Is there a switching fee if you decide to change providers?
- How will I be billed?
- What will be your total monthly bill (including all fees, taxes and surcharges)?
- How does the company handle any billing discrepancies?
- Are customer service representatives available 24 hours a day or does the company use an automated service?
- How many customers does the company serve and how large is its service territory?
- If your family needs payment assistance, does the company have a program in place, such as Lifeline?
- Is there a program for customers with medical needs, such as a repair priority program?

Some companies may require you to be served by AT&T before they will pick you up as a customer. Be sure you do not cancel your existing service. The competitive provider will coordinate the transfer of your service, and you should receive confirmation via a welcome letter by mail within 10 days.

If you switch to another local service provider, you should be able to keep your current telephone number, however you may have to contact your long-distance company to make sure your calling plan follows you. If you have any questions about your bill or the switching process, you should call the new telephone company or contact the OCC.

# Telephone Services & Features Glossary

Many local telephone plans bundle services and features together. Below are the general definitions of those services that are commonly offered. Please keep in mind that definitions can vary from company to company so be sure to clarify all services and features before signing up for a plan.

**Automatic Callback or Call Return\*** – allows a customer to get the telephone number of the last incoming call.

**Call Forwarding** – sends a customer's calls to another telephone number of his or her choice.

**Call Rejection or Block** – prevents calls from anonymous callers (anyone who has blocked their Caller ID) or from a customer's created list of unwanted calls.

**Call Screening** – allows a customer to create a "do not accept" list of telephone numbers; callers from the numbers on the list will hear a message indicating that their call will not be accepted.

**Call Trace** – allows a customer to initiate an automatic trace of the last call received. The number traced will be sent to the telephone company, not the customer. The results of the trace will be given only to legal authorities upon request by them.

**Call Transfer** - Allows the customer to transfer a call to another person.

**Call Waiting** – notifies a telephone customer who is already engaged in a call that there is an incoming call; enables the customer to switch between conversations.

**Call Waiting ID, Call Waiting Deluxe, Sneak-a-Peek or Wait and See\*** – allows a customer who is already on the telephone to see the identity of an incoming caller (see Call Waiting).

**Caller ID\*** – allows the customer to see the telephone number from which an incoming call is made before answering the call; requires feature to be built into the customer's telephone or special equipment must be purchased separately.

**Caller ID with Name\*** – allows the customer to see both the telephone number and name of the person or business placing the incoming call; requires feature to be built into the customer's telephone or special equipment must be purchased separately.

**Caller ID Restore** – allows customers, who have permanently blocked their information from appearing on Caller ID, to have their identity revealed on Caller ID on a per call basis.

**Custom or Distinctive Ring** – allows the customer to create a list of callers; a special ring will announce their incoming calls.

**Do Not Disturb** – prevents a customer's telephone from ringing - calls are automatically forwarded to voicemail.

**Find me, Follow Me** - Allows customer to forward calls to home telephone to a cell phone.

**Hunting** – a feature that allows a customer with two or more lines to route incoming calls to the next available line if the number called is busy.

**Inside Wiring Plan** – a maintenance plan such as Linebacker that serves as insurance against problems you may have with the wiring inside your home.

**Local Calling** – telephone calls to residences, businesses and Internet access numbers near a customer's home; calls include those that are part of the customer's local calling area.

**Local Toll Calls** – Calls made outside a customer's local calling area; check your SBC Ohio local white pages directory for the area codes map.

**Long-Distance Alert** – allows the customer to identify incoming long-distance calls through a special ring.

**Long-Distance Calling** – telephone calls to anywhere outside of the customer's flat rate local calling area, including local toll and calls to other states.

**Multi-Ring** – allows a customer to obtain two telephone numbers that both ring on the same line; each number has a different ring.

**Per Call Blocking, Per Call Number Privacy or Caller ID Block** – enables a customers to block their information from appearing on Caller ID for a specific call.

**Per Line Blocking or Per Line Number Privacy** – enable customers to block their information from appearing on Caller Id for any calls made from that specific line.

**Personal Toll-Free Number** – an assigned telephone number that allows callers to reach the customer using a toll-free exchange such as 800 or 877; calls are billed to the customer who owns the number. For exact details contact company.

**Personal Voice Mail Assistant (PVA)** – allows the customer to have the ability to send and receive e-mails messages through enhanced features such as an address book and distribution lists.

**Privacy Manager** – an AT&T service that helps consumers screen their incoming calls.

**Repeat Dialing or Auto Redial** – redials busy or unanswered numbers for up to 30 minutes and uses a special ring to alert the customer that the call has been completed; the customer can then pick up the phone with the other party connected.

**Speed Calling or Speed Dialing** – allows a customer to call frequently dialed locations using one or two-digit codes.

**Three Way Calling** – allows a customer to add a third party to an existing telephone call.

**Unlimited Internet Access** – provides a customer unlimited dial-up access to the Internet; a computer and a modem are required.

**Voicemail** – an automated program that accepts messages while a customer is away from home or currently on a call.

**Voicemail Plus** – Voicemail that includes extra recording time, multiple mailboxes, pager notification and a mailbox-to-mailbox feature allowing the sending and forwarding of messages to other voicemail subscribers.

*\* These features will not function if an incoming caller has blocked Caller ID.*

*The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.*

**For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel:**

**Call: 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free or (614) 466-8574**  
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