

Answers from

Five Questions Cell Phone Customers Should Ask

(NAPSA)—Dear Wireless Guru: I am considering changing my cell phone service, but it's been two years since I switched companies. I don't want to make a mistake and get locked into a contract that doesn't suit my needs. What should I be looking for?

—Confused Cellular Consumer

Dear Confused: Being able to keep their cell phone numbers has made it more attractive for consumers to switch cellular service providers. But changing phone companies—and getting a new phone—needs careful thought, or you might find yourself with a contract, service plan and cell phone that don't suit your needs.

Wireless customers can find an incredible array of plans and phones. It is worth the time and effort to sift through this information, most of which is available online, before committing to a plan. Some wireless carriers offer special incentives. Cingular, for example, was the pioneer in allowing customers to “rollover” their unused minutes to the next month, which can be a real savings.

Here are five questions every consumer should ask:

- Where will my phone work? Will the phone work where the consumer needs it to work—at home, on the road, in other cities, in rural areas? Ask the sales person if they have an interactive

mapping tool that shows specific coverage areas.

- How can I get help if I have problems? Consumers often complain about poor customer service from cellular companies. Ask if your carrier has a variety of ways to contact customer service—including telephone, online and text messaging.

- Does the company have a variety of plans? Consumers have different needs, and companies have responded with a multitude of plans. Consumers will find that a little time spent investigating the offerings, whether at a phone store or on-line, will pay off in satisfaction.

- What is the length of your contract? The average contract is two years, but contracts are not for everyone. Many consumers prefer prepaid service. Ask if your potential carrier offers a 30-day grace period, giving consumers the opportunity to see if the service is a good fit.

- Does the company offer additional features? Today's cellular phones are not just for talking. They are for text messaging, instant messaging, taking pictures and more, but not every phone has these extras.

The Wireless Guru is a column that enables readers to have questions answered concerning any aspect of their cell phone service either in print or online by going to www.thewirelessguru.com.