



Manchester United has replaced its 0870 numbers with a single 0161 contact number. It says: 'We never intended to make money from fans' calls and that's what was happening, so we felt we should change it.'

No to 0870, yes to 03

We tell you which companies have switched from costly contact numbers to the cheaper 03

One thing's clear from our phone number research: you avoid using expensive 084 and 087 dialling codes – the non-geographic numbers that let organisations share revenue from customers' calls.

Last year, telecoms regulator Ofcom introduced 03 – a non-geographic code that costs the same to call as 01/02 geographic numbers. Some organisations – including the BBC and the Driving Standards Agency – have switched their 0870 contact numbers to 03.

But others have made less consumer-friendly changes by switching from one revenue-sharing number to another, or even from 0800 numbers that are free from landlines to pricier revenue-shar-

ing dialling codes (see 'Number sinners and winners', opposite).

You're also particularly annoyed by the trend of GPs switching to revenue-sharing 0844 numbers (see 'Doctor's orders', opposite).

Benefits of 03

Many organisations deny that they use 084 and 087 for financial reasons. Some claim that it's to allow them to use one number for all customer communications that isn't tied to a location – unlike 01 and 02.

But the 03 code offers these benefits without penalising customers, so why haven't these companies switched to it?

03 awareness

Broadband provider Eclipse (see 'Number sinners and winners', opposite) says consumers haven't heard of 03 so won't trust it.

But our survey of 2,369 people in August shows that just 7% avoid using 03, even though only just over a third of you have heard of it. This is a much smaller percentage than those who steer clear of revenue-sharing numbers and the even-pricier premium 09 numbers.

The proportion of you who avoid each type of dialling code are:

- 03 numbers: 7%
- 0844 numbers: 23%
- 0845 numbers: 22%
- 0870 numbers: 49%
- 0871 numbers: 45%
- 09 numbers: 61%

It's clear, though, that knowledge of 03 numbers needs to improve. Only 24% of survey respondents know that 03 costs the same as the 01/02 geographic dialling codes – 10% think it costs more, 4% less and 62% don't know.

NUMBER BUSTER

Dialling codes are confusing, so follow our guide

Non-revenue sharing 01/02 (geographic) and 03 (non-geographic)

If you don't have inclusive minutes for these, you'll pay around 4p per minute (ppm) peak and around 1.5ppm off-peak from landlines. Virgin Media charges 3.25ppm off-peak. Connection fees may apply. Most landline tariffs include free weekend calls to these numbers. Pay-as-you-go mobile rates range from around 5ppm to 20ppm.

0800 (non-geographic)

This is free from landlines, but costs up to 30ppm from most mobiles. 0800 isn't included in free mobile minutes.

Revenue sharing

These non-geographic numbers let organisations take a cut of call revenue. Some claim that they make no profit from this.

0844, 0845, 0870 and 0871

These codes typically cost more than 01/02/03 numbers per minute – BT's 0845 charges are the exception on some tariffs. Charges vary by company, but 0870 and 0871 calls can cost up to 10ppm from landlines. Mobile calls to all four codes can cost up to 30 or 40ppm, although mobile network 3 charges around 15ppm. Revenue-sharing calls



are never included in mobile or landline call bundles.

09

These premium-rate numbers can cost up to £1.50 a minute from landlines. Some broadband providers – such as Orange and Tesco – use 09 numbers for some technical helplines.

Number sinners and winners

Here are some of the latest organisations that have changed dialling codes – for better or for worse

Sinners

■ ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER

Switched from revenue-sharing 0845 and 0870 to revenue-sharing 0844. The company says it was a 'business decision' not to use 03.

■ **CAPITAL ONE** The main customer relations number changed from 0800 to a revenue-sharing 0845 code in August to 'align with the rest of the industry'. Its fraud number remains 0800.

■ **ISP ECLIPSE** The broadband company switched from 01 to 0845 in mid-2008. It says a non-geographic number makes tracking calls easier, leading to a better customer experience.



It says it ruled out 03 due to concerns about awareness and trust.

■ **TOUCAN** This phone and broadband provider's former 0800 customer support number is now a pricier, revenue-sharing 0871 number. However, it has switched its premium-rate 09 technical support number to 0871, which is cheaper.

Winners

■ DRIVING STANDARDS AGENCY

It has switched its 0870 number to 03, saying: 'It was a consumer-driven change, designed to save customers money.'

■ **BBC** The broadcaster has switched its 0870 numbers to 03, although the BBC has retained its 0845 contact numbers for now.

■ **BRITISH GAS** The energy supplier will change all its contact numbers from 0845 to 0800 by June 2009.

■ **MANCHESTER UNITED** has unified all its 0870 numbers as a single 0161 contact number. It says: 'We never intended to



make money from fans' calls and that's what was happening, so we felt we should change it.' Manchester United adds: 'Ironically, income [from 0870] was fairly minimal. Telecom operators take the lion's share of the profit.' This reinforces our message that organisations should ditch these numbers.

Which? says

Low awareness of 03 shouldn't deter organisations from using it, so our previous message still stands (see *Which?*, June 2008, p16).

Even though Ofcom is reviewing 0870 charges, we think that all organisations should switch their customer service and support lines from expensive 084, 087 and 09 numbers, and use 03, 0800 or 01/02 codes instead.

In the meantime, log on to www.saynoto0870.com for details of cheaper alternatives to 084, 087 and 09 numbers.

Some companies have switched from 0800 numbers to revenue-sharing codes

Which? online Phone numbers

Visit www.which.co.uk/phonenumberscosts for tips on avoiding expensive call charges, information on how companies are switching and details of 08 number charges. To help us, if you spot phone number changes, email news@which.co.uk and leave the details.

And if you're considering switching home phone providers, log on to www.which.co.uk/

switchingphonecompanies for a simple step-by-step guide to the process, plus expert advice on hidden charges, calls packages and prefix codes.



DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Tony Taylor 65, retired

Many of you told us you're unhappy that your GP surgery has switched from a local number to a pricier, revenue-sharing 0844 number.

One in six of the UK's 8,000 GP practices uses Surgery Line, a telephone system promising more access and efficiency, featuring call routing and a queuing system.

NEG, the company behind Surgery Line, confirmed to us that GPs make 2p from every call, but it said that the money is invested in surgeries' telephone systems.

It claims that its surgeries have increased patient access by 30%, and calls are cheaper because they are answered more quickly.

But Which? members have said that calls cost more, not least because 0844 numbers aren't free on their tariffs.

Tony Taylor's Oxfordshire surgery changed to 0844 two years ago. Calls to 01, 02 and 03 numbers are free on his tariff, but the last 20 calls to his doctor on 0844 have cost an average of 17p a call.



Hanging on the telephone

Members also question claims about improved services, saying they've often been held in a queue.

Tony told us: 'Everyone phones at 8am, so you are put in a queue until your call is answered. If the queue is full, you are put on hold to be connected. All this can take a very long time.'

Ofcom has encouraged the Department of Health to promote 03 in surgeries, which means GPs would have to pay extra for call-management systems – the department is reviewing the issue.