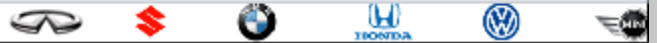




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TOP BUSINESS STORY

Study: Bundling saves a bundle

Phone plans that bundle local and long-distance as well as several other services are saving consumers about \$429 each year, a new study says.

Here's the latest from a Washington think tank: Competition in the local telephone market works and brings down prices for consumers and businesses.
BY BEATRICE E. GARCIA / bgarcia@herald.com

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MORE IN BUSINESS

A welcome bull's-eye -- in two languages

Bilingual advertising is a growing trend in the marketing industry as the population of second-generation Hispanics increases.

Volkswagen's doing it, so is Coca-Cola, and, as the population of U.S.-born Hispanics continues to rise, other advertisers will, too -- use bilingual ads in both Hispanic and general markets -- speakers at a conference said Monday.
(BY CHRISTINA HOAG, choag@herald.com, 01/27/2004 03:01 AM EST)

Woes keep mounting

An audit ordered by a court-appointed administrator reveals that Parmalat owes a lot more money than the dairy firm admitted to last fall.

Confirming investigators' fears, a new audit of Parmalat found the dairy conglomerate's debt to be about \$17.9 billion -- or nearly eight times the figure the dairy conglomerate reported in the fall, months before the huge fraud scandal erupted.

(BY FRANCES D'EMILIO, Associated Press, 01/27/2004 03:01 AM EST)

PEGGY ROGERS: Ms. Computer

Factors to tune into before buying a new TV

Televisions have become the Baskin-Robbins of the tech industry: There are so many flavors that it's easy to feel bombarded and confused.
(01/27/2004 03:01 AM EST)

'Queen of Seas' an earthly delight

A planetarium, cooking shows and a spa are among the attractions that make the Queen Mary 2 a bit different.

On the world's biggest passenger ship, star gazers don't have to walk on deck. The theater doubles as a planetarium. The Chef's Galley gives travelers a Food Network-style show -- a kitchen-eye view of their next meal.

(BY JAY CLARKE, jclarke@herald.com, 01/27/2004 03:01 AM EST)

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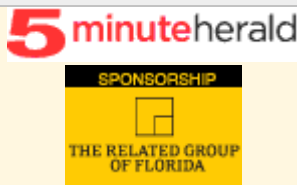
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Business

Posted on Tue, Jan. 27, 2004

UTILITIES

Study: Bundling saves a bundle

Phone plans that bundle local and long-distance as well as several other services are saving consumers about \$429 each year, a new study says.

BY BEATRICE E. GARCIA
bgarcia@herald.com

Here's the latest from a Washington think tank: Competition in the local telephone market works and brings down prices for consumers and businesses.

A new study released today by the Phoenix Center for Advanced Legal & Economic Public Policy Studies found that "all you can eat" calling plans, which bundled local and long-distance service, provide about \$10 billion in savings annually for the consumers and businesses.

That works out to about an average savings of \$429 for households that have switched to one of these plans.

"This study empirically demonstrates the obvious. Consumers are better off as a result of competition," said Lawrence Spiwak, a former Federal Communications Commission staff attorney and author of this study for the Phoenix Center.

Spiwak, who also serves as president of the Phoenix Center, noted these plans offer unlimited local calling, unlimited or discounted long-distance service, and a slew of features including Caller ID and voicemail. They were first offered by the companies such as Z-Tel, which is based in Tampa, as well as AT&T, MCI and Sprint.

These firms all compete with the regional phone companies such as BellSouth, Verizon and SBC Communications, which were once part of the Ma Bell phone monopoly.

The federal government ordered the break-up of Ma Bell system in 1982, and the Bell companies were formed in 1984.

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The 1996 Telecom Act opened the door for these rival firms, requiring the Bell companies to lease them a portion of their network to offer local phone service.

That law also allowed the Bell companies to offer long-distance service once there was competition in their markets. In the past two years, the Bell companies have entered the long-distance market and they also began to sell bundled services for one monthly flat fee.

Because there's now competition among all the companies to see which offers consumers the most compelling packages services, "it's one area where the Bell companies have responded to pricing," Spiwak said.

Spiwak added that ``these benefits are very fragile."

If state or federal regulators give in to pressure from the Bell companies to restrict access to their networks or allow rate hikes for leasing a portion of the network, competition would be limited.

According to the FCC's latest report on telecom competition, the rival firms control 14.7 percent of the local phone market.

Flat-rate service plans were first introduced by the wireless companies when they stopped charging for air time by minute and offered subscribers a bucket of minutes. Some, like Cingular Wireless, let customers roll over unused minutes from month to month.





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