

PHONE FACTS

by Mark Alessio

One of the nice things about receiving phone bills is that they verify your importance to someone other than the electric, gas, and credit card companies. However, that benefit is outweighed by the lower back strain you suffer from trying to lift the envelope out of the mailbox. "Why is this thing so heavy?" you mumble in the elevator. And the joker next to you says, "Because there's so much ink on it and because you're such a valued customer they included a gushing thank you card."

In the safety of your flat, wincing, you open the envelope, extract the bill, unfold it, see the total, gasp, hyperventilate, pull at your hair, go into denial, and then ask yourself, "Hey, who do I know in Wawa?"



How can you get some relief? For the lower back, Tylenol, stretching exercises, and bending at the knees next time; for the hyperventilating, breathe into a paper bag; for hair loss, try Rogain; and for the denial, see a therapist. For the phone bill? Well, the opportunities are limited, but you should know a few things. First, stop making operator-assisted calls. This is one of the most expensive ways to phone home. Although, after a long night out, it may be the only way to call home. Instead, start making International Direct Dialling (IDD) calls. The helpful people at Hongkong Telecom are more than willing to provide you with this service, because they benefit directly. Just call 013 to register. This alone will save you a bag of cash.

You should also be aware that there are peak and off-peak hours with different rates. Off-peak hours are from midnight to 7:00 a.m. Monday to Saturday, and from 1:00 p.m. Saturday through Sunday. During these times Hongkong Telecom offers you 14 per cent off the peak rate.

Alternatively, City Telecom International (CTI) provides a service which helps you save a bit more money. Compared to Hongkong Telecom rates for a call to Canada, CTI offers a savings of 14.9 per cent during peak hours and 12.1 per cent during off-peak hours. Those savings can be increased to 19.1 per cent (peak) and 16.4 per cent (off-peak) if you buy a City Telecom stored value coupon.

Call from any touch-tone telephone, dial an access number, type in your 10-digit secret code, and then dial the number of the person you're calling as if you were making a regular IDD call. This service is great for the secret code alone. You can also use CTI services to make calls from 29 countries in Asia, North America, Europe, and a few other places like the Dominican Republic. They say there is no application fee, monthly fee, or any extra charges.

You can use the money you save to pay your therapist. ♦

Mark Alessio is an irregular contributor to Canada Hong Kong Business, but he has recently switched to a high fibre diet.

Peak			Non-Peak		
HK Telecom	CTI	CTI Coupon	HK Telecom	CTI	CTI Coupon
\$89	\$75.70	\$72	\$78	\$68.60	\$65.20

Charge for a 10 minute telephone call to Wawa, Ontario, or anywhere else in Canada (after the first minute).

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