



# How to Sign Up for First Time Telephone Service

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## What is Basic Service?

Basic telephone service is the dial tone in a residence that allows customers to place and receive local telephone calls. It also allows access to other services such as 9-1-1 emergency service where available, operator and directory assistance, and long-distance calling.

## How to Sign Up for First Time Service

Many times when you move to a new residence, information about your telephone company can be obtained through your realtor or your landlord.

Signing up for telephone service is as easy as contacting the telephone company directly.

You must be able to provide the address of the location where the service is to be installed and the full name of the person who will be billed for the service. Some companies also require a monetary deposit to set up service in addition to installation and connection charges. You have the option of paying the installation and connection charge over a three-month period, so talk with the telephone company about this possibility.

You also will be asked which long-distance carrier you will be using. You do not have to pick a long-distance carrier at the time you sign up for local service. You have 30 days to choose without incurring an additional charge, but if you make long-distance calls before signing up with a long-distance company, chances are the cost will be higher. Once you decide on a long-distance company, you should contact that company to sign up for the service and notify your local provider as to which company you have selected.

You may choose a different company to handle your 'local toll' traffic and your long-distance calls. Please see the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel's (OCC) fact sheet "How to Choose a Long-Distance Provider" for assistance in choosing the carrier for your long distance calling. If you have any questions, call the OCC at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622).



## Additional Services

Many telephone companies may try to sell you additional services, such as Call Waiting, Three-way Calling, Caller ID, second line service and high speed Internet services. These services are not necessary to make and receive local telephone calls, but may offer you extra convenience and privacy for an additional cost. Other services can be added at a later date, but you may be required to pay an extra fee for signing up along with the monthly fees for the service.

## Questions to Ask

- Q. Do I have to pay a deposit?
- Q. How much will the deposit cost?
- Q. How much will local telephone service cost each month (including taxes and surcharges)?
- Q. When can I expect my service to start?
- Q. When can I expect to receive my first bill in the mail?
- Q. What types of discount programs are available and do I qualify for any?
- Q. Who do I call if I have problems with my telephone service and what is the toll-free number for service problems?

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## Types of Plans and Packages

There are commonly three types of local telephone service: flat rate, measured and message service.

**Flat Rate** – You pay a set fee each month allowing you to make and receive unlimited local telephone calls.

**Measured** – You are charged for each call made during the month. This could be the lowest cost option if you only make a few calls each month.

**Message Service** – You have a minimum monthly rate, usually for an allowance of 30 calls per month. You are then charged an additional fee for each call made after the 30 call limit in that month.

Some companies offer many telephone services as a “package” for a fixed rate. Before signing up for any package it is a good idea to evaluate your needs and decide which additional services you need, if any. It may be helpful to compare the individual cost of local telephone service and any additional services you want to the price of the “package” offer to see which is a better deal. You do not have to purchase a package in order to receive basic local telephone service. Most packages include Voicemail, Caller ID and Call Waiting, among several others. Examples of packages offered by some of the major local telephone providers are listed below.

AT&T Ohio: “Personal Choice”

Cincinnati Bell Telephone Company: “Complete Connections”

Verizon: “Local Package”

## Useful Definitions

**Additional Services:** any service offering that is not essential to the delivery of dial tone.

**Basic local exchange service:** the dial tone in a residence that allows a person to place and receive local telephone calls.

**Caller ID:** allows the customer to see the telephone number from which some incoming calls are made before answering the call; requires feature to be built into the customer’s telephone or special equipment must be purchased separately.

**Call Waiting:** notifies a telephone customer who is already engaged in a call that there is an incoming call; enables the customer to switch between conversations.

**Cramming:** the illegal act of billing a customer for additional services that a customer did not order.

**Slamming:** the illegal act of switching a customer’s carrier without permission.

**Three Way Calling:** allows a customer to add a third party to an existing telephone call.

If you have any questions about basic local telephone service or any other utility topic call the OCC at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) or email at [occ@occ.state.oh.us](mailto:occ@occ.state.oh.us).

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts. The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues and resolves complaints from individuals. To receive utility information, brochures, schedule a presentation or file a utility complaint, residential consumers may call 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free in Ohio or visit the OCC website at [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org).

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**For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel:**

**Call: 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free or (614) 466-8574**  
**Write: 10 West Broad Street, 18th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215-3485**  
**E-mail: [occ@occ.state.oh.us](mailto:occ@occ.state.oh.us) • Internet Address: [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org)**