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CUB gives online help on cell bills

Analyses of various plans helped users save an average of \$260 a year

By Wailin Wong

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Want to save a few dollars on your cell phone bill? The Citizens Utility Board's new Web site may be able to help.

CUB on Wednesday launched Cellphone Saver (www.cubcellphonesaver.com), which analyzes monthly cell phone bills to help consumers see if they could be saving money.

During CUB's testing phase with hundreds of participants, consumers were able to save an average of \$260 per year on their wireless bill, said David Kolata, executive director of the watchdog group.

At the CUB site consumers can upload a PDF of their monthly cell phone bill. The site then spits out a free report that details how much a subscriber could save every month by switching to another carrier under a similar plan. The report also offers analysis on whether customers are using the best voice and data plan from their carrier, given their current usage.

Kolata said one of the biggest concerns he hears is confusion over wireless plans and which carriers offer the best deal.

"Plans constantly change, and there's so many variables at stake," he said. "This does a very good job at cutting through the price variable. Price isn't the only factor ... but it's an important one."

CUB, using technology from a Texas-based start-up called Validas Inc., worked on adapting the system for eight months before going live. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

To use the CUB site, consumers must be subscribers of AT&T, Verizon Wireless, Sprint, T-Mobile or U.S. Cellular. The Web tool does not compare phones or promotions related to signing up with a new carrier.

Kolata said he hopes to add more carriers and other features if there's enough user interest and money. The service is free, but users can click on a button to donate money to CUB to keep the site going.


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Validas' founder and chief executive, Tom Pepe, is a former Verizon Wireless executive. He said the technology took about three years to develop.

Individual consumers, as well as businesses or government agencies, can purchase customized reports directly from the Validas Web site. Another Web site offering a similar tool is BillShrink.com, which is free and also offers some comparison of devices.

The Validas technology eventually could be tweaked to analyze any kind of service with electronic invoices, such as other utility bills and bank statements, Pepe said.

He is hoping to sign agreements with wireless carriers so he can gain access to their proprietary information on new promotions and pricing plans, allowing for even deeper comparisons across service providers.

"We're not a whistle-blower," Pepe said. "What we're saying is there are 200 dynamic plans and features ... there's no way a human can look at all those scenarios and come up with the right plan."

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