



Office of the Director of
**Telecommunications
Regulation**

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 4th April 2002

ODTR Survey points to lack of awareness among consumers re: International Mobile Roaming Charges.

ODTR advises consumers on how to reduce these costs.

The ODTR today(Thursday 4th April 2002) issued the results of a survey which shows that many consumers are unaware of the high prices associated with using their phone when abroad. The survey carried out in conjunction with Oftel, the UK regulator, shows that consumers are generally dissatisfied with international roaming costs. In particular they are dissatisfied with the fact that they are charged for receiving incoming calls while abroad.

The survey shows that:

- 43% of consumers did not know how much it costs to use a mobile phone while abroad even though consumers can pay up to € 1.90 per minute calling home from the UK on a pre paid tariff.
- Only 15% of consumers were satisfied with overall value for money for making calls while abroad.
- Less than one third of consumers have tried to reduce their international roaming charges by using options such as text messaging rather than making voice calls.

In light of these results the ODTR has now published some advice for consumers as to how best to manage their mobile usage costs when abroad.

In general consumers can make some significant savings on their international roaming costs by;

- changing from a pre-pay service to a post-pay contract;
- manually selecting the least expensive UK network;
- using text messaging instead of voice calls – UK networks do not charge for receiving a SMS;
- barring or diverting incoming calls while roaming;
- calling off-peak;
- swapping to a UK SIM card while in the UK; or
- Using an International Traveller Service (pay an extra rental charge upfront and avail of cheaper international roaming call tariffs).

The exact savings on international roaming costs depends on the individual's usage pattern and the operator's prices which vary and must be continuously monitored by consumers in order that they can minimise their roaming costs.

The ODTR undertook some joint market research with Oftel the UK Regulator to compare UK and Irish consumer awareness of roaming charges. The results were similar for both markets. The research looked at usage patterns for a range of users i.e. business trip, holiday maker, daily commuter and an occasional visitor.

For example:

- A Business user could save up to 40% on mobile calls by using an International Traveller Service and up to 51% by manually selecting the least expensive UK Network as opposed to the most expensive UK network.
- The daily commuter could save up to 64% on calls by changing from a pre-paid service to a post-paid contract and up to 37% by manually selecting the least expensive UK network as opposed to the most expensive UK network.
- The occasional visitor (visits UK once a month) could save up to 85% by changing from a pre-paid to a post paid contract and up to 22% by manually selecting the least expensive network as opposed to the most expensive UK network.

However the results clearly show that consumers need to assess their own usage profile and decide what option suits their needs.

According to the Regulator, Etain Doyle:

“The ODTR has worked closely with Oftel, the UK regulator, to highlight the costs to Irish consumers of using their mobile phone abroad and to give advice to consumers on how to minimise these costs while roaming in the UK”

She advised that:

“The best advice for travellers is to check with your network operator before you go in order to know exactly how much you will be charged for mobile calls.”

“Consumers should pick options that best suit their individual usage patterns”

The ODTR today published two reports on international roaming

1. ODTR document 02/33 – “*Consumer awareness of mobile roaming – A report by the ODTR, part of a joint ODTR/Oftel study on mobile roaming*”
<http://www.odtr.ie/docs/odtr0233.doc>
2. ODTR document 02/34 – “*Benchmarking study and Consumer Advice on mobile roaming between Ireland and the UK – A report by the ODTR, part of a joint ODTR/Oftel study on mobile roaming*”
<http://www.odtr.ie/docs/odtr0234.doc>

Copies of these reports are available on the ODTR website www.odtr.ie

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Notes to Editors

International mobile roaming is the ability to make and receive calls with your mobile phone while travelling abroad.

Irish Operator’s tariffs for roaming in the UK:

The international tariff’s for an Irish Consumer using their mobile phone in the UK as per February 2002 is given in Annex D of:

ODTR document 02/34 - *“Benchmarking study and Consumer Advice on mobile roaming between Ireland and the UK – A report by the ODTR, part of a joint ODTR/Oftel study on mobile roaming”*

<http://www.odtr.ie/docs/odtr0234.doc>

It should be noted that these operator tariffs may have changed since February 2002. It is therefore advisable to contact operators directly for their current international roaming rates.

www.digifone.ie

www.vodafone.ie

www.meteor.ie

Potential savings on roaming costs for Irish consumers:

More detailed information on the potential savings on international roaming cost for the 4 consumer profiles - 2 week holiday maker, occasional visitor, a business user and a daily commuter - can be found in Section 2 of:

ODTR document 02/34 - *“Benchmarking study and Consumer Advice on mobile roaming between Ireland and the UK – A report by the ODTR, part of a joint ODTR/Oftel study on mobile roaming”*

<http://www.odtr.ie/docs/odtr0234.doc>

The potential savings were calculated with February 2002 tariff data and may have changed if operators have changed their international roaming tariffs since February 2002.

International roaming reports published by Oftel

Today Oftel have also published reports on international roaming at www.oftel.gov.uk

Summary Results of ODTR document 02/33:

“Consumer awareness of mobile roaming – A report by the ODTR, part of a joint ODTR/Oftel study on mobile roaming”

1. Mobile customers in ROI (38%) are more likely to use their mobile abroad than mobile customers in GB (19%) and NI (23%).
2. Roaming customers tend to be younger consumers, higher social grades, and those using contract packages - this is consistent across UK and ROI.

3. Awareness of roaming charges is also highest amongst these groups of consumers.
4. Exact knowledge of international roaming charges among roamers is low in ROI (6%) considering that 38% of Irish mobile consumers have used their phone abroad. (note 51% of roaming customers have rough knowledge of costs)
5. Awareness of methods to reduce roaming charges in general was low (14% - 26%) in ROI with the exception of sending text messaging (SMS) (89%)
6. Most Irish roamers use the network that is automatically selected for them (66%) despite the fact that 54% of Irish roamers know that costs depend on the network used.
7. Satisfaction with various cost aspects of mobile roaming was low (10% - 26%), particularly for costs of receiving incoming calls whilst abroad.

Comparison to UK and NI

8. Mobile customers in ROI (38%) are more likely to use their mobile abroad than mobile customers in GB (19%) and NI (23%).
9. Perception of awareness of international roaming charges among roamers was higher in GB (69%) and NI (76%) than in ROI (57%) , but actual awareness of incoming call charges was higher in ROI (75%) than in GB (62%) and NI (66%).
10. Awareness of methods to reduce roaming charges was similar across ROI and. UK. Text messaging (SMS) being the most well known option.
11. Satisfaction with mobile service abroad results in ROI are similar to those in GB and NI