



NHS Choices highlights GPs and other providers using 084 telephone numbers - in breach of contracts / directions

In accordance with a recent ASA adjudication, NHS Choice has now added a warning message to many of its directory entries for GPs and others with 084 telephone numbers. The message states:

* Calls to 084 numbers are charged at a higher rate than standard calls on BT's most popular call plan (BT Unlimited Anytime). Mobile and other providers costs will vary and you should check the costs of calls with your provider.

See these [Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust](#) [Lightwater Surgery](#)
examples [Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#) [Cambridge Smile Studio](#) †

† NHS Dentists are simply in breach of the terms of NHS Constitution, not their specific contract.

It must be noted that the **ASA** requirement to be **honest** and **truthful** applies also to every one of the websites published by **all** users of 084 numbers.

What it actually costs

Contrary to the assertions of many, the charge for making a "standard" call (to a geographic or 03 number, of less than 60 minutes, during working hours) under the terms of the most widely used telephone call plan, and most others used for such calls, is ZERO. (see [this misleading example](#))

All calls to 084 numbers incur a Service Charge, equivalent to between 2 and 7 pence per minute, to the benefit of the person called. This is absent from calls to 01/02/03 numbers. It is therefore perfectly natural that most telephone companies impose a premium on calls to these numbers.

There is a large amount of variety in the market, creating various confusing effects.

- Some callers pay a very high "penalty charge" for calling otherwise inclusive numbers at times not covered by their chosen call plan.
- Some telephone companies collect the Service Charge from all call plan subscribers (whether they call 084 numbers or not) so that calls to 084 numbers may be inclusive.
- Some telephone companies add an Access Charge, to their benefit, of up to 39p per minute on top of a Service Charge of 2p per minute.

The way forward

It is now well known that users of 084 telephone numbers may switch to 03 numbers with ease. The leading provider of 084 numbers to GPs [recently confirmed](#) this free of charge facility. There is no longer any excuse whatsoever for remaining in breach of contract revisions applied in 2010.

Ofcom is hoping to proceed with plans to introduce the "unbundled tariff" for 084, 087 and 09 numbers. This will make it clear as to who is being paid for what. There are some in the telecoms industry who appear to prefer the present unclear situation and are fighting **Ofcom** all the way.

Under the terms of the "unbundled tariff", the Service Charge - to the benefit of the person being called, and the Access Charge - to the benefit of the caller's telephone company, will be clearly shown separately. It will no longer be necessary to try to understand a complex web of bundled charges to work out what is going on.

