

Consumer Corner

Finding The Phone Service That's Right For You

(NAPSA)—Increasingly, when it comes to selecting a telephone service, consumers are making the call.

They are doing this by taking advantage of a growing number of ways available to communicate, from “plain old telephone service” to wireless phones to phone service from cable companies.

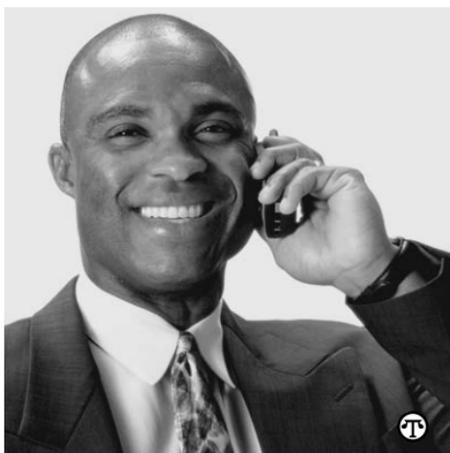
It's even possible to use an Internet connection to make phone calls. You can send e-mails to people anywhere in the world, and surf the Net wirelessly. Having so many choices is great, but it can be confusing.

The nonprofit National Consumers League (NCL) says it's important to learn about your communications options and shop around for the services that are right for you.

For example, consumers can choose from hundreds of long-distance companies and in most places there are many choices for local service, too. Wireless phones are also popular ways to make local and long-distance calls. In fact, some people are only using wireless phones. Before you cut the cord, though, test the wireless service to be sure it works from your home and keep the battery charged so you can make calls in emergencies.

Another choice is VoIP—phone service over the Internet. You don't need a computer, but you do need to connect your phone to high-speed Internet service.

VoIP plans usually offer unlimited calling anywhere in the U.S. for a flat monthly fee. While there are many benefits with VoIP, there are some considerations: It



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doesn't work if the power is out, and you may not be able to reach 911 emergency services, though VoIP companies are working to solve that problem.

High-speed Internet service is becoming more widely available and has clear advantages over dial-up service. It's faster and allows you to make and receive calls while you're online. In either case, you need good virus protection and other security measures to keep your computer safe.

Some companies offer service bundles that include phone, Internet, wireless and/or pay TV. These may be good deals, depending on your needs, but make sure you're not paying for things you don't want or need. Check services and prices from different companies and be certain you're comparing “apples to apples.”

NCL offers tips about choosing and using communications services at www.nclnet.org.