

www.chicagotribune.com/business/chi-tue-cell-phone-bills-aug18,0,3666882.story

chicagotribune.com

Cut \$331 from cell bill

By Wailin Wong

Tribune reporter

August 18, 2009

Illinois cell phone users could save an average \$331 on their bills every year if they switch to plans with fewer minutes and get rid of unnecessary features, the Citizens Utility Board said in a report Monday.

The \$331 figure comes from an analysis of 6,985 cell phone bills that Illinois residents entered into the CUB Cellphone Saver, an online tool the group launched a year ago.

Consumers who use one of the five major carriers can upload a PDF of their bill at CUBCellphoneSaver.com. The site, which uses technology built by Texas-based Validas Inc., analyzes bills to measure customers' usage and how much they pay for their service. The service then generates a free report with recommendations on how to save money, either by switching to a different carrier or using a different plan with the same company.

The carriers covered are AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular and Verizon Wireless.

CUB said its data showed that most bills averaged more than seven hours of unused calling time a month, representing almost half the total minutes for which consumers were paying. "A large number of bills" also averaged 386 unused text messages a month, CUB said. Only 9.3 percent of bills analyzed had penalties for going over the monthly allotment of minutes.

"This is really savings without sacrifice," said CUB Executive Director David Kolata. "All you're really doing is optimizing your cell phone plan so it matches your calling behavior."

The report said other culprits in high cell phone costs are extra and often unnecessary features such as roadside assistance, 411 and insurance.

"In most cases, this is money that is simply being thrown away," Kolata said.

CUB's Cellphone Saver isn't the only Web site where consumers can get money-saving tips on their monthly plans. BillShrink, a California-based technology company, also analyzes cell phone bills on a number of factors, including the network that a consumer calls the most, the times of heaviest usage and the strength of a carrier's network in an area.



**\$249 PER MONTH FOR A
36-MONTH LEASE* ON A NEW
MINI COOPER HARDTOP.**

> Learn more at
CHICAGOLANDMINI.COM



*Visit MINIUSA.COM/FS for details.

If an AT&T customer is making most of his or her calls to a number in the Sprint network, for example, the site may recommend that the person switch to Sprint to take advantage of free in-network calling.

Wireless carriers say they welcome services that help consumers decide among the large number of carriers, plans and features.

"The more information the consumer has, the better," said Dane Snowden, vice president of external affairs at CTIA, the wireless industry group. "We know a lot of these sites are out there."

T-Mobile has even partnered with BillShrink on a marketing campaign launched in May. The T-Mobile Web site directs customers to BillShrink, where they can input their cell phone bill and see the results, even if the site recommends that they switch to a different carrier.

Unlike CUB's Cellphone Saver, BillShrink does not include U.S. Cellular. And neither of the sites cover prepaid wireless carriers such as Boost Mobile and Cricket Wireless, which offer pay-as-you-go plans without a monthly contract or credit check.

Kolata acknowledged that for some consumers, a prepaid plan may be the best option. He said CUB hopes to add prepaid options to its Cellphone Saver.

wawong@tribune.com

An orange promotional banner for AT&T. On the left is the AT&T globe logo and the text "at&t". In the center, it says "Up to \$150 Cash Back." followed by "Home Phone, Internet and Wireless or TV." On the right, it says "Under \$100.00 per month" with "per month" in smaller text. Below this is a blue button with white text that says "LEARN MORE" and a right-pointing arrow.

Copyright © 2009, [Chicago Tribune](#)