

# Going Mobile (Part 1): Wireless Phone Service for Your Home

## Business

By Donna Schwartz Mills

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Going Mobile: Wireless Phone Service for Your Home Business  
(Part 1 of 3)  
by Donna Schwartz Mills  
<http://ld.net/?americanglo>

There is no more important tool for your at-home business than your telephone. You need it to sell your services, negotiate prices, keep in touch with vendors, market and more. Posting your phone number on your website and listing it on your business card gives potential clients peace of mind that you are a real person that they can reach at will. It's a simple way to give yourself credibility, even as you are just starting out.

However, it doesn't take the new home worker long to discover that there's no quicker way to lose that credibility than letting the kids answer the phone when clients call. That's why the experts advise that you:

- \* Get a second phone line, dedicated to your business;
- \* Let your family know that you are the only one to answer it, and
- \* Have a good voicemail system in place for those times when you can't answer it.

But this can be quite an investment when you're just

starting out, especially if your home is not already wired for two telephone lines.

The solution: Go wireless.

As mobile phone use in the United States has exploded, the cost of wireless service has gone down -- so much that a growing market segment is foregoing traditional "landlines" entirely.

In fact, after comparing the cost of installing another line to my home with the cost of a mobile phone, I discovered that the latter actually cost \*less\*. That's because today's wireless networks allow carriers to bundle features like voice-mail, three-way calling, call waiting and caller ID into their basic services -- at no extra charge. Throw in free nationwide long distance on some plans and you could end up \*saving\* money while gaining the convenience of carrying your office phone with you while you're ferrying your kids to their after-school activities.

## HOW TO FIND THE WIRELESS PLAN THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

Start by asking yourself the following questions:

1. How much time do I typically spend on the phone each month for business? How much time do I think I will use for personal needs? When will I be using the phone the most? (M-F 9-5? Weekends? Evenings?)
2. Are my clients local or will I also need long distance?
3. How often do I leave my local calling area - either for business or personal reasons, and where do I go most often?
4. What extra features will I need? (These can include wireless Internet access, text messaging, free mobile to mobile calls, emergency roadside assistance, transmission of digital photos, etc. I highly recommend buying some kind of protection plan in case you lose or break your new phone - these can be lifesavers!)

Write down your answers and then visit the following website, which is a clearinghouse for all things mobile:

<http://www.WirelessAdvisor.com>

Enter your zip code to access a list of each wireless company currently operating in your area.

At this point, you could spend hours visiting the websites of these companies and comparing rate plans (trust me,

I did that while researching this article). What I discovered is that -- at least in large metropolitan areas -- competition is working. Here in Los Angeles, there are six different companies to choose from, with plans that meet my needs ranging in cost from \$510 to \$614 per year, with most of the difference due to the price of the telephone handset. Once you factor out the cost of the phone, the price differential was much less - only about \$20 per year between all six companies.

## IT'S NOT THE MONEY, IT'S THE COVERAGE

So your choice of wireless carrier should be based upon something tougher to quantify and of way more importance than rates: service and coverage areas.

Unfortunately, no wireless carrier is able to give you perfect coverage 100% of the time. They all have some dead zones where they are prone to dropping calls. But if you choose a company with excellent coverage in the areas you are in MOST of the time, you may never experience these problems.

So DO visit the carriers' websites and DO select the plan that best suits your service needs - but not before you study the map each company posts showing their coverage areas. If you will be using your phone at home most of the time and your neighborhood is in an area with poor coverage, you can cross that carrier off your list.

Narrow your search farther by returning to [WirelessAdvisor.com](http://WirelessAdvisor.com) and checking out their message board focusing on providers in your area. There are two kinds of posts here -- the first from people who are asking what the others think of X-company or Y... and what their customers think of their service. Most of the posts are complaints and many are quite specific about the parts of town where they have experienced problems. These are extremely busy boards - if you do not see your target neighborhoods already discussed here, post your own question -- you will soon get plenty of opinions from those who have been there!

Then, if any of your friends or family uses the provider you are considering, invite them over and ask if you can try out their phones in the areas you are likely to use them. Nothing beats first-hand experience when making a decision you may have to live with for one or two years.

Finally, most providers offer a no-penalty 14-day trial period allowing you to return the phone and cancel service without paying the exorbitant termination fees (which range from \$150 to \$200). Make sure you ask about this and make a note of it on your contract in case you and your new

provider don't work out.

A wireless phone could be the answer to your business communication needs, and may even save you money. But before you go that route, it is imperative that you carefully figure out what those needs are and match them to what's available in your area. New products and rate innovations are coming online all the time. We'll look at some of those in Part 2 of this series.

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Donna Schwartz Mills writes about the specific needs of work at home parents at her website, The ParentPreneur Club, "For Parents Who Want Choices, Not Office Politics." Tools, tips and advice you need to help grow your home based business while raising a family.

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