



Daily Mail - 118 call rate cap

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At last, curb on rip-off cost of calling 118 for a phone number

THE cost of calling 118 directory enquiry numbers has been capped in a crackdown on rip-off charges.

Currently, some 118 numbers cost as much as £20 for a 90-second call, says telecoms watchdog Ofcom.

But from April 1 callers will pay a maximum of £3.65 for the same length call.

Experts warn that the move does not go far enough because it does not cap the total cost of the call.

Customers will still have to pay a so-called access charge of up to 55p from their telecoms provider, and if the call runs on they could still face huge bills.

Money Mail has previously highlighted how the cost of calling the most popular directory enquiry service, 118 118, had risen 50 per cent in two years.

More than one million people still rely on easy-to-remember 118 numbers for help finding telephone numbers for local tradesmen and big businesses.

Most are elderly or vulnerable and may not be comfortable using the internet to find this information. People aged 65 and over are four times more likely to call 118 numbers than 16 to 34-year-olds, according to research by watchdog Ofcom.

But nearly two thirds of 118 callers did not know how much the calls cost, its study showed.

Customers told Ofcom they expected to pay around £2 for each 90-second call to this type of service. But they were in fact often paying around £8.50.

It means that around 450,000 customers are currently paying around £2.4million over the

odds, according to the regulator's research. Until 2003 there was just one directory enquiry number, 192, run by BT and costing 40p per call.

In 2002 the then telecoms watchdog, Oftel, announced an

'This is hurting people'

end to BT's monopoly and offered 118 numbers to its rivals. Today there are around 300 directory enquiry numbers. The move was expected to cut costs, but they have spiralled as fewer people use the service.

The 118 118 number accounts for around 40 per cent of all

directory enquiry calls. Each 90-second call costs £11.23. BT is next biggest and charges £3.10 per 90-second call.

Ofcom launched a review into call charging practices in 2017 promising to make prices transparent and fair to all customers. When calls are capped from April 1, 2019, it will bring prices back to 2012 levels.

Ofcom's Jane Rumble said: 'Callers are paying much more than they expect. Our evidence shows this is hurting people, with some struggling to pay their bills.'

David Hickson, of the Fair Telecoms Campaign, warned that the cap only applies to a 90 second-rate, not the total cost of

the call. Callers also have to pay an access charge set up by their phone service provider. For landlines this is between 10p and 15p per minute, for mobiles it is around 55p per minute.

However, Mr Hickson said customers who look up numbers on the internet should also take care because there are many rip-off connection services offering premium rate numbers for organisations which have much cheaper numbers.

Last night a BT spokesman said: 'We welcome Ofcom's price cap. The price of BT's 118 500 service is 77p per call plus £1.55 per minute, well below the cap of £3.65 for 90 seconds.'

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David Hickson



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