



# Consumer Guide

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Keep asking!

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With the liberalization of the telecommunications sector in the Kingdom of Bahrain you now have choices. But how do you make the right ones?

We have competing operators and each operator will offer you a number of different packages. You can even take different services from different operators.

Confusing? Not if you are clear about what you need – and this guide will help you sort that out. The important thing is to keep asking questions until you get a telecoms service that meets your needs. Remember – the choice is yours.





## GETTING STARTED

### What type of service do you want?

The first step is to think about how you use your phone and what services are most important to you. As there are different packages for services, the different features you request will affect the price you will pay. Some of the questions to think about when choosing the right package for you are:

- What sort of calls do you make (national, international, premium rate)? If you make international calls, which countries do you call the most?
- How often do you make them?
- When do you tend to make your calls (time of day, weekday or weekend)?
- How long are your calls?
- What other services do you need (e.g., voicemail, internet connection)?

Old phone bills might help you get this information. Once you have a good idea of what you want, then find out what is on offer – and get the best deal for you.

### How are calls charged?

It is important to know how your service provider charges you for calls. Calls are usually charged in one of the following ways:

- **Unit based:** where the duration is calculated in units. The units may differ from one service provider to another and from one network to another (fixed or mobile network). For example, your service provider may consider every three minutes to be one unit. In this case, if you make a call that lasts for 1.5 minutes, you will be charged for a whole unit regardless of the actual duration of the call.
- **Second based:** calls are charged according to the seconds spent on each call. This is usually the case with international calls, where you pay only for the seconds you spent on the call.
- **Minute based:** here the call duration is rounded to the next minute. For example, if your call lasted 1 minute and 15 seconds it will be charged as two minutes.

Furthermore, different times of the day are charged differently. Most service providers divide the day into peak and off-peak periods. The peak period will have a higher charge for the call. Sometimes the call rate is different between weekdays and weekends. Make sure you ask your service provider about these periods so you know how much you will pay for the calls.

## Mobile phone

Many people today choose a mobile phone, rather than a fixed phone (one you plug into the network), for personal use. There is a choice of mobile operators and a choice of packages.

These are questions to think about before deciding which service to take:

- How do you want to be billed (e.g. pay in advance or get a monthly bill)?
- Do you mainly use the phone to talk or SMS?
- Are there any set-up fees for the service?
- Are you likely to use voicemail? What do calls cost to pick that up?
- In Bahrain, do call costs differ when calling different networks? If yes, then to which network do you make most of your calls?
- Do you want to use your phone when you are abroad? If yes, then which package has this feature?
- What additional services are available – and can you make good use of them (e.g. mobile internet)?

The costs – and availability – of all these will vary between operators and between packages. For example, you might be offered a package with a number of free minutes or sms plus line rental and a discount price for the handset. But you need to check whether it is still good value for money if you are likely to:

- use more minutes than the number that come free, or
- need to use free minutes or sms to other networks, or
- have unused free calls left (can you carry them over?), or
- make a lot of international calls, or
- use your phone abroad – and so on.

If you have a good idea of how you use your phone, you can then choose the right package for you with the additional services you require and save yourself time, money and effort.

You will normally be offered the choice of paying for all your calls in advance – prepaid – or being billed for them afterwards – postpaid.

1. **Prepaid** - With prepaid, the calls are usually more expensive, as there is no monthly rental, and you will not get an itemised bill showing the calls you have made. But you do not risk running up a large bill that you might find difficult to pay.
2. **Postpaid** - With postpaid, the calls are usually less expensive but you pay a monthly rental. You get full information about your calls. But you need to make sure you keep track of how much you are using your phone, particularly for more expensive calls – and especially if you allow somebody else to use your phone.

# International Roaming

## What is international roaming?

Roaming is using your mobile service outside your country. This is possible because the mobile service provider in the country you are visiting (host service provider) carries your calls on its network. The host service provider then bills your service provider who in turn bills you.

Usually, roaming charges are higher than those for local and international calls. Before you use international roaming you should think about:

- Do you need to use your mobile phone while abroad?
- Is roaming available in the country you are visiting? You can find this out by asking your service provider before you travel.
- Do you know the roaming charges of the different service providers in the country you are visiting, or at least the approximate charges? You can ask your service provider about these charges before you travel.
- Are you better off using a prepaid mobile service in the country you are visiting?

## How can you minimize your roaming charges?

- Choose the service provider who charges the least at the country you will be travelling to. You can find out the rates by asking your service provider in Bahrain about the rates operators charge in the country you are planning to travel to.
- Try to make your calls during off-peak times.
- Remember that you will be charged for all calls (incoming and outgoing) while roaming, so choose the calls you answer carefully.
- If you intend to make a lot of calls, travel frequently or cannot afford roaming charges, you can find out the cost of a prepaid mobile phone card in the country you are visiting and buy one if it is more feasible for you.

## Fixed line

You can choose from the service packages on offer from your fixed line operator. When choosing your service provider consider the following:

- How much is the service registration fee?
- How much is the monthly line rental?
- What is the cost of calls on the same network and to other networks?
- Can you make international calls?
- Can you get additional services, such as internet?

The above will help you to know more about your needs and to choose the right package for you.

## Carrier Pre-Selection.

You can now choose to take services over the network from other service providers without changing your telephone line number or getting extra equipment. This is very easy thanks to Carrier Pre-Selection or CPS. Using CPS allows you to choose a service provider to use for different types of calls:

- National Calls
- International Calls
- Both - National and International Calls

Before you choose your CPS operator you need to look at how you use your phone and also know which operators are providing this service in Bahrain. You can visit our website [www.tra.org.bh](http://www.tra.org.bh) or call us on 17520044 for a list of CPS operators.

In order for you to use the CPS service you will need to subscribe to the selected operator by filling in a subscriber application form.

Once you have subscribed to CPS, the calls you choose (whether national, international or both) will be handled by the CPS operator you have subscribed to. You will be making your calls in the normal way without dialing any extra numbers at the beginning.

When you have CPS you can still make calls using your telephone line service provider. This can be done by dialing a special number first (your operator should tell you what this number is) and then dialing the phone number you want to call.

There are a few things you need to know about the charges you will pay for CPS:

- You will receive bills from each operator you take a service from. These bills will include the details of the calls and the charges, as per the contract you signed with each operator.
- The operator that provides your telephone line will send you bills that include the charges for line rental plus any calls you make using its network.

## The CPS Contract

The minimum period for contracts is three months for individual customers and 12 months for business customers, both of which are renewable. Read the contract carefully to find out if there are any penalties for ending the contract before the specified term.

## Cooling off Period

As a customer using the CPS service you are entitled to a "cooling off period" which is a period of 10 working days starting from the date of your subscription to CPS, during which you can cancel your subscription, if you wish to do so. During that period:

- the service provider you chose to leave by selecting CPS, can call you only once to try to get you to change your mind. Remember this in case you start receiving more calls, as they would be illegal; and
- you can change your mind and cancel the contract with no penalty. You will only pay for any calls made using CPS during this period if you decide to cancel it.

## Internet

The internet is a rapidly growing service that is available through a range of packages with different options and features in each package.

### How to connect to the internet?

- **Dial Up:** this is when you connect your computer to a telephone line and dial a number that connects you to the internet. The dial up speed is relatively slow and you will usually be charged according to the amount of time you are connected to the internet. If you are using dial up, during the time you are connected to the internet you will not be able to make or receive any calls on the phone line without breaking your connection to the internet.
- **Broadband:** this is when you connect to the internet through a special line (DSL line) which enables you to browse and download files at high speed. In this service you can always be connected to the internet while making calls from your telephone as normal, without affecting the connection to the internet.

Internet subscription options:

- Monthly rental plus paying for the time you spend connected to the internet
- Flat rate monthly rental, where you can stay connected as long as you like without paying any extra amount
- Flat rate with threshold, which is when you pay a monthly amount that allows you to download up to a certain limit or spend a specified amount of time connected to the internet each month. If you exceed the specified time or download limit, you pay extra for each use.

When choosing your internet subscription, consider the following:

- How much time will you be spending on the internet? The type of package suitable for you will depend on how you will be charged for connection time.
- Will you need to use your phone line to make calls while connected to the internet?
- Will you be downloading a lot of files? If so, then you need to decide whether a flat rate package would be more suitable than a threshold one. Or you can look for a threshold package that matches your needs.

## Prepaid International Calling Cards

There are many companies offering prepaid international calling cards in Bahrain. Each

company has different prices and quality. The prepaid cards are available in different denominations (BD1, BD2, etc.). Sometimes you might notice that the lowest price does not give you the voice quality you want. In this case you can choose a card that offers you the best value for your money both in terms of price and quality.

When you are trying a card for the first time, it is highly recommended that you buy the lowest value of the card (BD1). This way you can test the service before you decide to buy the higher-value cards.

Also, when you are buying a prepaid card, check first to ensure that the plastic wrap is not broken or tampered with, and that the PIN number is not scratched. Otherwise the card has been used and you will not be able to make calls with it.

## SIGNING UP

### What next after choosing the provider and package?

The next step is to look very carefully at the contract between yourself and your service provider – or providers – before signing, so that you know your rights and obligations. Make sure you are going to get exactly what you expected.



Check out any fixed charges that will appear on every bill, e.g. line rental. And check the cost of all the types of calls you are likely to make and the services you want to take.

And ask a few more questions:

- Is the operator or service provider licensed to offer this service? (Ask the provider and check with the TRA)
- How long is the contract for?
- What are the steps you need to take, and what are the penalties, if you want to end the contract early?
- When could the provider cut off your service?
- What will be on the bill and how often will you be billed?
- Is there a deadline for payment and what happens if you don't pay all or part of your bill on time?
- Can you easily upgrade your package or change the services you take?
- How do you contact your service provider?
- What is the complaints procedure?

Remember – a contract is legally binding, so make sure you know what you are signing before you do so.

## What about the bill?

Most service providers send you a bill monthly or quarterly. You need to make sure you understand the bill (ask your service provider to explain it to you) and that it clearly shows you what you are paying for. Most complaints are about bills, so it is worth sorting this out before you sign up.

Questions to think about:

- Are the account name, your phone number and the service being provided all clearly shown?
- Does the bill separate local calls, international calls, premium rate calls, etc.?
- Are calls charged by the unit (and, if so, what is the unit), by the minute or by the second? If by the minute, are extra seconds rounded up or rounded down?
- Are any fixed charges, like line rental, shown separately?
- Is it clear which charges are prepaid and which postpaid?
- How quickly do you have to pay and what happens if you miss the deadline?
- Does the bill tell you how to query items on it that you think are wrong?



## LATER ON ...

### What about changing your service provider?

If you are not satisfied with your service provider or want to choose a provider that offers more suitable services, you may well be able to choose another one. Or move to a package that suits you better.

These are the questions to think about before you

change your service provider:

- How much notice do you have to give to end the contract with your current service provider?
- What are the penalties for ending it early?
- Given the whole picture of how you use your phone, is the new operator offering you a better deal?

You are the customer – it's your choice!

### What if you have a problem with your telecoms service?

If you have a problem – a query on your bill, poor quality of service, etc. – the first thing to do is contact your operator or service provider. Try and sort out the problem between you. You can do this by contacting your operator's customer service department either:

- **In writing:** you will need to keep a copy of your letter and a receipt of delivery where possible. You will need to include the following information in your letter:
  - Your personal details: Name, a contact number where the operator can reach you, the line/telephone number you are complaining about, etc.
  - Information regarding your complaint: when you started facing the problem and what you did once you knew about it. Provide sufficient information to help your service provider investigate your problem, such as copies of bills and receipts of payments.
  - Request feedback from your operator and don't forget to include the date of the letter.
- **By phone:** Where possible always request a reference number for your complaint so you can follow up on your complaint. Discuss the matter and provide the necessary information. At the end of the call, request a feedback date. You will need to take note of the following:
  - Date and time of your call
  - Name and position of the person you spoke with
  - Information that was given to you during the call

**Now, if you did all of the above and the issue is not resolved within 60 calendar days of submitting the dispute to your service provider, you can contact the TRA through:**

- email: [consumer@tra.org.bh](mailto:consumer@tra.org.bh)
- Post: P.O. Box 10353 – Kingdom of Bahrain
- Fax: 17532523
- Provide the TRA with:
  - copies of all the correspondence between you and your operator, or a complaint reference number
  - description of the problem
  - copy of your ID, as proof that you are the subscriber of the service related to the complaint
  - contact details, such as your telephone number, in order for the TRA to get in touch with you

## What will happen next?

- The TRA will study your complaint and will acknowledge receipt of it. The TRA may request further information/clarifications depending on the nature of your complaint
- The TRA will investigate your complaint
- The TRA may disclose your identity to your service provider, after receiving your permission to do so
- The TRA will notify you of the outcome



## TRA

### What is the TRA?

We are an independent public body established by Legislative Decree No.48 of 2002. We are completely independent from telecoms companies in Bahrain. We are the regulator for the telecommunications sector in Bahrain. This means that we issue licences to companies who want to offer telecoms services in Bahrain, and we make sure operators are sticking to the rules and competing fairly. We also look after your interests – the consumer. There is a lot more information about telecommunications in the Kingdom of Bahrain and about the TRA on our website: [www.tra.org.bh](http://www.tra.org.bh)

You can contact us from 9 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Sunday to Thursday for advice and guidance. You can always get in touch if you are not satisfied with the response you get from your telecommunications operator to a problem with your service or your bill. We can also give you more information about your rights as a telecommunications customer.

### Contacting the TRA

By mail: P.O. Box 10353 – Kingdom of Bahrain  
By phone: 17520044  
By fax: 17532523  
By email: [consumer@tra.org.bh](mailto:consumer@tra.org.bh)  
Or via our website: [www.tra.org.bh](http://www.tra.org.bh)

### For more information

For more information contact the TRA or any of the service providers advertising their services.

This guide is also available in Braille and large print upon request.