

Identify your communications needs

Advancements in technology have driven service providers of telephony, internet and TV services to continue providing new and innovative services to remain competitive in this ever changing industry, resulting in more plans available to you as a consumer to choose from. This increase in choice may sometimes be overwhelming for you to choose the communications service that best suits your needs.

As a first step, you should identify what type of communications service/s you need to subscribe to, either a mobile telephony, a fixed telephony, internet, TV service or a combination of these services. Secondly, you need to identify what your requirements are and how frequently you will use such service. We have gathered some useful information to help you identify your communications needs.

● Mobile

If you would like to subscribe to a mobile telephony service you should consider whether you will be spending most of your time using the **internet, calling or sending SMSs**. The different packages available on the market cater for the different types of usage patterns. Be aware that mobile reception in a particular area or building may vary from one service provider to another. It is advisable that you enquire with friends and colleagues about their experiences of using mobile services from certain locations which you regularly frequent before signing any contracts. Alternatively you may consider purchasing a pre-paid SIM card to test the service yourself to ensure you are satisfied with the quality level of the service. If you intend to call and send SMSs to international numbers, compare the different rates applied by the service providers. If you frequently travel outside the EU, take into account whether service providers offer the service in such countries and compare the applicable roaming rates.

Some service providers offer subsidised mobile devices with their plans. This could be an important consideration that could determine your decision when seeking new mobile plans on the market.

● Fixed telephony

There are an array of fixed telephony plans to choose from on the market. Some of these plans apply a charge for each call you make whereas other plans offer a number of minutes to be used as calls subject to the payment of a periodic rental fee. In both these cases it is important to check whether different conditions apply when calling users subscribed to other service providers as sometimes such calls (also known as off-net calls) may be subject to higher charges.

If you are an elderly person or a registered disabled person, you may wish to consider to subscribe to the Telecare service. This service is provided by a third party and works by using a special telephone connected through the normal telephone line and in case of an emergency you can activate such service by a pendant which is available 24 hours a day. Even though this service is provided by a third party, before subscribing to a fixed telephony service make sure that the Telecare service is compatible with the fixed telephony service.

● Internet

If you would like to subscribe to an internet service, you need to determine **what type of user you are**. If you intend to use the service to surf the internet and to access your emails, we advise you to opt for an entry-level internet package. This way, you will avoid paying for super-fast speeds that you may not need. On the other hand if you intend to stream videos, download large files, engage in online gaming or connect multiple wireless devices at the same time, you will probably require an internet package which has an unlimited download limit and fast speeds that support this kind of activity. Users should consider whether the internet service will be connected to multiple wireless devices at the same time when deciding which internet package to choose from.

● TV

If you would like to subscribe to a TV service, check the different **TV channel line-ups** offered on different plans to see what type of content is available. Some content such as 'Sports' or 'Movies' may be offered separately from the standard TV subscription and you may need to pay additional monthly fees to subscribe to this content.

In trying to keep up with users demands in today's fast paced world, a number of service providers offer the possibility to record or to catch up with your favourite programmes on demand at your own comfort. Some of these TV services can also be access remotely while on the move on your mobile device or tablets. It is always recommended to enquire about these features with your service provider.

Apart from the factors mentioned above, you should also consider what is most important to you, whether it is the cost, duration of contract, initial time of connection, after sales service, time taken by service providers to repair faults, or any other factor.

How to find the right information

After identifying your needs, you need to start comparing the different communications packages offered by service providers. These are just a few tips to help you obtain information on the different telephony, internet and TV plans.

- **Call the service providers' customer care or visit their outlets** to enquire about the different communications packages they offer.
- **Log onto the service providers' website** to view the tariff plans provided by service providers.
- Check reviews from existing customers available on the different social media platforms. Keep in mind that this information is based on personal experiences and may therefore vary from one person to another.

Different packages to choose from

● Bundle vs Standalone

If you need more than one communications services, you should consider subscribing to a bundle which is a type of package which combines two or more communications services in one single plan. Bundles normally offer more advantageous conditions in the form of discounts or subsidies and is easier to manage your communication services bills as you are billed once periodically for all the services together.

On the other hand, if you only need one particular communications service or if you wish to purchase different services from different service providers, be on the lookout for standalone services so as to avoid paying for services which you do not need.

● Pre-paid vs Post-paid vs Hybrid plans

Telephony service providers offer one or more of these three different types of services, a pre-paid plan, a hybrid or a post-paid plan.

- **Prepaid plan** – As the name implies, a pre-paid plan is a service for which you need to pay in advance, normally by purchasing a top-up card. Your balance is then depleted every time you use the service. After consuming such credit you will no longer be able to make use of the service unless you purchase more credit.
- **Post-paid plan** – This is a service where you pay after you use the service. Generally, post-paid plans offer free allowances and any usage thereafter is billed at a flat rate which you have to pay afterwards. You will normally be billed for a post-paid service every month.
- **Hybrid plan** – This type of plan is a combination of both prepaid and postpaid plans. Generally, a hybrid plan provides you with an amount of free allowances for a fixed periodic price while allowing you to top-up your service whenever you want.

● Tailor-made packages

If you are a business user and would like to subscribe to a communications service, be aware that service providers offer ready-made packages designed to meet different needs of different businesses. Upon request, certain service providers may also offer tailor-made plans designed to meet the specific requirements your business may have.