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Mind your mobile data spend

Web browsing, email, video, chat, social networking – Australians are rapidly adopting mobile data services. It's important for consumers to take steps to ensure that they monitor their data usage, manage their spending and avoid bill shock.

Here are some steps and tools to help you monitor and control your spending to enjoy affordable access to mobile data services.

Tip 1: Get the right plan for you

Choose a plan or product that suits your particular needs. Consumers may choose a prepaid mobile service if they want to control their costs with upfront payments. Prepaid is also a good option if you are just getting started with mobile data services, such as browsing the internet, because it will give you a chance to evaluate your needs with an in-built mechanism to control your costs.

Mobile broadband should not be left on when not in use. Switch off to ensure that software running in the background does not use up your data allowance without your knowledge.

It's important to stay within your plan because data used over and above your plan's download allowance or limit can be charged at a higher rate for each additional megabyte. If your plan no longer suits your needs, call your provider and discuss your options (but don't forget to check whether there are any early termination fees).

Tip 2: Use the bill management tools to keep an eye on your bill

Mobile service providers offer a range of self-help tools to assist you keep track of your data usage and spending. These are free online accounts allowing you to monitor your usage and bill on a daily basis over the internet.

Check with your service provider to see if they offer a service to contact you if your expenditure is unusually high compared to your previous bills. You can also request the barring of some services at the network level.

Ask your service provider if they offer an SMS notification service that lets you know when you have reached 80% or 100% of your data plan. Some providers offer free text services that you can use on the move to monitor your usage.

Tip 3: Watch out for big downloads and streaming

Downloading music, video files, podcasts, vodcasts and games can use a lot of data. Sites that allow you to watch video streaming can also eat up your available usage as can downloading popular games.

Browsing the internet or emailing may incur mobile data charges. Even simple software updates can add up. Both downloads and uploads count towards monthly data usage.

As a guide to give you an idea of your data usage here's how much data you are likely to use:

- Emails are around 100 kilobytes (KB) of data each
- Web pages are about 100KB each
- Videos are roughly 1000KB or 1 MB (megabyte) per clip
- Downloading a song is roughly 5MB and an album is likely to be more than 50MB.
- Average Instant Messenger Sessions are 100KB each

The actual amount of data used each month will depend on your specific circumstances and it's strongly recommended that you monitor your usage and spending online (by using the self-

help tools) regularly - daily if needed – to keep track and ensure you stay within your spending limit and don't incur a MB surcharge once your plan's allowance is reached.

If you are regularly incurring mobile data charges on your handset you should buy a data pack that will allow you to do the things you want, such as surf news, sport, weather, email or Facebook, at a lower monthly fee than going over your limit and getting hit with excess data charges.

For heavy users of particular content, check if your carrier provides access to unlimited usage for a specific monthly charge.

Tip 4: Check roaming rates if overseas

Calls, data and texts you make when travelling overseas are charged at the rates of the overseas network operator you are using plus any surcharges. If you use push data services, such as email on your phone, you may wish to turn this off or set to retrieve email only at your request. It is strongly recommended you check the specific country costs before travelling to avoid any shocks at bill time. In some countries you may also be charged for incoming calls by the overseas network on which you are roaming.

For more information about your carrier and mobile data use:

Telstra

If you have a Telstra mobile phone, click on the Telstra logo, click on web tab, click on 'click here for browsing cost', and you'll see a page headed 'charges apply' and there is text that says 'to find out how much 1mb will give you, click here'.

Optus

Data tables outline what your mobile internet data allowance lets you do:

www.optus.com.au/MIP

Vodafone

For information on Vodafone's Mobile Internet offering click [here](#). To see how many MBs you'll use when using the Mobile Internet check Vodafone's [MB Usage Calculator](#)

Hutchison 3

For more information on getting the Internet on your mobile with 3 click [here](#)

AAPT

For FAQs on mobile data see: <http://www.aapt.com.au/services/personal-small-business/personal/mobile/new-mobile-plans>

Virgin

For frequently asked questions about data plans, data usage and mobile browsing see:

http://www.virginmobile.com.au/en_au/vma/internet-on-your-mobile-phone/mobile-internet-faqs/

AMTA

For more tips on how to manage your mobile spend and what to look for when buying a mobile phone see Consumer Tips on the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association website www.amta.org.au

Disclaimer: These tips are intended to assist potential users of the services described with general information that is usually relevant to those services from a consumer perspective. Specific circumstances may affect any information provided above. Users should also note that the nature and features of the services described above may change, and while AMTA endeavours to keep up with changing circumstances, it cannot guarantee that the information provided above will be current or will correctly describe the relevant service at a particular point in time.

The tips are not intended to provide advice of any kind in relation to particular circumstances, nor are they intended to endorse, recommend, or guarantee any companies, organisations, products, or services that are mentioned. Potential users of the services described above must make their own enquiries and, where necessary, obtain their own independent advice. AMTA accepts no responsibility for the consequences of any decisions that users may make as a result of any information they have gained from AMTA's Consumer Tips.

