

Cellular Roaming Can Be Expensive



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In January, one of my clients took his family to Florida for a week’s vacation, but he didn’t leave the office at home. He called his office on his cell phone each morning to check in and resolve any pressing problems, and he even made calls during the week to several of his customers.

He thought all was well until his cell phone invoice came in about ten days after his return to the office with charges coming in at well over \$500 for the month. While it’s true that he only used about 500 minutes, almost 180 minutes were from Florida. The roaming charges were the culprits in this case, working out to almost \$2.40 per minute.

Roaming charges are the tolls charged and added to your invoice by cell phone providers in the U.S. when your calls are routed through their towers. The charges are handed on to your regular provider, which charges you in turn.

There are several ways to avoid this happening to you or your employees. The easiest is to call your provider before you leave and give them your travel dates. Tell them how much usage you think you will need while away and they will change your usage to a roaming plan which will include long distance used. Roaming plans provide ‘buckets’ of long distance minutes that cost more per minute than the charges that can come without it.

Another way to avoid sky-high charges is to use your Blackberry or laptop computer and do your business by email. It sounds simple enough, but most people can’t resist the urge to pick up their cell phone and make the call instead of laboring away at the keyboard. Still, even if your intention is to rely on email, change the cell plan just in case.

A third method is to do it the old-fashioned way; go to a pay phone and use a calling card. The pay phone method is the best way, as using the card on the hotel room phone will still be expensive because of usage surcharges hotels usually add to the bill.

If you get to your destination and realize you forgot to change your plan, call your provider immediately and tell them where you are and the date of your return. The providers I am used to dealing with will make the change retroactively.

But don’t leave it until you are ready to come back. That might not get the results you want.

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