

# Uncalled For: The Cost of Ringing Directory Enquiries

No doubt you know the numbers 11811, 11890 and 11850. But do you know what they charge?



 **REPORT** by Alex Tierney

At a glance

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In 2009 we took a look at the main directory enquiry providers in Ireland in order to show you exactly how much a call to each one of them costs. At that time a Comreg survey had revealed that over 40% of respondents had no idea what they were paying when they dialled 11811, 11850 or 11890. The question is: do they now? Our latest research shows that while consumer awareness may or may not have grown, the directory enquiry charges most certainly have, in some cases leaping upwards by over 200%. For example, the most expensive one minute call from an Eircom landline in 2009 was to 11850 at €1.24; now it is to 11850 at €5.58.

The latest 11850 increase occurred as we were finalising this article, and we have included 11850's previous price (valid until end of August 2014) in the tables in order to show you how dramatically their charges can jump.

We have laid out for you the current prices (opposite). You may want to read them before making your next call.

## Set-up charges

When you ring a directory enquiry number you are automatically charged a set-up or connection fee the moment an operator answers your call. This means that no matter how quick the call is, and how efficient the service, the price will already be high. Eircom 11811's set-up fee is €2.10; 11890's is €3.40; and 11850's is €2.79. In cases where the number is ex-directory and the operator cannot find it, these basic costs still apply.

In addition, some of the providers have a minimum fee. 11811 charges by the

second from the beginning so after you incur the set-up fee the remainder of the price will be dependent on the length of the call. (For example, a 30 second call will cost you €2.76.) 11890's set-up includes the first minute of the call, so you will pay €3.40 until you go above 60 seconds. 11850, on the other hand, charges a minimum fee of one minute (€2.79) alongside the €2.79 connection fee, so each call will cost you at the very least €5.58. Again, this is prior to requesting or receiving service.

As part of our research, we called all three providers; not one of them informed us of the connection or minimum fees when they took our call. This lack of early information leaves you at an obvious disadvantage, because unless you have looked up the price of the service before calling, or noted it down from an ad, or read this article, you won't know how much you have been charged until you see your phone bill.

## 1 minute call to a national directory enquiry provider

	Eircom Land-line	Vodafone Pre Pay	Vodafone Bill Pay	Meteor Pre Pay	Meteor Bill Pay	O2 Pre Pay	O2 Bill Pay	3 Pre Pay	3 Bill Pay
11811	€3.42	€2.98	€1.70	€1.98	€2.02	€2.36	€2.98	€4.26	€3.26
11890	€3.40	€2.98	€1.70	€1.98	€2.02	€2.00	€2.98	€4.26	€3.26
11850	€5.58 €4.38	€2.98	€1.70	€3.18	€3.18	€2.00	€2.98	€4.26	€3.26
11888	€0.60	€2.98	€1.70	€1.98	€2.02	€1.00	€2.98	€4.26	€3.26

## 1 second call (i.e. connection plus minimum fee) to a national directory enquiry provider

	Eircom Land-line	Vodafone Pre Pay	Vodafone Bill Pay	Meteor Pre Pay	Meteor Bill Pay	O2 Pre Pay	O2 Bill Pay	3 Pre Pay	3 Bill Pay
11811	€2.12	€1.49	€0.85	€1.98	€1.01	€1.18	€1.49	€4.26	€3.26
11890	€3.40	€1.49	€0.85	€1.98	€1.01	€1.00	€1.49	€4.26	€3.26
11850	€5.58 €4.38	€1.49	€0.85	€3.18	€1.59	€1.00	€1.49	€4.26	€3.26
11888	€0.60	€1.49	€0.85	€1.98	€1.01	€0.50	€1.49	€4.26	€3.26

## Call completion/transfer

Call completion is a service offered by all three providers wherein the operator, after finding the number you want, asks you if you would like to be transferred to it. If you say yes, a short automated message will play prior to the transfer, warning you that you will be charged at the quoted price for the remainder of the call. It is crucial that you pay attention to this message. Some people presume that once they have been transferred, they are back to paying normal Eircom landline charges. This couldn't be further from the case. If you select call completion with 11811 you will continue to pay roughly 2.2 cents per second, or €1.32 per minute; with 11890, 99 cents per minute (with per second billing); and with 11850, €2.79 per minute (with per second billing). Our table showing the price of a 10 minute call using call completion gives you a good idea of how the costs can quickly add up if you stay on the phone for any considerable length of time. By way of comparison, a normal, 10 minute daytime national call on an Eircom landline would cost you 97 cents.

In addition to the costs involved, you should remember that call completion doesn't guarantee that your call will be completed. For example, the person you are calling might not answer the phone in time. If, for whatever reason, you don't get through, and you have not written down the number, then you might have to start the whole process from the beginning.

## The Cheap Option

As you may have gathered, cheap is not an easy word to find a place for in this article. Of the three main numbers, 11890 is the cheapest once the call hits the minute mark, yet €3.40 is still a high charge, and 99 cents per minute can still make an ugly mark on your phone bill.

On the other hand, 11888 - 11850's low call number - offers a more reasonable price: with a 10 cents set-up fee and a charge of 50 cents per minute, you will most likely be able to get your number for a relatively low 60 cents. 11888 does not offer call completion but you are probably better off without it. There is little or no advertising surrounding the 11888 number, meaning it is likely that you will never have heard of it, unless you've gone onto 11850's website, or complained to their

## 10 minute call using a national directory enquiry provider

	Eircom Landline	Vodafone Pre Pay	Vodafone Bill Pay	Meteor Pre Pay	Meteor Bill Pay	O2 Pre Pay	O2 Bill Pay	3 Pre Pay	3 Bill Pay
11811	€15.31	€16.39	€9.35	€10.89	€11.11	€12.98	€16.39	€23.52	€22.52
11890	€12.31	€16.39	€9.35	€10.89	€11.11	€11	€16.39	€23.52	€22.52
11850	€30.69 €24.09	€16.39	€9.35	€17.49	€17.49	€11	€16.39	€23.52	€22.52

customer care team about the high cost of 11850, or read this article. Both 11890 and 11850 provide a texting service: a text to 11890 costs your standard network rate, and the reply is €2.00. A text to 11850 costs your standard network rate, and the reply is €2.50. If the number you are looking for cannot be found, you will only pay the standard network rate. The cheapest option of all, if you have Internet connection, is to use the services' free online search engines. You can find them at 11850.ie, 11890.ie or eircomphonebook.ie.

## Is there any justification for such high costs?

We wrote to the three providers and asked if they would like to comment on the prices they charge. An 11850 spokesperson said only that 11850 provides its customers with the highest levels of speed and accuracy, but those customers can use the free Internet service if they aren't time-constrained. 11811's spokesperson attributed the high prices to a continuous decline in consumer demand, as did the spokesperson for 11890, who pointed also to the undiminished cost of maintaining

the National Database, staff, advertising campaigns, and the technical infrastructure for the phone and computer system. Both 11811's and 11890's spokespeople stated that while they set the prices for Eircom landlines, they have no control over what other networks charge for the services.

The decline in demand is inevitable: with smartphones and widespread broadband access, there simply isn't as much need now for the directory enquiry phone services as there used to be. But is it reasonable to combat this decline by levying such high prices on the consumer? And would the methodology of sharply increasing prices be an effective one if consumers were fully aware of what they were paying? And what about the people who don't have smartphones or Internet access? If you do not have the means or the technology to employ the free options that the services provide, you should, at the very least, know exactly what you are going to be charged before making your next call.

## 1 minute call to an international directory enquiry provider

Each service provides a number for international enquiries. Coupled with 11811 there is 11818; with 11890 there is 11891; and with 11850 there is 11860. See the table for a quick indication of the prices they charge.

	Eircom Landline	Vodafone Pre Pay	Vodafone Bill Pay	Meteor Pre Pay	Meteor Bill Pay	O2 Pre Pay	O2 Bill Pay	3 Pre Pay	3 Bill Pay
11818	€2.54	€4.00	€1.30	€2.98	€3.02	€2.28	€4.00	€2.54	€2.54
11891	€2.28	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
11860	€5.98 €4.98	€4.00	€1.37	€3.18	€3.18	€2.45	€4.00	€2.54	€2.54

-All prices are correct as of 2nd September 2014

-All prices quoted in the body of the article are for an Eircom landline

-All mobile prices are taken from the price plans of the respective operators

-O2 Bill Pay prices are for Open Plan customers

-Vodafone Bill Pay prices do not include Vodafone Red customers

-With 11891, mobile costs are not applicable (NA) as the service is only open to landline customers.