

About the JCRA

The JCRA is an independent authority established by the States of Jersey to enforce Jersey's competition law and regulate its telecommunication and postal sectors. In each of these areas, the JCRA's primary mission is to promote consumer welfare through efforts that encourage lower prices and greater choice and innovation in the goods and services available in Jersey. The JCRA is recognized internationally as a leading voice in the application of competition law and policy in small economies.



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Advice to Mobile Phone Users



Choosing

Roaming

Security



General Advice for Mobile Telephone Users

Introduction

Mobile telephones are becoming the standard means of communication for many consumers of telecommunications services in Jersey and elsewhere. Mobile operators offer numerous packages of voice and data services as well as ranges of handsets from the simple to the advanced Blackberry® type devices. However, consumers should be aware of the scope of these services.

Voice

All mobile handsets offer voice telephony and this is the basic service licensed under the Telecommunications (Jersey) Law 2002. All operators are obliged to offer services that interconnect with other island networks and generally to connect with other networks worldwide (see below on Roaming).

All mobile networks are required to offer access to emergency services via both 112 and 999. Access to emergency services is also available even if your operator's network does not have coverage in certain locations on the island (see your operator's website for details of coverage). Access to emergency services is also available if the mobile handset has no SIM card inserted or if your Pay-As-You-Go credit is exhausted.

SMS

Short Message Service (SMS) or texting does not have as many obligations under JCRA licences as voice. The SMS system originated as part of the mobile network underlying maintenance services and was subsequently adapted to provide public text messaging services. Consequently, it is based on a simple protocol that uses an old-type computer program that operates on a rudimentary First In, First Out (FIFO) stack principle similar to email. The FIFO stack means that during busy periods an SMS message may be pushed down the stack as other more recent messages are dealt with. Therefore, on occasions SMS messages are not 'instant', and may take minutes, hours or even days to be delivered. It is therefore important that consumers are aware that SMS is not an entirely reliable messaging system and that important or urgent messages should be conveyed by voice.

Data

Data services, such as Internet access and Multi Media Services (MMS) are also offered by island operators using either 2G GPRS or 3G services. Data speeds are greater using 3G and consumers who are heavy users of data services are advised to purchase a 3G handset or other mobile device. Data speeds will vary depending on a number of factors including:

The choice of handset will probably be much more limited and some initial payment even for a very basic handset is probable.

SIM/Phone Locking

Jersey operators, unlike many in other jurisdictions, do not lock either the SIM or the phone and thus it is possible to exchange SIMs when travelling abroad as noted above. If you have a handset from another network outside the island, your Jersey operator may be able to unlock it for you.

What to do if you lose your Handset

If you lose your handset inform your operator immediately so as your credit or monthly account will be frozen and the SIM disabled. This will prevent any fraudulent calls or other transactions being made.

Report the loss to the police at the earliest opportunity stating when and where the phone was lost and a description of the handset (the model number preferably).

If the phone is returned you will be able to reactivate it by taking the handset with personal photo identification to your operator.

A further security concern is that many people keep much personal data on their handset, especially modern multi-function devices such as a Blackberry®, iPhone® and other multifunction handsets. This information may be extremely useful for thieves who may use such information for identity theft or other similar crimes. You may also lose important information such as contacts, telephone numbers and other vital data on the handset. It is therefore important that you keep regular backup copies of your handset data. See your handset manufacturer's handbook or website for details on how to interconnect with a PC for backup. Backed-up data will also enable you to identify possible areas where a crime may be committed and you will be able to take steps to mitigate this. If you lose a handset that contains personal data, such as bank account details etc, inform the relevant organizations as soon as possible.

It is recommended that your handset is password or PIN locked at all times, although this is not convenient and many users do not take this precaution.

Your handset may be insured under your household or travel insurance, check your policy for details.

Contract

Generally a monthly subscription has a more attractive range of handsets available at competitive prices and most packages include a free handset although the user may want to pay a little more for a handset with more functions. Remember that a more attractive phone is likely to be bundled with a more expensive monthly rental bundle.

Contracts are offered currently on 12, 18 or 24 month terms. Generally the longer contracts have better features on the phone and bundle but you will be locked in to your operator for longer and thus porting your number will be expensive until the contract ends. Once the initial term of a contract is ended then unless you choose to upgrade your handset you will be able to port at any time.

Monthly contracts have a number of advantages including lower call costs and if you are a heavy user of either voice telephony or text messaging then a monthly bundle may be your best option. But remember that statistically you are unlikely to use all your bundled minutes and texts each month. Some operators carry forward unused minutes onto the next month, but generally wipe these off at the next carry-over. Also beware that some types of call are generally excluded from bundles, these can include calls to Premium, Freephone and other numbers outside the mobile (07XXX) or geographic number (01XXX, 02XX and 03XX) ranges, although 070X numbers may not be included. Remember also that calls made outside your bundle may be charged at a higher rate than your normal on-net calls if the number you call has been ported to another operator. You can ask your operator to give you a breakdown of calls made outside your bundle on your monthly bill.

Pre-Payment

Pre-payment offers require you to pay for your calls before they are made by adding value to your account generally in units of £5 (although from time to time operators may run special offers that change the relative value of this unit). In addition some operators offer extra value for topping up online.

Pre payment is ideal for managing a budget as you can only spend the amount of credit that is bought at any time. Call charges are likely to be more than for contract plans and your operator will be able to give you details of costs for each type of call.

Roaming is likely to be more expensive than with a monthly plan. It is also likely that you will have less choice of destinations as operators find making roaming agreements for pre-payment handsets more onerous.

Calls to emergency services (112 or 999 and 116XXX) are always available even if you have used all your credit.

- Whether 2G or 3G is being used
- Distance from the nearest mobile mast
- The number of users currently sharing the data connection
- Contention elsewhere in the network
- Interference from other wireless sources

Handsets will also automatically switch between 2G and 3G depending on signal strength, thus data rates may be variable, particularly if the handset is on the move in a car or bus.

The JCRA licences currently do not have as many obligations for data services as for voice.

Roaming

Mobile operators strive to make agreements with as many overseas networks as possible, but such agreements take time and as new mobile operators enter the market more agreements are required. Consequently, individual operators will have differing numbers of roaming partners and charges. You are advised to check with the mobile operator the networks it has agreements with before you make a final selection, particularly if you regularly travel to particular countries.

Remember that while Jersey is within the UK telephone numbering plan (international code 44) the island's operators are treated as foreign operators by UK networks. Therefore when travelling to the UK roaming charges will apply.

Voice Roaming

Voice calls are charged at a premium while roaming and users are advised to check with their operator before travelling. Remember that you may also be charged for receiving voice calls while roaming and these charges will vary from country to country. Roamed calls will generally be calculated outside your monthly bundled service and will be identified separately on your account.

As an alternative to roaming, Jersey consumers can purchase a Pay-As-You-Go SIM in the country of destination for making and/or receiving calls. This is a potentially lower-cost option and will result in no surprises when you receive your next bill.

Calling Your Voicemail

Remember that a call to your voicemail from abroad is to a Jersey number and you will be charged at the same rate as a voice call. To reduce your charges you can turn your voicemail off before you leave home.

SMS Roaming

SMS messages are also charged at a premium while roaming and will generally be several times more expensive than on the local networks. They will sometimes be noted on your bill as calls to a mobile number, this is the one used by your operator to receive roamed messages. Again, a potentially lower cost alternative is to purchase a Pay-As-You-Go SIM on one of the destination networks while on holiday.

Data Roaming

Data roaming is also available on mobile networks but the number of roaming partners may be somewhat more restricted than for voice calls. Currently data can be many times more expensive while roaming and the JCRA cautions users to be aware of this. If you think that you are likely to want data services while away from the island then purchasing a Pay-As-You-Go SIM at your destination is a potentially lower cost option. Alternatively, consider using free or low-cost Wi-Fi services or internet cafés for accessing Internet services. To minimise the risk of huge bills, switch off your always-on internet services when travelling abroad. Devices such as iPhones®, Blackberry's® and other smart phones will constantly download data when connected to a network.



Mobile Number Portability

In order to increase consumer choice the JCRA introduced Mobile Number Portability (MNP). This facility enables consumers to move between local networks without the inconvenience of changing telephone number. Currently this service is provided free of charge by island operators. Remember you will have to pay the balance of any existing contract to the operator that you are porting from, so it is best to port when your current contract ends.

Number porting takes a maximum of 48 hours to complete and consumers will not lose voice services during the process. Porting is possible for both contract and Pay-As-You-Go handsets. Further information on the process is available directly from the island operators.

More information about MNP may be obtained from the JCRA's MNP Consumer Fact Sheet.

Selecting a Handset

Handsets are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Not only do handsets allow you to make calls and send texts, they can be used for many other functions from taking pictures and videos, to surfing the Internet, sending and receiving e-mails and listening to music. Some phones are also able to synchronize with computer programs so that they can hold a lot of personal information and data.

Pre-payment options mean that you will probably have to buy a handset, while with a monthly contract operators usually include a free or discounted handset.

What do you need in a phone?

Make sure that you select a handset that suits your needs – camera, MP3 player, etc. Be aware that if you do not use all the features that are available on your handset you will probably be paying more than you need.

For advanced data services such as Internet access, downloading or video calls, then a 3G phone and service might be best for you. Some handsets also have Wi-Fi connectivity which can be a cheaper option for data services when roaming.

Depending on how you use your telephone, it may be cheaper to buy the handset yourself and then select a SIM-only or pre-pay option.

Contract or Pre-Pay?

There are a number of offers from mobile operators but in essence these break down into two main classifications:

- Contract or
- Pre-Payment (Pay-As-You-Go)

Which type of package that the consumer selects will depend on individual needs.

