

Technology In Our Lives

Getting A Phone Number To Go

(NAPSA)—While it might sound like the call letters of a radio station, WLNP actually stands for Wireless Local Number Portability.

This is the FCC rule that makes it possible for wireless telephone users to change their carrier but keep their number.

Customers of small and rural wireline and wireless companies, in particular, should understand the porting capabilities of their service providers. Larger carriers have had months to fine-tune automated systems, streamline processes and resolve operational issues. For many small or rural carriers, porting will be a new experience and some do not have automated systems for inter-carrier ordering. It's important that customers in the smaller markets have realistic expectations about the porting process.

In an effort to ease some of the confusion that consumers may still have about how the process works, the experts at Cingular Wireless have created a checklist called "The A to Z of WLNP." Here are their suggestions:

- Not all numbers can be ported. Some small wireless and wireline companies in rural areas are not required to participate in WLNP. If your carrier is exempt, you can still switch companies, but you will not be able to keep your number.

- Know the details. Bring a bill from your existing carrier to your new one. If you don't have a copy of your bill, know the exact details of your account, including name, address, account number and phone number.

- Leave some time. The process can take a few hours, a few days or in some cases, a few weeks. Cingular provides most customers with an activated phone, so they can place calls as soon as they leave the store. Once the process is complete, the phone will be in the customer's hands and incoming calls can be received.



Doing your homework can come in handy when you want to switch wireless carriers but keep your phone number.

- Don't cancel your service. If you want to bring your number to a new carrier, don't cancel your current service beforehand. If you do, you may end up losing your number. Your new carrier will work with your prior carrier to close your account.

- Are you a free agent? Your existing carrier may charge you an early termination fee if you cancel your existing service while still under contract.

- Do your homework. You may need a new phone when you switch carriers, even if you are keeping your number.

- The "L" stands for local. When switching carriers you will be able to take your number within the same geographic area, but you may not be able to take it if you move to another area.

Said Faith Seiders, Director of LNP Strategy and Operations at Cingular, "We know from experience that WLNP can be confusing. We encourage consumers who are considering the switch to take the time to prepare. The result will be a much more positive and efficient experience."

To learn more, please visit www.cingular.com/customer_service/LNP.