



Talking numbers

A recent survey by telecommunications regulator ComReg found that over 40% of respondents have no idea of the cost of their directory enquiry calls. *Consumer Choice* outlines providers and costs so you can remember the cheapest.

Long gone are the days when we all called the same four digit number for directory services. In 1999, the Irish market was deregulated and opened up to competition. It is now estimated to be worth some €70 million annually. However, despite the increased choice, it seems that there is a low level of consumer awareness as to the costs charged by the service providers. ComReg recently published a consultant survey of over 1,000 adults and found that just over 30% of respondents knew the exact or approximate price of calls to directory enquiry services, while almost 70% were 'fairly unsure' or had 'no idea' of the cost of the call.

Summary of providers

There are three providers operating in the directory services market in Ireland. Current market leader Eircom provides a national enquiry service on 11811 and an international service on 11818. Next is Conduit, which is better known by its 11850 number. It also operates a lesser known national enquiry line on 11888, offering a basic search facility at a

reduced rate. Conduit also has an international service on 11860. Finally, the most recent market entrant, Call 11890, was launched in July 2006. It offers a national search facility and has plans to launch an international enquiry number on 11891 in the future.

Call costs

Since the market was deregulated, charges to enquiry service are determined by a combination of the service provider and the telephone network on which the call is made. If you are using a fixed line telephone or pay monthly mobile, charges are collected through your telephone account and will show on your phone bill. For prepaid mobile customers, charges are deducted from the available phone credit.

In our survey we assumed calls were made from an Eircom landline and compared the cost of a typical one minute call to the various providers. Of those numbers that provide more than one listing per call, 11890 was the cheapest, costing 91c as opposed to €1.03 with 11811 and €1.24 with 11850.

However, Conduit's basic service on 11888, which allows consumers only one listing per enquiry, was cheapest overall at 30c for a one minute call.

For international directory enquiries, Conduit's 11860 is the cheapest provider, costing €1.57 for a one minute call. The only other competitor currently in the international enquiries market, Eircom, costs €1.91. Call 11890 intends to launch an international enquiry service on the number 11891 but dates and charges have yet to be announced.

Consumers should remember that if the number is ex-directory or cannot be found that the price of the call will still be charged to their accounts.

Call completion

Call completion is where the directory service provider connects directly to the number that you are looking for. As with other directory enquiry costs, ComReg's report found that there is a low level of call completion price awareness among consumers with 71% of respondents being 'fairly unsure' or having 'no idea' of how much it costs. Call completion is

AT A GLANCE

Summary of providers.

Call costs.

Other services.

Useful contacts

ComReg

Block DEF
Abbey Court
Irish Life Centre
Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1
tel (01) 8049668
1890 229668
email
consumerline@comreg.ie
www.comreg.ie

TABLE 1: DIRECTORY ENQUIRY CALL COSTS FROM AN EIRCOM LANDLINE ¹

	Number	Listings per call	Online search service	Business finder service	Cost of first minute (cent)	Cost per minute thereafter (cent)	Cost of a 1 minute call (cent)
NATIONAL DIRECTORY ENQUIRIES							
Conduit	11850	Unlimited	✓	✓	99 ²	25	124
Conduit	11888	One	✓	✓	30	30	30
Eircom	11811	Up to 3	✓	✓	90 ³	25	103
Call 11890	11890	Unlimited	✗ ⁴	✗ ⁴	91	22	91
INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORY ENQUIRIES							
Conduit	11860	Unlimited	✗	✗	157	60	157
Eircom	11818	Up to 3	✗	✗	158 ³	66	191

NOTES: ¹ Information correct as at 27 January 2009. ² Set-up charge is 99c. ³ For the first 30 seconds. ⁴ 11890 operators will perform a regular web search for callers.

TABLE 2: DIRECTORY ENQUIRY CALL COSTS FROM A MOBILE PHONE ¹

	Minimum charge (cent)	Cost per minute (cent)	Cost of 1 minute call (cent)
NATIONAL DIRECTORY ENQUIRIES			
Vodafone Ready to Go ² (all numbers)	94	94	94
Vodafone Pay Monthly ² (all numbers)	84	84	84
O2 (Eircom 11811)	85	85	85
O2 (Conduit 11850)	85	85	85
O2 (Conduit 11888)	50	50	50
O2 (Call 11890)	75	75	75
Meteor (Eircom 11811)	130	75	130
Meteor (Conduit 11850)	130	75	130
Meteor (Conduit 11888)	90	75	90
Meteor (Call 11890)	90	75	90
3 Mobile ² (all numbers)	85	75	85
INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORY ENQUIRIES			
Vodafone (11818)	n/a	135	135
Vodafone (11860)	125	65	125
Vodafone (11866)	n/a	128	128
O2 – Prepay (all numbers)	150	75	150
O2 – Pay monthly (all numbers)	151	75	151
Meteor (Eircom 11818)	180	120	180
Meteor (Conduit 11860)	180	150	180
3 Mobile (11860 / 11818)	130	120	130

NOTES: ¹ Information correct as at 27 January 2009. Prepay and bill pay rates the same unless otherwise stated. ² Priced the same regardless of directory provider. Does not include Conduit 11888.

Report by
Mark Channing 

choice comment

Consumers who are occasional users of national directory enquiry services and only have a single search request should remember the 11888 number. Operated by Conduit, it is not widely publicised but offers the best value at only 30c for a one minute call. Consumers who require more than one listing per call should use 11890. It offers unlimited searches and is 12% cheaper than Eircom and 36% cheaper than Conduit's 11850 service based on the cost of a one minute call. Consumers who have access to the internet can do even better by using free online search facilities on the Eircom and Conduit directory homepages, at www.11811.ie and www.118.ie. And of course, don't forget the good old phonebook.

Unfortunately the choice is more limited for international number requests, but Conduit's 11860 is the cheapest option at €1.57 per minute. However, consumers in search of even cheaper information should check online for free international web based searches such as those available online for UK numbers.

available across all the national service providers, with Call 11890 the cheapest for this service at 22c per minute. Conduit's 11850 number costs 25.1c and Eircom's 11811 number is priced at 24.27c. Call completion is only available for certain international numbers.

Consumers should be aware that while call completion services are convenient, they cost more than calling the number directly. Added to this, where the enquiry is made from a landline, the consumer may not receive their own record of the number (although if calling from a mobile the number will be sent to them in the form of a text). This is especially important as there is a risk that the number being connected goes unanswered or is incorrect.

Other services

Directory enquiry service providers also provide other services in addition to their number search facility. Both Eircom and Conduit have a business finder service which allows consumers to use the database to find a business in a particular area without having a name to search under. Call 11890 does not currently provide this service although operators will perform a regular search through Google for callers. Eircom and Conduit provide a free, searchable online directory which can cut out the need to make a directory call altogether, while Conduit has recently launched a text-based service for people who can't or don't wish to make a voice call. Consumers can text 11850 their search request and receive a reply by text once the number has been found. Sending the initial text is charged at the standard network rate with the reply costing 50c. However, if the number isn't found within 10 minutes or there is no reply, the only charge to the consumer is the cost of the initial text.

Complaints

If you have a complaint regarding a number request from a service provider do not call the 118xx number as you will be charged directory enquiry rates. Instead call the customer service line of the operator. If, after having exhausted the complaints process of the service provider, you can refer the complaint to ComReg, which can aid you in seeking a resolution. For more on ComReg, and how they help consumers see 'Commander ComReg' on p100 of this month's issue.

Particular to Call 11890 is a refund policy whereby, in the event of a consumer getting the incorrect number or being unhappy with their service, the provider will send out a National Lottery scratch card by way of compensation.