



'Carrier pre-selection' consumer guide

November 2000

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Improving your choice

The UK has a very competitive market in telecommunications. You may already have a choice of who supplies a phone line to your home. If you are a BT customer, you can also make calls using one of the many other phone companies. You can do this either by:

- dialling a short code (or sometimes a freephone number) before you dial the number you want; or
- having an adaptor plugged in between the socket and your phone. The adaptor means you don't have to dial a different number.

But from **December 2000**, if you are a residential or business BT customer you will be able to use other providers more easily. You will not have to dial any extra numbers or use an adaptor. This is called ‘carrier pre-selection’ (**CPS**).

This leaflet explains the changes and what CPS means for you if you are a BT customer. We have produced it together with consumer groups and telecommunications operators.

What if BT don't provide my phone service?

Kingston Communications is currently the **only** other company that has to let its competitors provide CPS (and only to its customers in the Hull area). Other companies, such as cable TV companies and mobile-phone companies, can choose whether to offer you CPS, although call types and combinations of calls may be different. If you are thinking of switching from BT, you may want to check whether your new supplier will let you receive CPS, and in what form.

How could I benefit from CPS?

CPS means you can choose services from different phone companies using your existing BT line. As a result, you may pay less for your phone calls. Even if you are a BT customer already using other companies, CPS may be a more convenient way of doing this. CPS also means that all phone companies will have to be more competitive, which should help to cut prices.

What types of call can I make using CPS?

BT customers can get CPS from December 2000 for national and international calls only. ‘International calls’ means calls to the Republic of Ireland and overseas. You will be able to choose one CPS provider for all national calls and one provider for all international calls. You could even have the same provider for both.

From the end of 2001, there will be another option – ‘all calls’ – which will let BT customers choose one provider for a package of all the following types of call:

- local;
- national;
- international;
- calls to mobile phones;
- specially tariffed calls (for example, freephone, local rate, national rate and premium rate);
- personal numbers; and
- paging.

You cannot split the 'all calls' option. If you choose the 'all calls' option, you will only be able to use it with one provider. For example, you will not be able to use one provider for calls to mobile phones and another for national calls.

Operator services, directory enquiries and emergency numbers are not included in CPS.

Do I have to make every call using my CPS provider?

No, you will be able to use any other provider with whom you have arranged services (including BT) by dialling extra digits before the phone number you want to call. For example, you may want to use a CPS provider for most international calls but use another provider just for calls to a particular country.

Will I need any new phone lines or equipment?

BT will still own, run and send you bills for your phone line. Your phone number will not change. However, you will get a separate bill for call charges from each different call provider that you use.

If you have more than one phone number and line, you can choose different CPS options for each line. However, all extensions on the same line must have the same CPS option.

If I have CPS, how will the other services that I receive from my current provider change?

How existing services such as call barring, call diversion and discount schemes are affected depends on what the different companies offer. You may lose some services but gain others. For more information, check any leaflets or contracts, or talk to the companies concerned before you sign up.

You should be aware that if you sign up for CPS and then decide you want to have call barring, you will need to cancel your CPS service first. This process will take 10 working days.

If you use BT's 'Light User Scheme', and similar lower-cost schemes such as 'In Contact' and 'In Contact-Plus', you will not be able to use these schemes and CPS. To take CPS, you will first have to cancel your agreements with these schemes.

On the other hand if you already use CPS and want to use one of these schemes instead, you will have to cancel the CPS service first.

Also, if you want to change other services you receive (for example by adding new lines), you will need to find out how the CPS service will be affected.

Do I have to make a choice?

It's up to you. If you do nothing, your current service (including any 'indirect access' services) will not change.

How will I get CPS?

The CPS options available to you for each phone number are:

- CPS for all national calls;
- CPS for all international calls; or
- CPS for 'all calls' (available from the end of 2001).

You will be able to choose the same or different companies for national and international calls. You cannot use the 'all calls' option with the other two options.

To receive CPS you will have to:

- sign and return a contract to your CPS provider; and
- sign and return a separate confirmation slip directly to BT to confirm the changes.

On the confirmation slip, you will have to write your account number as it appears on your BT bill. This will be a password. To keep full control, you should not share this number with anyone else, including the company that is trying to sign you up. In some countries a small number of companies have been known to change their customers' CPS options without telling them, but this new system should prevent them from doing this.

You should return the confirmation slip to BT within four weeks of sending the contract to your CPS provider. This means they can set up CPS for you as quickly as possible.

There is a different process for setting up CPS if you are a business customer. CPS providers can explain this to you.

What about hard selling?

Telephone and door-to-door sales people, who may be working on commission, can be very persuasive. You may be asked to sign something on the spot. But, unless BT gets your written approval on a standard confirmation slip, CPS will not be set up. **You should not let any sales people see your CPS confirmation slip with your BT account number on it – this will prevent them setting up the service, unless you want them to.**

How can I change my provider or service later?

If you want to change your provider, contact the company of your choice. They will do this in the same way CPS was set up in the first place. This will also apply if you decide to change your service back to BT. If you are changing your provider, your current provider will be told of the change automatically.

If you want to change your call options, they will also do this in the same way CPS was set up in the first place. If you choose an option that cannot be used with your existing service, your new request will cancel the old arrangements. This means in particular that if you have 'all calls' CPS and decide to change national or international calls to another provider, the other call types in the 'all calls' package will go back to being provided by BT.

What if I change my mind before the CPS service begins?

If you have only returned **one** of the documents needed (either the contract or the confirmation slip), the CPS service will not be set up.

If you change your mind after you have returned the contract and the confirmation slip, you will still have a 14-day 'cooling-off' period to change your mind. The 14 days will start when BT receives the confirmation slip from you. To prevent them setting up the CPS service, you can contact either BT or the CPS provider you have chosen. If you decide to choose a different provider while you are waiting for your first choice to set up CPS, you must cancel the first request within 14 days.

This cooling-off period applies to both the new CPS service and any later changes.

What does it mean when I sign the contract?

And, can I end a contract after I have signed it?

The contract is legally binding. The length of the contract and your rights to end it may vary between companies. Always check the terms and conditions of the contract carefully and be sure you know what you are signing up for. If necessary, speak to the company **before** signing. Keep a record of anything you sign and a note of your rights to end the contract.

Some contracts may be for a minimum period. If you are thinking about a fixed-term contract, remember that the 'all calls' CPS option will be available towards the end of 2001. It would be a good idea to ask the providers if they will be able to offer you the 'all calls' option when it is available.

Remember though you will still be able to make calls through other companies (including BT) that you have agreements with. You will just need to dial extra digits before you dial the phone number.

What will it cost?

Before you sign a contract, the companies must tell you how much they charge, how often they will send you bills and how you can pay. They will give you free itemised bills (unless you tell them not to). They must also explain what will happen if you do not pay your bills and what help they can give you if you have difficulties paying your bills.

What if the provider ends the CPS service?

If your CPS provider decides to stop the service, it should still keep to its contract with you, for example by giving you notice of when they will end the service. Your contract should tell you when the provider could end the service.

If your CPS provider goes out of business, the CPS call types will go back to BT unless you choose another company. If your provider is taken over or merges with another company, your CPS service would probably not change.

What if I change my address?

If you change your address and you want to keep CPS, you will need to contact your CPS call provider and follow the same process that you used to set up the service originally.

What if I change my phone number?

If you are just changing your phone number, but not your address or CPS options, you can keep the CPS service without going through the original setting-up process again. You will need to contact your CPS provider to ask them to move the CPS service to your new number.

What if I have a problem?

If you have problems making a call, contact the company that provides that call type. They should be able to solve the problem. Before the problem is solved, you can go back to using another provider you have an arrangement with. You will just need to dial a short code before the phone number.

If you have a complaint, it is best to contact your provider. If you are not happy with the response, you can contact us or the appropriate national Advisory Committee on Telecommunications (for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland).

How can I compare companies?

When deciding whether to change providers, it makes sense to compare the different prices and services. The following are some questions you might want to think about.

- How much will different call types cost?
- Will there be discounts, or different prices for different times and days of the week?

- How will they work out call charges, for example, each second, each minute or part-minute?
- How often will I get bills or statements?
- How can I pay?
- Will there be any connection or disconnection fees?
- What sort of contract is it and, if it is fixed-term, how long will it last?
- What arrangements and penalties are there for ending the contract?
- What if I have trouble paying my bills?
- What other phone services or benefits will I gain or lose by changing providers?
- When and how can I contact your customer services department?

If you are thinking about getting CPS, it may be helpful to check your old bills to see what call types you make most often, and so which package of prices is best for you.

For more information

We cannot recommend which company you should choose, but we can give you more information and advice on phone services in the UK and what CPS means for you.

If you need any help, please contact us at:

Consumer Representation Section
Of tel
50 Ludgate Hill
London
EC4M 7JJ.
Phone: 0845 714 5000 (local rate number)

E-mail: advice@oftel.gov.uk

Textphone: We are currently arranging a textphone for our helpline. In the meantime, if you have problems with your hearing, you can use Typetalk.

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