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22 MILLION MOBILE PHONE USERS BURNT BY HIGH BILLS

33 million Brits will be packing their mobile phones when they go abroad this year, 10 million more than last year^[1]. But with the majority in the dark about the costs involved, many could be coming home to a huge bill warns uSwitch.com.

- **Getting burnt: nearly half of Brits (49%) have returned home to a large bill after using their mobile phone abroad^[2] - costing them an average of £149^[3]**
- **In the dark: just a fifth (22%) check how much they'll be charged for using their phone abroad before they go – over four in ten (42%) have no idea of the costs^[4]**
- **Running the risk: nearly seven in ten mobile users (67%) leave themselves open to high overseas charges by having their phone switched on all the time, even though over half of these (35%) don't intend to use it^[5]**
- **Status update: a quarter (24%) will be using their phone abroad this year to check Facebook or Twitter while a third (33%) will be checking personal emails. 14% will risk racking up high bills by checking work emails^[6]**
- **Too expensive: 83% think that mobile phone providers charge too much for services when abroad^[7].**

With more Brits than ever planning on taking their mobile phones abroad on holiday this year, new research from uSwitch.com, the independent price comparison and switching service, suggests that many more could also be coming back home to an unexpectedly hefty bill.

33 million people (71%) plan to take their mobiles away this year compared to 22 million last year^[1], but just a fifth (22%) will be checking on the charges for overseas use before they go. Over four in ten (42%) will have no idea what they'll be charged^[4], running the risk of racking up huge bills on their return. And they are not alone - nearly half of mobile phone users (49%) have been burnt by roaming costs in the past^[2], coming home to an average bill of nearly £150^[3].

Nearly seven in ten Brits (67%) run the risk of high bills by leaving their mobile phone switched on while abroad, even though more than half of these (35%) don't even intend to use it. A further quarter (26%) will turn their phone on sporadically to check messages^[5]. But by doing this, consumers are unwittingly opening themselves up to high overseas charges. This is because the minute you switch on abroad and your phone registers onto a local network you will be billed at overseas rates – you will have to pay to receive calls, for someone leaving you a voicemail message and to pick up voicemail messages.

Brits are also being caught out by their need to keep in touch with those back at home while they're abroad. A third (33%) admit they will use their phone abroad to check emails and nearly a quarter (24%) intend to use Twitter or Facebook on their phone. Nearly three in ten (27%) will browse the internet when they're away, a quarter (26%) will use apps and 16% will check the weather. 14% will even risk racking up high bills to check their work emails^[6].

But even though 83% of people think that overseas charges are too expensive^[7], they are still missing a number of simple tricks when it comes to cutting the cost of using their phones abroad. Seven in ten (70%) don't switch their voicemail off before leaving the UK^[8] and less than half recognise that local SIMs and roaming packages are the cheapest way of staying in touch while abroad^[9]. And although O2, Vodafone, T-Mobile and Orange all offer roaming packages, just one in ten (11%) savvy mobile users always get a special roaming package from their provider to cut the cost of using their phone abroad - a third (33%) don't know about them and one in ten (10%) think they're too much hassle to sort out^[10].

Ernest Doku, technology expert at uSwitch.com, says: “Contacting your mobile phone network should be high on every mobile user's holiday checklist, alongside packing your passport and sun cream. If people don't want to add to their post-holiday blues by coming home to a ‘bill shock’, they need to take control. If you really can't do without your mobile while you are away, at the very least you should make sure you understand the charges and try to limit the scope for a huge bill. Just switching your phone on while abroad – even just to use the alarm clock or the camera – can open you up to unexpected charges so it's definitely best to ‘know before you go’.

“You could opt for a special roaming tariff like one in ten savvy Brits do, fix a cap or even using a cut price local SIM card. But if this seems like too much effort, or you run out of time, at least

ask your network to switch off your voicemail service before you leave the UK to avoid these hidden charges – over two thirds of Brits are missing this simple trick.

“But with smart phones taking over, one of the biggest ways to get burnt while abroad is by the high cost of data roaming. Mobile internet users must ensure they check that this is turned off when not in use to prevent online services such as email updating automatically. And although telling your friends about the bar or the hotel pool on Facebook or Twitter may be difficult to resist, it’s best to avoid visiting sites like these which are heavy on the visuals, as data is charged per megabyte.”

How do Brits plan to use their mobiles abroad this year?

Send text messages	79%
Receive text messages	78%
Receive calls	65%
Make calls	63%
Use the camera	60%
Use the alarm clock	55%
Check personal emails	33%
Listen to music	33%
Pick up voicemail	27%
Go online/ browse the web	27%
Use apps on the phone	26%
Use Facebook, Twitter or other social media apps	24%
For emergencies only	20%
Play games	18%
Check the weather	16%
Check work emails	14%
Watch on demand TV	1%

For more information visit www.uswitch.com or call 0800 093 0607

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Notes to Editors:

Research carried out online with the uSwitch.com Consumer Opinion Panel in May 2011. Sample size 1,760 UK adults. Calculations based on the fact that 95% of adults surveyed have a mobile phone for personal use. Assuming 48.3m adults (ONS) uSwitch.com calculates that there are 45.9 million mobile phone users in the UK.

1. In response to: 'Do you plan to take your mobile phone abroad this year?' – 71.1% said yes. 71.1% of 45.9 million = 32.63 million. From last year's online research carried out by uSwitch.com in February 2010, sample size 2,335 UK adults. In response to: 'Do you plan to take your mobile phone abroad this year?' – 48.9% said yes. 48.9% of 45.9 million = 22 million.
2. In response to "Have you ever returned from holiday/travelling abroad to be surprised by a large mobile phone bill?" 16.7% said yes on more than one occasion; 32.2% said yes once.
3. The average cost of this phone bill was £149.
4. In response to "Do you know how much your mobile phone provider charges for using your mobile phone for calls, text, voicemail and internet while you are abroad?" 22.2% said 'Yes I check the cost before I travel'; 36.3% said 'I have a rough idea of the cost'; 41.5% said 'I don't know what the cost is'
5. In response to "When taking your mobile phone abroad, which of the following best applies to you?" 34.9% said 'I have it switched on most of the time but don't intend to use it'; 31.7% said 'I have it switched on most of the time and use it'; 25.6% said 'I keep my phone switched off but switch it on occasionally if I need to make a call or check messages'
6. In response to "How do you intend to use your phone abroad this year?" 23.7% said 'To use Facebook, Twitter or other social media apps'; 32.8% said 'to check personal emails'; 14% said 'to check work emails'; 15.7% said 'check the weather'; 26% said 'to use apps on the phone'
7. In response to "Do you think the amount mobile phone providers charge for services when you are abroad is reasonable?" 82.7% said 'no'
8. In response to "Do you switch your voicemail off before leaving the UK?" 69.5% said 'no'
9. In response to "What do you think is the cheapest way of communicating with your mobile phone abroad?" 31.9% said 'buying a local SIM'; 16.1% said 'Getting a special roaming tariff add-on package from my provider' – these are the two cheapest. Therefore 52% don't know the best way
10. In response to "Thinking of the last time you went abroad did you get a roaming package added to your contract?" 11.2% said 'yes I always do'; 33.1% said 'no - I didn't know it was available'; 10% said 'no - it was too much hassle to sort out'

About us:

uSwitch.com is a free, impartial, online and telephone-based comparison and switching service, helping consumers compare prices on gas, electricity, water, heating cover, home telephone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones and personal finance products including mortgages, credit cards, current accounts and insurance. In 2010 uSwitch.com celebrated ten years of saving customers money.

uSwitch.com is the first comparison website to achieve the Plain English Campaign's Internet Crystal Mark, which is recognised as a standard that a website has clear language, is accessible and easy to use, and has been tested on a sample of its users.

uSwitch.com is dedicated to helping consumers save money whether they have internet access or not. It offers a dedicated call centre, manned by uSwitch customer service representatives, as well as a freepost 'Send us your bill' service, whereby customers can post their latest energy bills with their telephone number to FREEPOST USWITCH, to get a free call back from a dedicated customer services representative. The service is also available via fax, email and post. Consumers should fax 0203 214 8417, email CustomerServices@uswitch.com or write to Customer Services, uSwitch.com, Centro 3, 19 Mandela Street, London, NW1 0DU with their postcode and usage details.

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