

YOUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PHONE COMPANY - "DETARIFFING"

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has announced the "detariffing" of domestic interstate long distance telephone service. What does this mean to you, the consumer?

Background

A "tariff" is a legal document that a company files with a regulatory agency describing the rates, terms, and conditions of the services it provides. In the past, companies that provided interstate long distance service had to file these tariffs with the FCC, the regulatory agency that oversees the telephone industry. These tariffs included the cost per minute of calling at various times, cancellation procedures, and all other elements controlling the company's provision of service to you. The company was obligated to provide service according to the terms of the tariff.

Now long distance companies must make this information, which includes the vast majority of their interstate long distance services and rate plans, available directly to you, the consumer. Detariffing makes it easier for you to find out what you are paying for your service and what other interstate long distance companies are charging for their services. That way, you can compare the terms of your service to the terms offered by other companies. This will give companies a greater incentive to reduce prices and improve their terms in order to remain competitive.

You and Your Long Distance Company

Generally, you and your interstate long distance company will now deal with each other by means of an individual contract, just as you deal with many other entities, such as your credit card company. Your long distance company must make available to you the rates, terms, and conditions of your service, and it is up to you whether to agree to them, as in any other contract. If you do not agree with them, you can look for another company that offers terms that better suit your needs.

Under the FCC's detariffing rules, each long distance company is required to post a schedule of its rates, terms, and conditions on its Web site, if it has one. If you do not have access to the Internet, but want to use it to compare long distance prices, you can use the computer at your local library to get access.

Each company must also keep copies of this schedule at a business location of its choosing. Call or write your long distance company to find out this location or to learn how you can obtain information about the terms and conditions of your service and of all the services and rate plans your company offers. You should also make sure you read your bill inserts and letters from your interstate long distance company. Many companies are using these methods to inform you of their rates and conditions.

Consumers may contact their state consumer protection agency, Better Business Bureau, or state Attorney General's Office to learn about the protections and remedies available under their state contract and consumer protection laws. Although interstate long distance companies will no longer file tariffs with the FCC, the FCC will maintain its jurisdiction over these companies. Consumers can continue to file complaints about long distance companies with the FCC.



Be A Smart Consumer

Detariffing has already begun for domestic interstate long distance services. Companies must detariff their **international** services by January 28, 2002. Because of detariffing, consumers now have access to a lot more information about the calling plans of all interstate domestic long distance service providers. Be a smart shopper. Get as much information as you can about the various plans and products your company offers and compare the costs with those of other service providers in your area. You may be surprised!

For more information about detariffing, contact the FCC's Consumer Center at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5233) voice, 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY, or visit the Commission's Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb.

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html.

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