

# “The Dog Ate My Phone”

## Cell Phone Cancellation Special Report

14 Year Wireless Expert New Special Report Reveals the  
Secrets to Cell Phone Cancellation....



Ruh Roh...

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## **To Cancel Your Cell Phone Contract or Not to Cancel Your Cell Phone Contract....That is the Question.**

Everybody talks about “how” to cancel cell phone contracts but nobody talks about “why” people cancel cell phone contracts. The big problem is when people talk about “how” to get out of such a contract without giving the rationale and reasons that go with “why” they want out in the first place, the resulting discussion usually means end users find out that they are missing a lot of “oh I forgot to mention” information along the way. It’s those details that lead to an angry and frustrated user base, instead of a satisfied throng of customers.

The reason “how” as a standalone doesn’t work is because the variables are immense – and the specifics are often dictated by the “why” aspect of the question. These variables range from ethics and values to one’s individual personality to the cell phone company you have your service with to when you signed up for your phone service to whether you purchased your phone through the direct cell phone company or through an e-tailer or dealer. Additionally, although it feels oh-so-good to many people, attacking the cell phone company or finding ways that abuse “loopholes” in their systems will ultimately result in more laws and regulations being created. So this special report will reveal not only the realistic but ethical ways to get out of your cell phone contract, it will also explore the many hard to find options and alternatives that will help you avoid getting into a ‘non favorable contract’ in the first place.

# Realistic \*and\* Ethical Ways to Get Out of Your Cell Phone Contract

## ***Don't Buy One***

Hah! It doesn't get much easier than that. If you are a mobile road warrior and you frequently travel with a laptop you can consider an alternative solution such as as a VoIP 'Softphone' which allows you long distance calling through the internet via a free software download or a headset. Of course you will need internet coverage but that can be done from most airports, hotels, Starbucks and FedEx Kinkos locations to name a few. The consumer and SOHO, small business based VoIP programs would be equivalent to something like Skype, Vonage or Lingo. If your employer sends you abroad or out of the area occasionally rent a phone as needed.

***Side Note: It is understandable that in a corporate environment you can NOT easily run any type of sales & service based business unless you buy phones and use them. Many of my clients in the Corporate Environment have set up loaner pools for those people within the organization who can live with them 'minimally'.***

You know that your employees don't want to really be found and on call 24x7 anyway. Their productivity is optimized when they have a life outside of work. Many of the companies that I consult to have started doing shared pools, where employees who need to use cell phones daily for a specific job such as a runner or delivery person or occasionally for things such as on travel check out the phones as needed. An off the shelf bar code program from Staples or equivalent office supply store allows users to easily self-manage check out and return of the hardware. If they are needed after hours for emergency based issues they are called on their personal phones. All employees receive a flat rate technology stipend every month which they can use for cell phone, laptop cards or laptop upgrades etc. Workplace peers are apt to be more considerate when they realize that everyone is using personal phones as opposed to corporate phones and

when they have the corporate phones they are using them as intended and not freely giving out the number to everyone they know because 1. They do not want to be 'found' all hours of the day and night and 2. They know they will only have use of the phone temporarily.

### ***Buyer's Remorse, Changed Your Mind***

So despite my advice you go ahead and do it anyway. You decide you want to buy a phone and you take it to your home/office or the place you will be primarily using it and fiddle with it a bit, then decide it isn't right for you. Or perhaps there's limited coverage in the area(s) you'll be primarily using the phone. Maybe you just realized that \$499 was a lot more than you truly wanted to spend.

Whatever the reason, the buyer's remorse clause is designed to let you take it back whether you simply changed your mind or found the phone difficult to work with. The buyers remorse program varies by cell phone companies and can be anywhere from two weeks to one month. But beware, cell phone companies are very strict about those dates and the time which the cancellation date occurs depends on your operator. For some networks, the onus is on you to get the phone back to the warehouse as fast as possible; for others, it's a bit easier and the cancellation date is registered when you initially contact customer care as long as the phone is received within two weeks.

Once the contract is in your name you are the only person authorized to call in to make changes on the account because usage fees for the dates you may have used the phone or a restocking fee may apply. The sales representative or person who accepted the phone is not permitted to call in and agree to these fees on your behalf nor do they usually have the personal information needed to access your account. So if you decide to return your phone for buyers remorse, the first thing you want to do is call or stop by the store or source where you brought the phone from, get the customer care number and call in and deactivate

the phone. Inquire about the fees that you will incur, have the representative note the account and resolve the fees by phone at that moment if possible.

Delete any phone numbers that you may have called or programmed into the phone, repackage it in its original packaging and return to the location where you purchased it. If you purchased it by mail, send the phone with some sort of delivery confirmation. The phone is usually going to some huge warehouse and can easily be lost. Invest a few dollars more up front instead of paying a lot of dollars later to pay the retail value of a phone lost in transit (as the phone will no longer be subsidized with a new activation it will now cost the fees of a lost replacement which WILL BE considerably more.

Additionally, if you like the phone service but just want to get a different kind of phone, be sure to do that in the buyers remorse period as well.

### ***Moving Out of Area***

Dependent on where you are moving and whether or not the cell phone company offers coverage or service in that geographic area, you may be eligible to legally terminate your contract early without incurring any early out fees. Generally, it's as simple as checking out the coverage map your cell phone provider has online or available in its local cell phone shops.

If your new address has no coverage, or coverage that's iffy at best, you can usually cancel your contract without penalty. Most cell phone operators only require that you provide proof of your move, such as a copy of your mail redirection form or copies of utilities at the new address in your name.

### ***Military Deployment***

If you fax the cell phone company your deployment papers, you will be eligible to legally terminate your contract without incurring any early out fees.

## ***Change of Responsibility***

A change of billing responsibility is just that, a different person (related to you or not) can essentially assume the contract on your bill. They can even change the phone number and the hardware and you will not be penalized.

- A credit check will need to be run on the person assuming the contract, so they will have to be a minimum of 18 years old and if a deposit is required, they can pay the deposit and assume the months remaining in the contract.
- If they ultimately do not pay the bill and get sent to collections or what have you in no way will you be liable.
- The cell phone company will have you both sign a form and fax it in or make a verbal commitment on a conference call saying that you want to release the number and service and they agree to accept responsibility for the remainder of your contract term.

## ***Cell Phone 'Swap Out' Programs***

*Note: It is usually more difficult to sell older model phones through the program*

There are a number of programs operating on the web, and some through community papers in metropolitan areas, that enable you to basically exchange your phone AND contract for another you find more agreeable. Oddly enough, cell phone companies aren't adverse to this – as long as both parties involved in the exchange fill in all the requisite paperwork.

Popular sites, like CellTradeUSA (<http://tinyurl.com/35to8c>) and CellSwap offer a service that's easy to use and cost-effective. Essentially, you place an ad detailing the phone you have and the contract you're presently signed up with – including details of how long the contract has to run, the monthly fee, talk time and overage charges. Also, you can browse through other phones and contracts on offer. If you find one you like, you negotiate with the present owner and the deal is done.

- Newer model phones obviously are going to go faster but are also usually offered at a much lower price than retail with accessories included – meaning it's a great market for buyers, but sellers can take a serious hit if they're not careful.
- You have to register on the site and sometimes you have to put a 'credit card' number on file in 'good faith' to gain access and browse the site.
- You still have to do a change of responsibility after you find a buyer meaning your cell phone company has to run a credit check for the purchaser and they have to get approved for service. Then you have to sign a form saying that you want to release the number and service and the purchaser has to sign a form saying that they will accept responsibility for the remainder of your contract term.
- Make sure you don't sell a lemon and hopefully you don't purchase a lemon.

### ***Material Adverse [Carrier Breach of Contract]***

In the world of cellular this is most closely identified with a breach of contract on the cell phone company's behalf because they essentially *changed* the terms of the contract agreement without your consent. As you could imagine having to negotiate a rate increase with their entire customer base would not be very effective or realistic, so they just change it at will after months of market research and to deal with increased general operating expenses and such.

An example of a Material Adverse related fee could be something like the cell phone company raised their international text messaging rate increased from 15 cents to 20 cents but it can work in reverse as well they could decrease the price of a certain service or feature. Either way it is considered a change in the original terms of contract that you signed on whatever date and it gives you grounds to

exit your contract without having to yell and carry on, ask for a supervisor or go through any crazy extremes.

With regard to the Material Adverse Changes usually there will be a press release or news announcement in an industry trade journal or news source regarding the changes. What you're more likely to see – or overlook – is a little slip, non-descript recycled paper coupon type thingamajig with all the fine print in your bill. Yes, it is probably the little slip you throw straight in the recycle pile with the envelope, ads for new phones etc. Make sure you review these slips because they contain vital details – in this case, there is usually a time period stated (a very small window at that) during which you can call in and make your Material Adverse Dispute.

If you call in and inquire about the fee change, you will need to tell your cell phone company you received this notice in the mail (make sure you keep a copy) because usually you have to either fax it in with a cancellation request letter or mail it in with a cancellation request letter (and letter has to be signed by an authorized point of contact). You can tell them you would like to place a ticket in for a Material Adverse Dispute because you did not agree to this fee when you originally signed the contract and then ask them for your options for moving forward.

Let them do the research. Give them the opportunity to call you back and respond to you with options because if they find that the fees applies to you, it just may turn out that they will offer you something that you find more appealing than canceling your service, whether it is a set of bonus minutes at the same price you currently pay or a nice new shiny piece of gadgetry at a significantly reduced rate.

But be warned – tempting as it may be, if you agree to the new terms, you are renewing your contract. And you know what they say: “Fool me once, shame on me. Fool me twice, shame on you”. Those cell phone companies really know how to sock it to us, especially if we take our eyes off the ball.

Basically you need to play nicely, and remember that when you are angry and take it out on the cell phone company, they won't play nicely with you. It only takes one firm request from their customer care center, such as “Let us see a copy of your signed agreement...” And the next thing you know, you're adding up the cost of hunting down all the back paperwork, faxing it back and forth and realize that your time and effort expended far exceeds the \$150-plus dollars you could have just paid to get out of the contract.

*Note: The option to get out of the contract usually only applies if you currently subscribe to those services. And before you actually go through with the process, realize that going to another cell phone company may be more expensive or they may not offer the same services that you are currently getting. Everybody has an entry-level \$39.99-a-month plan, you know?*

### **Death**

Obviously, if you're dead you won't be sweating your cell phone bill. But someone else might. If you're in the situation of having to close accounts for a deceased friend or loved one, you'll need to call the customer service center and let them know the person has died.

Then, you'll need to fax in the death certificate with a letter asking that the account be closed, so that the cell phone company will stop sending bills. It has been known that in some cases cell phone companies have been known to

charge the early termination fee regardless. However, more often than not they will waive it or reverse the fee once it's been applied to the account.

## **The Rock or the Hard Place....**

There are four major U.S. cell phone companies with set public rates – and two of those companies are run primarily by lawyers ☺. The cell phone companies also have computers, software and other resources in place to measure everything from the number of calls coming in during the course of an hour, what geographic area they're from, how long the calls last, your true number of dropped calls and even the number of requests they've had for something specific. If they notice 1,459 people calling in every day requesting the same strange, and very specific, reason for wanting to get out of their contract early without paying a penalty, it is going to be flagged by the system. And it won't be long before that excuse is simply not going to fly.

Play nicely with the cell phone company and they will play nicely with you. In my nine years of dealing with customer care on behalf of my clients, from individuals to multinational companies, I found that when I was courteous and polite with the cell phone company they were always willing to work with me.

I have negotiated everything from six months worth of credits, to early out cancellations with no fees on multi-line corporate accounts, to bonus minutes for the life of the client's contract. Reality is you CAN be firm and polite at the same time.

### **In communicating with customer care:**

1. Never ask for a supervisor if you can avoid it (more on this momentarily)
2. Always express gratitude for their time, especially when they have to research something for you, and always ask for options.

3. Instead of threatening to leave them when you don't get your way, make a more positive statement like, "I have enjoyed my service up until this point and if you can understand I am a little frustrated right now because of (your problem) and if you can make suggestions of how you have resolved this problem in the past it would be helpful..."

Most times the first person you are dealing with 'has the power' to make changes or apply credits up to a certain dollar amount – usually somewhere around \$200. They don't need to go to a supervisor for most minor things. If they have to transfer you, tell them you don't mind but ask if they can stay on the phone with you and make the warm transfer so they can explain the problem "using their special cellular terminology" as opposed to you having to keep repeating the whole story, which can make things confusing.

The representatives are almost always happy to do this because they'd much rather stay on the phone with a nice and pleasant person for 20-plus minutes than to get cursed out by the next call that comes into their queue. While you may not be the majority you are certainly going to have more issues resolved in your favor, quickly and without too much effort on your behalf. In addition, if you are armed and empowered with resources and education it will make it a lot easier to alleviate common problems you have with your cell phone that make you want to consider terminating early in the first place.

## **Common misconceptions about cell phone contracts**

Some of the biggest arguments people have with their cell phone provider are down to users essentially misunderstanding the contract they agree to when picking up a new phone. There are a few areas to consider before you sign on the dotted line – the most common things that lead to problems later are outlined below.

## ***Consider Need vs. Want***

When it comes to cell phones, there's a little of both need and want involved in the decision to get one. Whatever your need/want makeup, you've got to realize that having cell phone service is a lot like any other utility. For many, it is as essential as running water and electricity.

There are plenty of reasons people don't want to be tied down by a traditional cell phone contract – and there are a growing number of options to address this desire.

You can pick up a TracFone at the grocery store checkout – these are essentially, disposable phones, with a prepaid amount of airtime at a knock-down price. Great if all you want to do is have a number people can reach you on for something specific, though not necessarily the best option for the long-term user.

There are also plenty of cell phone company's offering pay-as-you-go alternatives to traditional contracts, and a number of relative newcomers to the market offering fixed monthly rates for unlimited texts or minutes, depending on your preference.

In the event you truly want an **emergency-only phone** did you know that you can get a phone without a service plan? All cellular phones have the ability to dial 911 and also make a call via a credit card/calling card. So you can make calls as needed without having a monthly recurring fee. Understand that the fees could be in excess of 40 cents a minute but if you are only making a couple of calls in a month for just a few minutes it won't matter.

## ***Understand Why Termination Fees Exist***

The reason that cell phone company's charge early termination fees is because the phone, BlackBerry or other hardware you use is heavily subsidized by the wireless network you choose when you activate it with a service plan. This means you're getting an expensive piece of kit at a significant discount. The cell phone company makes this money back when you agree to commit to a specified length of service with them, usually between one and three years. The break even point in real dollars comes somewhere after you have had service with them just over one year, more or less dependent on the model phone you chose. Add the resources and time used from you calling into customer care, hence you get the "infamous two year contract" term.

If you so choose and request, you can pay for the full price of the hardware and opt not to agree to a contract. In this case the phone would be...you got it, very expensive. Typical handsets start around \$200 and can be significantly more, depending on the manufacturer's suggested retail price. Many of the suggested retail prices of phones which are often promoted as "free phones" actually range from \$99 to \$399 in cost. And popular new phones, such as the Apple iPhone can cost upwards of \$400.

## ***How much will early termination cost?***

The actual cost of the early termination fee per line is based on your cell phone company. Early termination can be charged as a flat rate, a percentage of fees and taxes on the remainder of your contract or a number of other variables, depending on your mobile phone Cell phone company. Typical early termination fees range from \$150 to \$250 per phone number active on your account.

## ***Termination Fees and Double Billing***

The contract varies not only by cell phone company, but also depending on where you purchased the phone. If you bought your phone from an authorized dealer or non-cell phone company direct store then you may be subject to two sets of contract terms, and therefore two termination fees. That's right, one from the company you are purchasing the phone from and one from the Cell phone company direct. If you're not sure, keep an eye on the signs, ads and notices around the shop – somewhere, it will say Authorized Dealer, Indirect Dealer or Retailer somewhere in small text.

Regardless of where you buy a phone from, the representative is usually paid some small commission. If you don't keep your phone number active usually for at least six months the agent who sold you the phone risks having their commission reversed or taken back. So, in order to protect their profit, they charge you an early termination fee. If you purchased the phone and service through a direct cell phone provider then they will charge you the early termination fee. If you purchased through an authorized dealer or mall kiosk you may be subject to the cell phone company's fee plus the authorized dealer's fee, therefore making the cancellation fee somewhere in the region of \$300 or more per active phone on the account.

## ***How is the Start/End Date of the Contract Determined?***

Typical contracts terminate two years from the date you activate new service or make a rate plan change or purchase a new cell phone/pda from a cell phone company, cell phone company website or a dealer. If you lose your phone and have to purchase a replacement phone your contract will start over from the date

you purchased your replacement. If your speaker goes bad or the phone develops another defect within the warranty period (usually one year for new phones or 30 days for refurbished) and you have to swap your phone through the manufacturer-cell phone company warranty exchange program, your contract does *not* renew. If you however, choose to purchase a new or refurbished device from the cell phone company then that means you are upgrading hardware – regardless of whether or not it is an upgraded or ‘downgraded’ model of what you currently have – therefore, means you have to renew the contract.

It does not add on another two years to your already existing two years – you just have a new start date. So if you bought a new phone on July 1, 2007 with a two-year contract your contract would end June 30, 2009. If you were going over your minutes and decided to upgrade to a higher plan in November 1, 2007 then your new contract end date would be October 31, 2009.

It’s worth mentioning that not all phone networks operate with the same rules when it comes to upgrading or downgrading your cell phone plan. Some cell phone company’s don’t reset your start date for increasing your plan. And in many cases you can revise your monthly commitment down without penalty.

### ***What Happens When You Move Your Cell Phone Number From One Cell Phone Company to Another One?***

If you move your cell phone number to another cell phone company, this is called ‘porting’ the number which comes from the term number **portability**. In order to port a phone number you have to keep the number active on your former cell phone company account for it to be eligible to be transferred. Without human

intervention the new cell phone company will pull the number from the old cell phone company's system; thus, the number is automatically deleted from the old account and the old cell phone company's database. If there were multiple numbers on the account only the number(s) you ask to have ported will be removed from the account. If it is the only number on the account then it will deactivate the entire account. However, if you were in contract with the old cell phone company then you will still be subject to pay the early termination fees. A final bill will be issued to you from the former cell phone company with the affiliated fees up until the last date you used it.

### ***When Shouldn't You Renew Your contract?***

You should treat your contract renewal like you would any other major purchase – do the research, consider your options and make an informed decision. For some people, the cell phone contract they've had for the last two years is fine and they're happy to re-up to get a newer, flashier handset. For others, renewing the contract is a contentious issue because of service, hardware or other problems during the term of the original contract. Whichever camp you fall in, there are some times when renewing your contract isn't the best way to go.

In general, if your contract has less than six months to run, you'll do better if you wait until the contract term has actually expired before renewing. This is because the cellular provider you're using will be more desperate to keep you as a client if you haven't fallen for their gimmicky ads and "limited availability" offers near the end of your contract term. Once you're not locked-in to their service any longer, they'll have a greater incentive to pile on the freebies to beguile you into staying – freebies are there for the taking, if you are crafty about it. If you don't ask, you'll never know – so feel free to ask for a Bluetooth headset to go with that new phone, or a bonus text bundle, or extra free minutes.

You'll need to be careful your contract doesn't "accidentally" get renewed. For example, if your two years of required service expires and you wish to continue your service on a month-to-month basis the system will not automatically renew your contract. You remain on month-to-month terms unless you choose to get new hardware or change your plan. Of course you'll notice that around the time your contract renewal is coming up the cell phone company will send you lots of special, amazing offers in the mail to entice you to stay with them. And, typically, you haven't got a clue that your contract is due for renewal, until after you have gotten the equipment, had it a few months and call in to ask a question about your bill. Without meaning to, you've re-upped with the cell phone company – and there's little you can do about it.

When you're at the end of your contract, you can ask your cell phone provider for an unlock code for the phone or other device you got when you signed up – they're obligated to give this code to you, and it is usually sent via text message. Once you have the unlock code, you can use it to liberate your device from the shackles of your current cell phone company – and then take that device and get a contract or pay-as-you-go agreement with any cell phone Cell phone company you like. That's right – provided the phone is compatible with your chosen network technology, you can use your phone where YOU want to, and give your money to a company you choose from that point forward.

Also, when you're nearing the end of your contract with one cell phone provider, you become an attractive target for conversion to the competition. So if you've got even the slightest inkling that you'd like to switch cell companies, this is the time to do your comparison shopping – often if you are going to port your existing number to the new cell service, there are excellent perks on offer. Again, if you don't ask, you'll never know!

Schedule the contract termination date on your Outlook calendar in advance so that you can start exploring your options before you need to take action.

## ***Common, but not necessarily 'practical' ways that people use to try to get out of cell phone contracts***

Everyone gets frustrated with their cell phone company once in a while, so it is to be expected there are plenty of people out there who are keen to give you advice, hints, tips and tricks to try for getting out of a cellular contract you no longer want to carry. Often, these are reactionary ideas that might help you blow off steam, but are unlikely to accomplish anything real.

Things you will find posted on forums and other sources run the gamut from the seemingly innocuous "ask for a supervisor" to the truly far-reaching "fake your own death". What follows is a selection of the most common but sometimes erroneous ideas out there. I will give you the down low, on the straight and narrow, as to why these bits of advice won't necessarily give you the desired results as well as provide a little insight to alternative solutions when applicable.

### ***Call Customer Care and Ask for a Supervisor***

Let's think about it, how many aggravated, irate, angry people call the cell phone company customer care department on any given day to vent their frustration regarding a problem with their service related issue, lack of coverage, broken or defunct hardware or problems with their bill? That's right – just about everybody who calls in to customer care on a daily basis which is far more than you'd care to count.

Have you considered what will happen when the representative says “No” or you get cut off in the middle of being transferred? Probably not – but you’ll end up having to fight your way back through the system, explaining everything again and being even more frustrated. Ever called in and cursed and fussed out the customer care representative only for the call to abruptly end? Did you really get lost in the transfer or just hung up on? Yes, you are the paying customer but the customer is not ALWAYS right. In fact, when the customer is really pissed off, they are more often than not WRONG and in THE WRONG with how they choose to deal with the situation to make it right. How many times have you crossed the line in pursuance of self-interest or fulfillment? Truth-be-told if you were on the phone cursing and getting all ghetto and over the top with me...I’d hang up on you too! So customer etiquette 101, if you want to get a little respect and help with your problem be certain to give a little respect and be HONEST with the representative. It is a lot easier to solve the problems when they have facts and real information. If you don’t know the answer, i.e. when you first started having the problem, say that you first noticed the problem when you were doing blankety blank or at blankety blankety place. Don’t give ridiculous filler sensationalized information.

If you have a reason to request your call be escalated to a supervisor, or a justified cause for concern, that’s fair enough. The thing is, in most cases asking for a supervisor is simply not necessary. The customer care representative has a lot more ‘power’ than you realize. How much they exercise simply depends on how new they are (they may not have dealt with a problem like yours before) as well as how nice or ugly you are when you approach them. I have been in MANY a situation where I have gotten approvals for everything from bonus minutes for the life of the contract, to discounted monthly service to hundreds or thousands of dollars of credits approved from the first tier customer care representative. Not

only have I done this for both consumer and corporate clients, I have also done this with all of the 'BIG 4' cell phone companies in the U.S. and on more than one occasion. Note: What you ask for and how you ask for it is equally important.

### ***Take Notes and Write to the Cell Phone Company***

Uhhh-- yeah right. Reality is when you call into customer care the first time you expect to get your problem resolved, easily and with minimal drama. So taking notes for every little call you make to customer care and writing a diary of your deepest most inner thoughts of what happened along the way is not practical and not likely to work as the first call along with all the details would probably be *the most important* one in the 'problem' thread. Also have you ever gotten transferred? Yes, haven't we all? Eventually you get transferred so many times, speak to so many people and receive advice on so many different things odds are most times you don't even know what happened, who did what, who screwed up something else. Naturally nobody is going to take responsibility for that and it doesn't matter what you say...what matters is what 'their notes say' (if they took them).

What you originally asked for was altogether different than the problem that they are trying to resolve for you now because they realized other things that were screwed up along the way. And even if you did manage to take notes and keep record of who you spoke to, what happens when you draft a letter and send it to the PO Box on your bill or the only mailing address you could find on their website? You'll get back the letter four to six weeks later saying, "Sorry, we are only a fulfillment center for payments and we don't have a forwarding address for *customer care*."

So after calling all over the place you find the address to the corporate headquarters and send in the same request. They send you a canned letter packed with catchy phrases like “thank you for your letter” and “we share your concern”. The letter goes on to tell you that the robot recipient will forward your letter to the appropriate department and of course, that they appreciate your business. The real sucker punch comes at the end, where it’s signed “Sincerely, The Cell Phone Company Team” – or something generic without so much as the name of a real person that you can talk to.

Frustrated, you call the office and a person gives you their name but not their extension because it is only an inbound general number. The call center worker tells you he’s sorry he can’t make outgoing calls – and apologizes that there’s just no way you’ll ever reach him directly again.

It is more likely that you can make some real progress by alleviating most of the headaches that make you want to cancel your phone service to begin with, rather than just flat out canceling service only to go to another provider and have a similar frustrating experience.

However, if you really are a detailed note taker (date, time, who you spoke to, what they said, what they promised, how you responded and then what was supposed to happen) and you insist on documenting everything and have the patience to follow through from start to finish with it, then you can write to the FCC (Federal Communications Commission). They are the government agency that oversees telecomm and wireless related regulations and affiliated services.

You can contact FCC, by phone, fax, snail mail or email to file your complaint: phone toll free: 1-888-225-5322; <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html>. They will issue you a case # and usually within 3 business days someone will get back to you to help you resolve the issue. They are the same group that handles complaints for obscene and offensive comments you hear on public radio broadcasts and for harassing phone calls from telemarketers. As you may have seen some high profile radio shock jocks firings in the past, calls in to them in volumes can influence change. If wireless and cellular consumers start voicing their frustrations with the shortcomings in the cellular industry, whether that be all those darn fees, early termination fees and access of the 700 MHz auctioning (which is **TECHNICALLY** public space and therefore its use should be dictated by the public....more on that later) on a collective voice, then you will begin to see change there as well. This looks like a 'job' for Eliot Spitzer ;-)  
Note: Being that I live and work in DC where rule of thumb is you should never 'talk politics' unless you work in the industry, I am not Democratic or Republican. I am Switzerland--- therefore neutral, lol.

### ***Set Your Phone to Roam, and Spend Over Half Your Time in Roaming Zones for Three Months Straight***

First, this is something that only works on certain CDMA handsets. Unfortunately, this eliminates almost half of the cell phone users in the USA who are carrying newer model, IDEN or GSM Phones.

Second, as far as Sprint is concerned, it would be faster for you to call into them three times a day for a month complaining about your phone and service and hogging up valuable customer care time so they can "fire" you as their customer and kill your contract early for using up too many of their human resources.

### ***Fake Your Death***

This story was reported in the August 2007 *Washington Post* – when a disgruntled Verizon Wireless customer from Chicago wasn't satisfied

with the results he got from any of the traditional channels and opted to take things a step further. He forged a death certificate, had a buddy fax it in to the relevant department at Verizon Wireless and hoped he'd heard the last of things.

In the end, his ruse was discovered by Verizon Wireless, and he opted to pay the \$175 fee to get out of his contract. The publicity this case has generated means faking your own death is an ill-advised course of action for those hoping to get out of a cellular contract no matter what the *extreme*.

## ***The Lemon Law***

Every state in the U.S. has a consumer protection law that allows consumers to pursue their money back from the manufacturer pursuant upon certain kinds of warranty issues. While the original law was targeted towards crappy vehicles that looked to be in pristine condition but barely made it off the lot, lol, how horrible-it now includes all types of consumer products.

In order to place a claim for the 'lemon law' you have to go to court. So yes, it might make sense if you have several thousand dollars tied up in a car. And no, it probably doesn't make sense to go to court and pay a lawyer more than the cost of your phone to get money back. Additionally, ALL new phones come with a one year manufacturer warranty. So if you actually have a claim related to a warranty issue, then you can return the phone through the direct cell phone company (carrier) or the manufacturer direct and they will either repair (but most likely replace your phone at no charge). And if your issue is not covered under warranty, then you have no case because your cell phone is either beyond the 1 year warranty period or YOU BROKE IT (and it doesn't matter whether it was intentionally or accidentally)!

### **[Qui Moi? Broke my phone?...Nay.]**

Yes YOU broke the phone, you may have done it intentionally because you were fuming mad and 'dropped' the phone while you were talking to??? or perhaps you just woke up one morning and noticed it on your dresser, 'it just

stopped working' and if it wasn't you maybe it was your significant other who threw it against the wall in the heat of the moment, your toddler who threw it in the black hole, your teenager who wanted the newest phone or your dog who decided it looked more appealing than their chew toy. These are actually more normal and conservative stories but throughout my 14 years in the industry I have heard all kinds of ridiculous, no let me correct myself, ABSOLUTELY ridiculous stories from customers of how their phone 'just stopped working' and it really scares me how much people curse and carry on and fuss about how terrible the cell phone companies are when the reality is so many people lie and/or just think up the most crazy kinds of schemes whether it is to get a few bonus minutes or an upgraded phone for free or at a cheaper price. You really don't have to go to so much effort to do that. It really is no wonder why Sprint fired 1,000 customers (although they should have sent a few reps with them). First people complain that their service sucks and they want to be out of the contract, now they are out of their contract and don't have to pay a termination fee and they complain they were humiliated or somehow embarrassed. I tell you--You can't win for losing. It is always something. Granted I have to argue that the cell phone companies should do a better job on educating their customers and streamlining and simplifying many of their archaic processes, they are less inclined to do it unless they hear their customers asking for it. So if you want to complain and throw a fit about something, find an advocacy group and complain on a collective voice about a bigger cause like the stupid amount of fees you have to pay on your bill every month as opposed to how your phone doesn't get reception in your 10x10 cubicle or your McMansion in the gated community. Remember it was you who wanted to get away from us city dwellers and urban warriors. So forget about being 100% connected 100% of the time via your mobile handheld. No my friend, I'm afraid you'll have to go find peace on your walking trail that leads to nowhere but around the perimeter of your neighborhood or go socialize with your happy smiling neighbors in their faux modern day Mayberry. Now that's an original thought. Ok, so where was I? LOL. Don't take me too seriously folks. Sometimes you know- working in the service industry just strikes a nerve ☺

## **Common Reasons People Want to Cancel Phone Services, and Realistic Alternatives**

Despite the best of intentions, signing up for a two-year contract with one particular cell phone company doesn't always work out as planned. There are a number of legitimate reasons people want, and need, to get out of their contracts. And in these particular circumstances, working directly with the customer care center can be fruitful.

### ***Customer Service Problems***

Three of the "big four" cell phone companies outsource their general, billing and customer care services (as opposed to data support) to the same company. This means there really isn't a great deal of difference in customer handling from one company to another. As a result, customers who have already left one company due to dissatisfaction are likely to leave the next for the same reason.

### ***Poor Coverage/Dropped Calls***

The current AT&T ad campaign highlights the annoyance, confusion and potential trouble dropped calls can cause. Whether you lose a client in mid-negotiation because your car shoots into a tunnel, lose your mom in mid-argument because you've walked into the basement or have a call cut out for no particular reason, a dropped call is a real pain for everyone. If it's down to dodgy hardware, spotty network coverage or some mysterious cellular black hole, it doesn't matter – the fact is, you've lost a call and it's easy to see why anyone might be a little upset about that happening more than once in a blue moon.

It's often alleged that people who experience a lot of "dropped" calls tend to spend an extensive amount of time on the phone hence they notice it more. You can combat that criticism by being sensible – if you are in a building, like your home or office use the landline whenever you can. You've got to think of your cell

phone and your landline phone as interchangeable devices. They've got many of the same features are available: voice mail, call waiting, three way calling and call forwarding.

Consider forwarding your cell phone to your desk or home phone if you get poor coverage in your home and your calls are urgent. The rate is around 10 to 20 cents per forward (not per minute) and dependent on the nature of the call it may be worth it to pay a nominal fee rather than dealing with the hassle of dropped calls, especially when it comes to important client calls.

If you work from a home office or in other circumstances that make forwarding your mobile to a landline impossible, consider purchasing an in-building wireless coverage booster. And I'm not talking about the little piece of foil you put under your battery cover – that nonsense does not work anyway.

Instead, consider a wireless booster – these are clever devices designed to give you a signal indoors that's virtually indistinguishable from the signal your phone gets when you're outside. Then again if you spend that much *personal* time on the phone, get a hobby, a life or a room.

For **home office users**, Wilson Electronics' 3W booster (<http://tinyurl.com/yupy8g>) or a similar wireless repeater from Spotwave ([www.spotwave.com](http://www.spotwave.com)) will go a long way toward alleviating your dropped call woes. For **corporate concerns**, there are tons of options and solutions, visit <http://www.cell-phone-help-and-training.com> and click on 'contact us' with a brief description of your needs and that should do the trick.

## ***Using the Phone is Too Expensive/Overage Issues***

One of the most common complaints people make about their cell phone service is the cost of overages. My personal “rule of thumb” and inside cellular joke is that everyone spends \$100 each month on their cell phone bill. While it’s realistic for people to spend less than this by being choosy about their cell phone plan and miserly with minutes, the majority of cell phone users find this difficult. This in turn leads to spiraling costs, as well as frustrated callers. But, it doesn’t have to be that way.

### **Think of it this way:**

When you were picking out your cell phone plan, did you start with the cheapest plan? At the time, did you also tell yourself that you would upgrade to the next plan up if you found yourself using more time than the cheap plan provided? After a few months of crazy bills, did you opt against upgrading your cell phone plan because it seemed like you’d be “paying more to pay less”? You’re not alone.

Let’s say you started with 450 minutes for \$40 a month. Once you’re settled into your phone, you find that you end up using an average of 600 minutes every month. This means you’re are paying, say 35¢ a minute times 150 minutes – that’s a total of \$52.50 in overage, making your bill over \$90 a month. Add to that the state and local taxes, FCC fees, universal taxes, that are payable regardless of your cell phone company, and you’re looking at another 17 percent – that’s a bill of over \$100.

You could have spent \$20 more a month, got a plan at the \$59/mo rate and got twice as many minutes per month for considerably less. But you didn’t. You could’ve increased your cell phone plan at any point, but you didn’t.

As you continue to remain stubborn opting not to change your cell phone plan to suit your needs, time continues to march on. Every month the frustration and anger builds against your cell phone company and its service – anger that could be easily avoided by selecting the right plan.

### ***Billing Problems***

Apart from facing unexpected overages, the other big problem cell phone users have with their bills is down to accuracy. The best recommendation I can make is that you opt to have a detailed bill whenever possible. In addition, you'll need to understand the bill you receive – and a big part of this is learning how your phone operator handles billing.

In general, you are billed when you place a call and when you receive a phone call unless you are on a cell phone plan that includes “free incoming calls”.

Typically you're billed by the minute rather than by the second – meaning if you talked one minute and four seconds you are usually billed for two minutes. In addition, many of us are charged for checking voice mail – this can easily be four to six minutes every time you pick up messages. Multiply that by 30 billing days that is already over two hours used even if you just deleted the messages.

You can ease the pain of this by simply checking voice mail from your landline phone. If you're not sure how to do this, the quick instructions are:

1. Pick up your desk or home phone and dial your own cell phone number.
2. When you hear yourself leaving a message, press \*, '0' or # to stop the greeting—whatever you normally press from your cell phone, otherwise it thinks you are trying to leave a voice mail message
3. Once you interrupt the greeting you should hear the automated teleprompts you hear when you checking your voice mail. Just follow the

prompts as you would normally do from your cell phone, press one to listen to messages, seven to delete, five to save – change your voice greeting or whatever else you want to do, it works exactly the same and once again you are not using minutes.

Also, many people take issue with the slap-dash way their bills arrive each month – claiming it's difficult to decipher what you actually owe and that the bill is hard to navigate and therefore difficult to dispute. Did you ever notice on your bill how all the pages are backwards and even upside down? Go figure, it's the same for all the major cell phone companies because they use the same company to do their billing – so the layout will be the same regardless of who you choose.

The summary page (usually within the first three pages) will tell you how much the cost is per each phone number on your account, along with the minutes used. If you're a math wiz, just add that magical 17 percent to cover your taxes and fees and you'll know the total you owe without giving yourself motion sickness flipping all those pages back and forth, round and round.

### ***Escalated Billing Issues and Unresolved Account Disputes***

If you have any dealings with the customer care people, and you invariably will, the first thing you've got to understand is that call center operatives are people too. Armed with that understanding, bear in mind that everyone has billing problems, and thousands of people need to change their address or update their account details on a daily basis – that's right, you aren't unique or special. That being said, you are the customer and should be treated with the all due care and respect all of the time. If you get cut off, or are on hold too long, it's easy to get frustrated – instead, consider other options.

The first option people often leap to is writing to customer support with their concerns – this means taking careful notes, copying documents and sending letters off via recorded delivery then waiting for a reply. The best advice I can give is quite simply: don't.

Don't worry about writing down a million notes or wait long times on hold month after month for customer services, instead use online customer care. Send in your non-urgent request and within a few days you should expect a reply back with the name of the person that handled your request as well as a resolution. They will do all the back end research, read through the notes and work with their internal resources to get the problems solved.

### ***Want to Update Your Phone***

The phone models you have to select from are specific to the cell phone company and their proprietary technology. Because cellular technology moves fast, it's quite common for people to feel bored with their phone after a few months. Sometimes, it's because you've realized there are phones or devices on the market that would better suit your lifestyle – others, it's simply because you'd like to have the latest gadget. The reasons aren't as important as the process of getting a phone can be.

First of all, you've got to understand that the phones any company has on offer are dictated by the technology they use. For example, it's extremely likely that AT&T and T-Mobile will have similar phones because they both use a GSM network; whereas, Verizon Wireless and Sprint will have similar phones because they both use a CDMA network. Though there are some large companies, like Nokia and Motorola, who make versions of their phones for both types of network eventually the majority of phones make their debut on one network or the other. So be realistic in your expectations.

Also, bear in mind that some new product launches are exclusive to a cell phone company for a period of time. Once that time has elapsed, the phone is trickle-fed to the other networks. Other times, a product is made specifically for a particular network and therefore is not available for another network. Remember when Verizon Wireless sold Kyocera and Qualcomm cellular phones but no other cell phone companies offered those phones...but then again who would want to carry a phone that looked like that?

The point is, with all these variables on top of the fact that technology changes all the time, it is usually only a matter of weeks before you see something else that you want *instead*. And in no case will it be a cheap fix.

### ***Options for Getting an Updated Phone for Less***

You can always try to sell your phone on the open market – through eBay, a local newspaper, Craigslist or one of the many online swapping sites. You can then look for the phone you want and buy it at your own risk through the same channels you used to sell your original phone. Bear in mind you'll have to buy a phone that's already setup to work with your Cell phone company, or a phone that is "unlocked" and therefore compatible with any Cell phone company you choose to use it on.

Or you can simply bide your time. In the world of phones, the more in demand something initially is, the more it costs. It is not until the fascination dramatically decreases and the buzz wears off that the price drops. Look at the Razr, Motorola's hottest phone in recent years went from \$499 to free within 18 months.

A more recent case-in-point is Apple's iPhone – hitting shelves with a starting price of \$499 for the low-end model and \$599 for the super 8-gig version. Less than three months later, Apple slashed \$200 from the price of the 8Gb iPhone and dropped the smaller version entirely. Customers were outraged, saying the price cut was grossly unfair on Apple's most loyal core of devotees – and Apple responded in kind by offering a \$100 store credit to customers who'd paid the introductory prices and a \$200 credit to anyone who purchased their iPhone within 2 weeks of the announcement of the price drop.

### ***Your Cell Phone Company Doesn't Offer the Phone You Want***

Your cell phone company may or may not offer the “special phone” that captures your imagination, but you won't know until you ask. Often the phones in your local T-Mobile or Verizon Wireless shop are merely a selection of the most popular models and there may be others available – but you've got to know exactly what phone you're after, and be willing to put in a little effort to ask the shop staff, as well as the online enquiry center.

Also, if it turns out your cell phone company simply can't provide the phone you really want, it's important to remember if you switch service providers you will have to sign up for a new contract with the new provider and by leaving your existing provider, you might be subject to penalties.

What's more, you don't necessarily know if the special phone will be worth it if you cancel your service. Consider what will happen if you get the “special phone” and it turns out not to be so special. Perhaps it's because the phone you've got is the first generation of a new cell phone that has a lot of bugs – first, you become frustrated that you are having so many problems, then you'll fall out of love with the phone and ultimately, you'll find yourself pining for the “good old days”.

If you decide to switch back to your old provider, you'll have to restart your two-year contract and pay a reinstatement fee. Reinstatement fees are applicable to people the cell phone company's system flags as "recently deactivated", and though they might be lower than the initial sign-up fee, adding a reinstatement fee to the first pro-rated month's bill and the cancellation fees for the other network gets pricey, fast.

### ***Breakup or Divorce***

I don't know if I pity the person who is stuck with the bill or the other person whose phone number and perhaps livelihood associated with it is at the discretion of the account holder.

The account holder has the right to release the phone and/or phone number to the other party. If the other half keeps their phone, then the account holder might be willing to release the number and the bill as well. If the account holder chooses not to release the number or the phone, there's very little you can do about it without resorting to under-handed tactics or getting downright nasty.

### ***Child or Teen Creating Large Bills By Talking, Texting and Downloading Far Too Much***

Instead of kicking up a stink with your cell phone provider when costs start spiraling out of control due to your kids being, well, kids, consider taking proactive steps to prevent the costs from getting out of hand in the first place.

In September 2007 AT&T launched its Smart Limits program, providing cell phone controls to parents. This is a service that can be added on to your phone bill for an additional \$4.99 per line, allowing parents complete control their child's or teens calling habits.

The service will let you control everything from what numbers your child can dial to the kinds of ring tone and game downloads and services that will be available for them and in what quantity. Of course they are not going to like it too much, but in the end I'm sure they'll agree it's much better to have limited cell phone services than NO cell phone at all.

### ***Termination of Employee, Maternity Leave, 'Between Jobs'***

If your company recently terminated an employee or your company let an employee go and have not hired a replacement or you have an employee on maternity leave, all of the cell phone companies offer an option called *Seasonal Standby* or *Temporary Standby*. This service can be used for corporate accounts and individual accounts like. Seasonal standby service places restrictions on the phone and reduces the rate to a flat rate per month, usually somewhere around \$4.95 or \$5.95/month. Instead of paying for a service plan, you pay the flat rate fee to 'hold' the cell phone number, however, it will not age the contract. Meaning if you put the phone on seasonal standby for 30 days, the contract will end 30 days later than its original date. Yet still, this is a great option because it is better to pay \$5.95 a month for 2 months while you search for a new employee that you know you will ultimately get as opposed to pay \$39.95/mo minimal plus the associated taxes for a phone that is not being used at all. Be advised that sometimes the cell phone companies leave the line open so that if calls were made on the phone it would cost \$.40/minute. So make sure you place the calling restrictions on the line when you request the service.

### ***Conclusions***

Ultimately, getting out of a cell phone contract isn't easy – with good reason.

There are serious moves about in consumer circles and political lobbying groups

to put a stop to the strangle hold contract termination fees are putting on cell phone users by giving states the power to set “reasonable limits”.

Obviously, “reasonable limits” are open to interpretation – and given that the big four cellular corporations have significantly higher budgets for promoting their message and ideals than John Q Public, it’ll take some very clever legislation to make much difference to you and me. On the other hand, states such as California and Florida are leading the way with consumer lawsuits challenging cancellation fees as illegal, essentially because they are anti-competitive.

In the mean time, you’ve got to try and make due with the service and support that’s available – unless, of course, you can afford to keep paying reinstatement and cancellation fees.

The best advice I can give you in terms of keeping your head above water and your bank in the black is as follows:

- **Play nice** – Because the old saying, “you’ll catch more flies with honey than vinegar” really is true. Call center workers in customer care departments get enough abuse to demoralize a football team that’s just won the Super Bowl. Instead of going in all guns blazing, try being the bright, happy spot in someone’s otherwise grim day. You’ll find this approach will make it easier for you to get a satisfactory result.
- **Choose your plan (and phone) carefully** – A little research at the beginning will pay dividends in the future. If you need a phone that works in other countries, be sure to choose your handset accordingly. While you’re at it, keep track of features you’ll use most on the phone - can you actually use the keypad effectively for text messaging verses getting a

mobile phone with a full 'qwerty keyboard'? Also consider those features that might not be suitable for your circumstances – does your workplace allow camera phones?

On a similar note, if you use a lot of text messages or other data services, choose a plan with a suitable data allowance. If you make the majority of your calls in the evening, opt for a cell phone plan with an unlimited night and weekends option or a service add on that allows you to start your nights and weekends calling earlier than 9 pm.

- **Keep an eye on contract terms** – those little slips that show up with free offers, etc. in your statement can have huge ramifications. You can use subtle contract changes as leverage to get out of your contract, if you wish. Plus knowing the terms have changed will help you stay on top of overage increases and so forth. Set a reminder in your calendar or make a note in your Outlook or contact management system to remind or notify you when your contract will end.
- **Use common sense before complaining** – If you have what you think is a high percentage of dropped calls, think about how you're using the cell phone. Are all your dropped calls on the same stretch of road, in the same building or part of town? Is there anything you can do, like getting a wireless booster, to improve things? If so, try it – if not, raise your concerns with the appropriate customer care department in a tactful, polite way.
- **Make complaints to the right people** – When your complaint is with the hardware, there's no point in discussing it with the billing people. Consider what the problem is, who can best assist and dial accordingly. If you're not sure who can help, call the general customer care number and explain your problem – they'll be able to give you the right number to ring

next time, and provide you with a transfer to the right department. Better yet, go online to the cell phone company website and submit your request and let them sort it out for you.

- **Only renew if you're fully satisfied** – Phone companies will try to lure you into agreeing to a new contract every chance they get. And it's up to you to keep your eyes on the prize – if you want the new phone, and you're happy with their service, by all means renew your contract to get a new phone. But if you're not sure, look at your options carefully and court other providers – you never know what you might luck into in terms of good deals, freebies and bonus items.

#### **About the Author of This Report:**

Shonika Proctor, the BlackBerry Crisis Rep, among other things, is a Creative Thought Leader and 14 year wireless personality. She helps frustrated consumers and overwhelmed corporate account administrators to overcome their cell phone service, hardware and billing issues. For tons more information, tips and how to resources visit: <http://www.cell-phone-help-and-training.com>

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Please respect the time of the author and refer them to the website to buy it. Click on the link for *Cancel Cell Phone*. If they *truly* cannot afford to buy it, then have him/her click on the 'Contact Us' link and email us with their circumstances. While we won't promise anything, we will take each situation into consideration and would much rather try to make accommodations or create a barter arrangement as opposed to have the information circulated unethically. We can continue providing you with quality and useful information and you can continue to have tons of real solutions for seemingly dead end and frustrating problems. Very much appreciate your cooperation and understanding.