

# Wireless Number Portability



Written by:  
John Campbell

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March 14, 2007 marked a milestone in Canadian telecommunications. That's the day when Wireless Number Portability or WNP was implemented in Canada, becoming the second country (USA was first) in the world to do so.

There are two questions this poses; what does it mean? And what affect will it have on my business?

WNP means that you can take your phone number with you when you change service providers. This has been a big stumbling block for clients who are not satisfied with their service or who want to take advantage of better pricing.

Another big stumbling block to switching was the cost- and the pain- of printing stationery and business cards with the new number.

Number portability applies not only to wireless-to-wireless, but wireline-to-wireless and wireless-to -wireline. Wireline refers to your desk phone or your home phone. We will contain this topic for now to wireless-to-wireless.

There are two ways WNP can affect your business. One involves hardware devices, i.e. cellular phone, Treo, BlackBerry, etc., and the other involves air time or text messaging. When you change providers you are leaving your hardware device behind and getting a new device from your new provider. We have three wireless providers in Canada, Telus

Mobility, Aliant Mobility and Rogers Wireless and there are a great many more in the US. Although there used to be noticeable differences in coverage in Nova Scotia they are pretty well on a par now. There may be some areas, especially rural areas, where one company provides better coverage than another. That may be a good reason to consider changing providers.

In order to entice businesses to switch there are some decent proposals being offered. There are also some decent proposals being offered in order to retain your business so this may be a good time to renegotiate your pricing with your current provider.

You will find when comparing offers from different companies that things quickly go from a simple exercise to one that is very complex. That's because of the myriad of packages offered combining hardware and air time. Some packages offer a better model of BlackBerry, Treo or similar device but the air time rates may not be as good as what another company is offering. Switching companies means ordering new hardware, a new air time plan and new features.

The most important bit of advice I can offer is to check what the contract says with respect to penalties before making any moves. This applies to both businesses and individuals. One individual to me she had to change to another provider for employment reasons and paid

a \$720 penalty. That's pretty steep, yet there are some contracts that have penalties of \$50 a month which can be onerous if there are two years left on your contract.

If making a choice between a fancier hardware device and a better air time package, it's always better to take the air time package. It's hard to refuse the latest in technology, especially when it gives you bragging rights but it is amazing how fast the charges build up when you have to increase your usage. It becomes evident what you saved on the hot little device in your hand is quickly gobbled up by all that air time you used.

If you decide you want to change your company's phones to another provider, don't cancel your existing service. The new provider will do that and the transition will be made without any loss of service. Besides, WNP only applies to existing phone numbers so whatever advantage you would have had is lost.

If your company has multiple wireless units each one has to be changed over

individually to the new service provider. In other words if your company has 80 cell phones they can't just change to a new account number with the new provider and have the numbers automatically ported. Each number needs new hardware, a new air time plan and new features.

WNP is a wonderful innovation for wireless users but only if all the lights are green. If the contract is expiring or close to it then it would be smart to see what other plans are out there. It would also be smart to see what your current provider is offering.

If you get lost in the fog of too many models of phones, too many plans and too many features I suggest you call your telecom consultant and get what I call a "spreadsheet opinion". It's sometimes easier to make choices when everything is laid out in front of the decision maker.

John Campbell is a Strategic-Partner with Schooley Mitchell Telecom Consultants, North America's largest independent telecom consulting company.  
[john.campbell@schooleymitchell.com](mailto:john.campbell@schooleymitchell.com)  
902-435-4578  
[www.schooleymitchell.com/jcampbell](http://www.schooleymitchell.com/jcampbell)