



**'He confessed he'd called 118 118 repeatedly to ask questions like "who has the longest hair?"'**

Kim Lewis

# The true cost of directory enquiries

Calling one of the 118 directory enquiry services can cost a packet and leave you hung up with poor advice, our investigation has found

## CHEAPER WAYS TO FIND A NUMBER

### Save money when calling directory enquiries

#### ■ Free online directories

Use a free internet service like thephonebook.bt.com, Yell.com or 118118.com.

#### ■ Use a mobile phone

**network's preferred directory service** Orange, for example, charges 69p regardless of call length to its own 118 000 service (30p a minute if put through), but £3.25 for a two-minute call to 118 500.

■ **Simple services for simple queries** Services that allow you just one enquiry a call with no option to be connected – such as BT's 118 707 (35p per call from a BT or Virgin Media landline) – are often cheaper than those such as 118 118.

#### ■ Free enquiries

The 0800 118 3733 service is free from landlines (not mobiles) but you have to listen to ads. The automated service uses voice recognition to identify the number, so you must speak clearly. It accurately gave us the number for Harry's restaurant in Exeter.

BT offers a free directory enquiries service 195 if you find a phone book difficult to hold, read or handle. Call 195 for an application form.

■ **Donation** 118 499 gives on average 7p a call to Barnardo's and the British Red Cross. A two-minute call is £1.30 from an O2 pay-monthly phone, 66p from a BT landline.

**W**e're probably all familiar with those two moustachioed joggers from the TV ads who invite you to call 118 118 and 'ask us anything'.

The questions we wanted to ask were how much such 118 directory enquiry services cost and how accurate the information is that you are given.

To find out, Which? has compared the cost and accuracy of some of the most popular, such as 118 118 and 118 500.

### 'Who has the longest hair?'

Former Which? employee Kim Lewis found that the cost of calling a 118 service can mount up, when her teenage son Adam dialled 118 118, a huge 111 times.

Kim says: 'My phone provider called about unusual phone use when the bill hit £136. I shone a bright light into Adam's eyes and he confessed he'd called 118 118 repeatedly to ask questions like "who has the longest hair?". When asked, 118 118 had told him the per-minute cost, so he assumed calls shorter than a minute were free.'

Even if you don't have a trigger-happy teenager, the cost can be significant.

### Our findings

#### ■ Calling 118 directory enquiries is more expensive than you think

In April 2009 we asked 2,214 Which? online panel members about the cost of 118 calls. On average, you estimated that a typical directory enquiries call would cost 33p from a landline and 64p from a mobile.

**THE TRUE COST** In fact, based on our experiences, a typical call from landlines to the two most-used 118 services (118 118 and BT's 118 500) is around £1 (assuming you write down the number or receive it via a free text). Call costs from mobiles can be up to £2.

#### ■ Being put through is expensive

Many 118 services can connect you to the number you're asking about. Nearly a fifth of you thought this would cost the same as if you dialled the number yourself. Some thought that the call would be free.

# 118 costs

The cost of a typical and a longer (two-minute) call to the 118 services Which? members use most.

**Costs** Rounded up to the next whole pence. Typical call costs were calculated based on actual fixed fee/per-minute cost. **Number of enquiries** How many numbers you can ask for in one call. **Typical call length** Average of three calls to find the number for Harry's restaurant, Exeter, from when the call was answered until we'd written down the number. **Fixed fee** Minimum you

SERVICE DETAILS				BT				ORANGE				O2			
NAME	NUMBER	NUMBER OF ENQUIRIES	TYPICAL CALL LENGTH (SEC)	FIXED FEE (£)	PER MINUTE (£PM) <sup>a</sup>	TYPICAL CALL (£)	TWO MINUTE CALL (£)	FIXED FEE (£)	PER MINUTE (£PM) <sup>a</sup>	TYPICAL CALL (£)	TWO MINUTE CALL (£)	FIXED FEE (P)	PER MINUTE (£PM) <sup>a</sup>	TYPICAL CALL (£)	TWO MINUTE CALL (£)
THE NUMBER	118 118	No limit	32	0.79	0.29	0.95	1.37	1.15	0.40	1.37	1.95	0 <sup>b</sup>	1.00	1.00	2.00
MAUREEN	118 212	1	40	0.68	0.19	0.80	1.05	0.95	0.40	1.22	1.75	0 <sup>b</sup>	1.00	1.00	2.00
YELL	118 247	No limit	49	0.78	0.14	0.89	1.05	0.95	0.40	1.28	1.75	0 <sup>b</sup>	1.00	1.00	2.00
BT	118 500	No limit	40	0.31	0.77 <sup>c</sup>	1.07	1.84	0.95	1.15	1.72	3.25	0 <sup>b</sup>	1.00	1.00	2.00

<sup>a</sup> Charge per second outside of fixed fee or minimum call charge unless specified <sup>b</sup> One minute minimum charge <sup>c</sup> Charge in minute blocks  
 pay regardless of call length. You also pay a per-minute charge. **Per minute** How much you pay for each call minute, including if you're put through to the number. In our examples, you pay the per minute cost from the start of the call plus any fixed fee (may vary by company).



**THE TRUE COST** This is where costs escalate, especially if your call lasts a while. Landline calls can reach up to 77p a minute and even more from mobiles.



Calling a geographic (01 or 02) number during the day direct from a BT landline would cost just 4p a minute.

## Can I get a refund?

We've tested the four main directory services used by Which? members (see right) on common types of question. But can you get a refund if they give you the wrong information?

**BT (118 500):** Yes, if its answer is miles from the place searched for or if it can't give a suitable answer because its advisor didn't conduct a proper search.

**Yell (118 247):** Yes, if it can be proven wrong information was given. It says there are few incidents of this.

**Maureen (118 212):** You get a full refund by cheque or postage stamps if you are given a wrong or unsuitable answer.

**118 118:** Yes, it gives refunds for wrong or unsuitable answers on request.

# Have they really got your number?

In April and May, we posed as customers to ask four questions of the 118 services above

Question one is the type that is most commonly asked by Which? members.

**QUESTION 1** What's the phone number for Harry's restaurant in Exeter?

We asked specifically for Harry's restaurant, not Harry's Grill Bar, its partner restaurant in Exeter.

**Best advice:** 118 118, 118 500 and 118 247 answered correctly each time, often checking which restaurant we meant.

**Wrong number:** Only one adviser for 118 212 checked which restaurant we meant; the other two gave the number for Harry's Grill Bar.

118 services sell themselves increasingly as being able to find a business type in a particular area. We tested this with questions two and three.



**QUESTION 2** Can you help us find a vegetarian restaurant close to Baker Street, London?

**Best advice:** 118 118. The only one to answer based on our initial question. Its suggestion wasn't the closest restaurant, but wasn't too far away. **More detail:** The other services asked for more details and calls lasted several minutes.

118 247 and 118 500 read us a list of vegetarian restaurants in central London, but couldn't say which was closest.

118 212 read us lists of London areas, some far from Baker Street. When it read out the right area (Marylebone) it did suggest a suitable choice.

**QUESTION 3** What's the closest cinema to Regent's Park tube, London, showing Gran Torino after 7pm tonight?

118 500 and 118 212 said they don't provide cinema listings. **Best advice:** 118 118 correctly said the closest showing was at the Screen on Baker Street (a ten-minute walk).

**Too far:** 118 247 suggested one



in Leicester Square (2km away) and Clapham (up to half an hour on public transport). Only when we said Regent's Park was in West or North West central London, did it suggest the Screen on Baker Street.

**QUESTION 4** How much will it cost if you put me through?

We called each service from an O2 PAYG mobile to ask for a specific number. When they offered to connect us, we asked how much it cost. All seemed to know we were calling from a mobile but could only give costs from a BT line, saying network costs varied. Our table shows this can be significant. 118 118 at first said connection was free.

We asked each service question one three times to check consistency. We asked them the other questions once.