Can I change cell phone vendors and keep my cell phone number?

Q: Can I change cell phone vendors and keep my cell phone number?

Answer

Yes. Wireless local number portability (WLNP) became effective on November 24, 2003. This allows users to change cellular providers while keeping their existing cellular telephone number.

In order to take advantage of this service, you must contact your new vendor with the request before you cancel your old service.

If you decide to port your number, you may need to exercise caution and patience.
If you are considering a switch, here are steps to take:

- Check your potential vendor's web site to see if your number is eligible to be switched. Not all numbers may be eligible at this time.
- Because phone numbers are assigned to a local geographic area, your number must remain with the same area where it is currently assigned.
- Check your potential vendor's web site for all of the details and "fine print" of the agreement you'll be signing.
- Check your current vendor's agreement to make sure you have fulfilled its agreement terms, and that the money saved by changing to a less expensive vendor will offset any termination charges you may incur.
- Changing vendors requires that you get a new cell phone, so consider its cost or any special offers as applicable.

If you do decide to transfer your number to another wireless service:

- Don't cancel your current service before applying to be switched; your current number must be active.
- Make sure you have a copy of your current contract and most recent bill at hand when communicating with your new vendor.
- In case the porting takes longer than expected, have an alternate phone number to give out for emergencies.
- If you use your wireless for more than just voice functions--e-mail, calendar, address book, contact lists, etc., you will need to plan how you are going to transfer those applications and their data to the new handset.
- Find out about your potential vendor's customer service options, and also check the vendor's warranty.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) provides detailed information on WLNP at http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/