

PERSPECTIVES

ON PUBLIC COMMUNICATION • OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE APCC®

July 2009
Volume 17
Number 4



Finding common ground on payphones

Government officials and other groups are not always aware of the key role payphones play in the community. Here's how you make the case.



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editorial

payphones for their everyday communication needs. We also talked about how valuable payphones are in emergencies.

Our main talking points also included the failure of the FCC to enforce its own DAC rules, the unfairness of PSPs paying into the USF but not being allowed to receive funds from it; and the need to ensure that payphone coding digits are included on calls transmitted via VoIP.



The general consensus after the meetings was that we were very well-received. The staff members and legislators we met with agreed that payphones play an important role in their communities, and are interested in helping us with our legislative and regulatory issues. Several have already offered to write the FCC on our behalf concerning enforcement of the DAC rules.

"No one can make an issue come alive to a policymaker better than the constituent who owns and operates a business in the representative's own district or the senator's state," said Tracy Taylor, a principal with Williams & Jensen, APCC's lobbying firm. "This was certainly evidenced by the APCC members who went up to Capitol Hill. These APCC members ably explained why the public phone in some small town that the member of Congress knew about, and used, was no longer there for his, and his constituents, use.

"Throughout the day, APCC members were able to effectively explain how current laws and regulations impacted whether or not that payphone would remain deployed," Taylor continued. "These explanations brought the industry's complex regulatory issues home to the policymakers in a very tangible manner and provided them the opportunity to think about the value of payphones."

I cannot close without complimenting Williams & Jensen for handling the arduous logistics of arranging these meetings. I think their efforts — and ours — will serve the industry well going forward. Our message is an important one, and it should be heard.

Tracey Timpanaro

Tracey Timpanaro
Publisher

CAPITOL HILL VISITS

APCC has a strong showing

I hate to sound like a tourist, but watching democracy in action is pretty darn exciting.

The centerpiece activity for APCC 2009 occurred Thursday, May 21, when more than 100 APCC members visited 70 congressional offices on Capitol Hill to lobby on behalf of the payphone industry.

First of all, just being at the hallowed grounds is pretty awe-inspiring. From the eager young interns to the savvy old suits to the buildings themselves, there's a certain energy about the place that is contagious. It makes you proud to be an American.

But while it was exciting to be there, we were very serious about our business just the same. Some of our meetings were with congressional staff, but many of us met with senators and representatives themselves.

Most of our meetings took place in office buildings around the Capitol, but one group of us was lucky enough to meet Rep. Steven LaTourette, R-Ohio, in the ornate and stately Rayburn room in the Capitol itself. The room featured a giant portrait of George Washington, and there were legislators huddled in small groups all around the room.

One meeting took place in a bustling hallway outside of the Energy and Commerce Committee's hearing room, where they were marking up the energy bill. Pretty cool stuff.

The goal of our visits was to have members of Congress gain a better understanding of how valuable payphones — and in particular independent PSPs — are to the American public.

We did this by talking about the number of payphones that are deployed nationwide (800,000) and the number of calls made annually (more than 1 billion). We mentioned that 6 million American households have no phone service and that these folks use

by Flori Meeks

Making a case for payphones

Unfortunately, government officials are not always aware of the key role payphones play in the lives of their constituents. Here's how you make the case.

The accusations are certainly nothing new. The city of Jacksonville, Fla., which has proposed an ordinance that would ban payphones from downtown rights of way and city parks, has a laundry list of perceived harms public payphones allegedly impose on the community.

For example, the city claims that payphones promote loitering and make it difficult for the sheriff's office and city police officers to enforce panhandling laws. The city further says they promote undesirable — and sometimes criminal — behavior when people congregate around the payphones. Finally, the city says that payphones supposedly interfere with city efforts to revitalize the downtown area by drawing indigents and posing an eyesore.

Since March, the Florida Public Telecommunications Association (FPTA) has been making a case for keeping Jacksonville payphones in place. The association has mobilized local members and social services groups that recognize the value payphones offer the populations they serve.

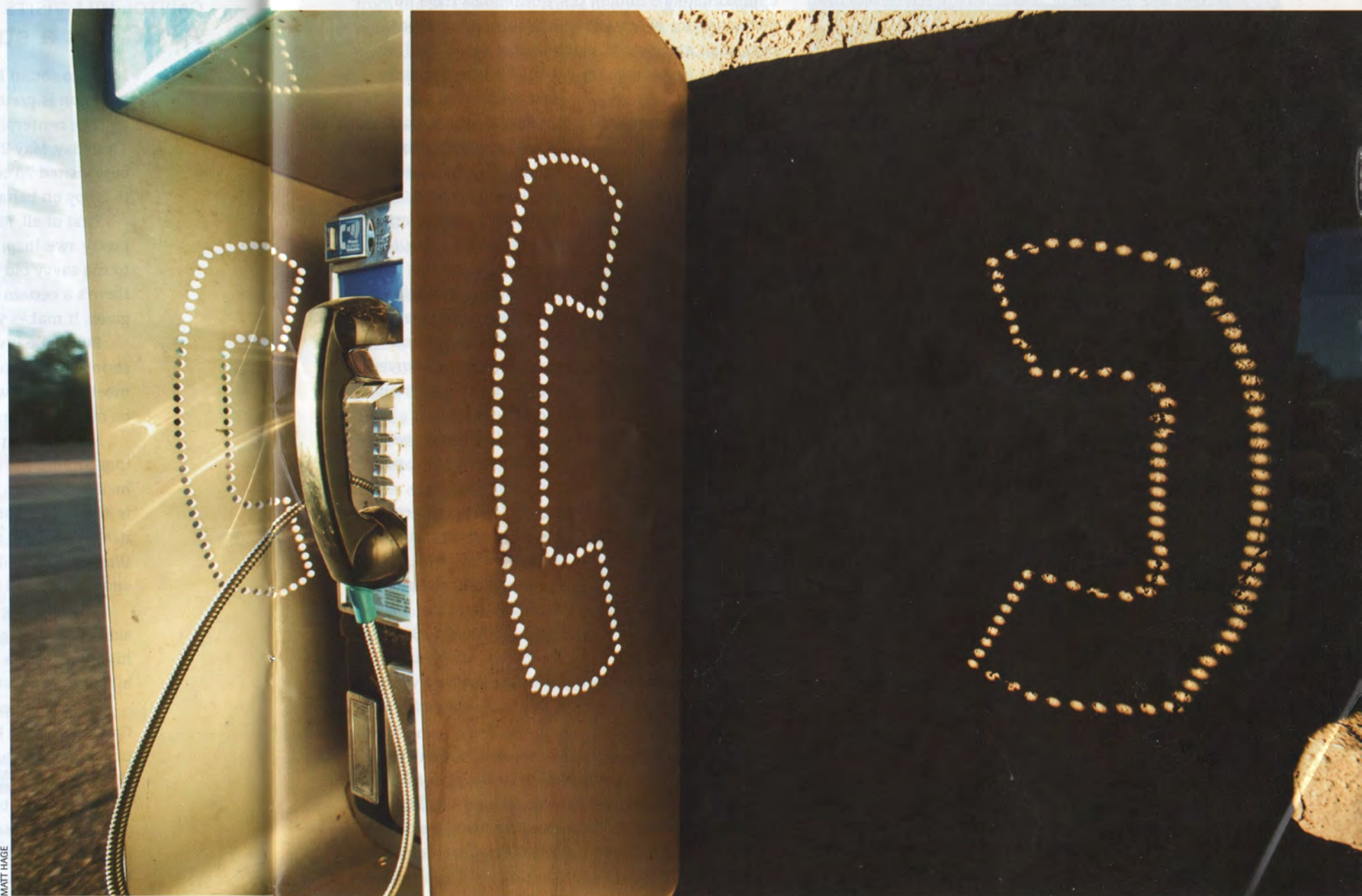
These groups have joined association members to speak at public hearings. Association members also have met with city officials in private. And every chance it gets, the association describes the far-reaching benefits payphones offer city residents.

"Payphones serve the poor and the homeless in our community," says FPTA President Bruce Renard. "They serve all of us when we don't have a cell phone available, or when it's not working. We've been emphasizing payphones' value in emergencies when we're hit by natural and manmade disasters. Payphones work when nothing else is working."

The association has also been emphasizing the fact that payphones help keep people safe. "Payphones provide around the clock 911 service," Renard says. "They let emergency service providers know where the caller is located, unlike the cell phone."

At press time, the Jacksonville situation had not been resolved. But city officials have been willing to listen to the FPTA's arguments. "We're working with them in every way we can, trying to find a way to address any legitimate concerns without throwing out the baby with the bath water," Renard says.

While there are millions of people in this country who could benefit from more payphones on the local landscape, rather than less, payphone service



providers (PSPs) still find themselves defending payphones' presence. But as the FPTA is demonstrating, there is a case to be made.

So if you find yourself having to defend payphones in your community, this article will provide some good information that you can share with concerned parties. Hopefully, it will make a difference in proving what we in the industry already know — payphones are an invaluable resource to their communities.

Cries for help

One of the services payphones are widely known for is their free 911 calling, which is required by federal rules and regulations. Further, most state governments have similar rules or regulations on the books. The very existence of these laws and regula-

continues. "Some hang ups are pranks, and some occur because the phone was knocked out of someone's hand. A lot of those calls are related to domestic violence. Some callers sought refuge at a convenience store or from an assault in progress.

"Payphones are still a good resource for us and for people in the community who don't have a phone at home."

Going without

The reality is, the population that Rowe describes exists throughout the United States. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) estimates that approximately 6 million U.S. households have no phone service of any kind. That's about 5 to 6 percent of all households in the United States, and it's twice that percentage for low income and minority households.

Further, the Urban Institute has reported that nearly 3.5 million people will become homeless in any given year. Families without phones rely on payphones to reach social service agencies, their children's schools and physicians — and sources of help in times of trouble and emergencies.

And like Rowe says, a large segment of the population seeking help through payphones can be described as victims of domestic violence. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 960,000 to 3 million people are victims

every year. These figures include thousands of women and children who rely on payphones as their only way to reach help.

One could make a similar case for runaway teenagers. One in seven youths between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away at some point, and 1 million to 3 million runaway and homeless children live on the streets in the United States, says The Kidsearch Network. The network adds that nearly 71 percent of

these children are physically endangered during their time on the run. To them, payphones can be a lifeline, a way to call an 800 number to find help or a way back home.

Helping law enforcement

When law enforcement representatives and local government officials blame phones for criminal activity, it's critical to respond with examples of the payphones and PSPs who've helped law enforcement agencies do their jobs.

Among the many letters, reports and photos the FPTA has presented to Jacksonville is a 2005 article from the St. Petersburg Times describing how a law enforcement official was able to track a fugitive suspected of a series of rapes via his payphone calls.

One day after breaking out of jail, the suspect called the father of another inmate from a payphone. The father called the police, and officials confirmed the call with the phone records. Other calls made from the payphone around that time provided officials with other numbers the suspect was calling.

After noting one especially long payphone call to a number, officials started monitoring it. They later began listening to other payphone calls to that number and intercepting calls relevant to the case. After an anonymous tip led to the suspect's arrest, those calls would serve as evidence.

PSPs have, on more than one occasion, helped police address the concern of prank 911 calls. In 1994, a team of San Diego police officers observed a high volume of 911 hang up calls coming from payphones in the 700 block of East San Ysidro Boulevard, in the city's Southern Division.

When the police described the problem, location owners and PSPs realized police were being diverted from crime-ridden areas to respond to false calls. The payphone providers agreed to remove 10 of the phones and relocate several others. The police installed signs above the remaining phones reading, "It is a crime to dial 911 to make a false police report." The PSPs also agreed to let police post English and Spanish "no loitering" signs next to the phones.

As a result of these and other efforts, the number of 911 calls from the phones dropped by 50 percent. The initiative also resulted in lower response times to other calls.

Further, there are cases of PSPs throughout the country who have effectively discouraged criminals



John Porter and several other New York PSPs were happy to participate in the NYPD's anti-graffiti program.

tions shows the value federal and state governments place on the accessibility of free 911 calling to their constituents.

Lynn Rowe is chief of police in Springfield, Mo. While payphones are not as easy to find in his city anymore, they continue to be a regular source of 911 calls, Rowe says. "We get a lot of 911 hang-up calls at payphone locations, but we respond to all of them.

"The possibility is somebody is in danger," he

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APA members were proud to participate in the Phoenix Police Department's Silent Witness program.

from using payphones. Successful tactics have included the following:

- placing stickers on payphones informing customers that calls may be recorded, and the information may be used to assist law enforcement;
- providing call detail record data to help law enforcement agencies in the apprehension of criminals;
- blocking incoming calls;
- blocking outgoing calls — except 911 calls — during evening and early morning hours;
- placing a real or dummy video camera above payphones, accompanied by signage warning of video surveillance (a favorite of many police departments); and
- keeping close tabs on frequently dialed numbers.

Positive signs

Gary Joseph wouldn't say the Arizona Payphone Association's (APA's) Silent Witness campaign has been the magic bullet that has eliminated all friction, now and forever, between the Phoenix Police Department and area payphone providers. But he

providers (PSPs) still find themselves defending payphones' presence. But as the FPTA is demonstrating, there is a case to be made.

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"The possibility is somebody is in danger," he

does describe the program as a positive effort. "I think overall it certainly has helped us," says Joseph, who is president of the APA and vice president of Sharenet Communications Co. in Phoenix.

The Phoenix Police Department's Silent Witness program encourages people to anonymously pass on information about criminal activities or suspects. The program provides rewards for tips that lead to an arrest.

About four or five years ago, Joseph and APA board member Tom Bade approached the Phoenix Police Department about a signage program that would promote Silent Witness on metropolitan Phoenix payphones. "Our concept was to do something positive for the police," says Bade, who is the president of Tempe, Ariz.-based Pacific Communications.

The ultimate goal, Bade says, was to strengthen relations with the department. The APA paid to print the signs and promoted them among its membership. About 3,000 to 4,000 signs were placed on Phoenix-area payphones. Some remain up today.

The signs (see Page 9) display a Silent Witness logo and phone number and state, "It pays to fight crime! Remain Anonymous!" They also warn that payphone theft and vandalism are felonies and will be prosecuted. The information is shown in English and in Spanish.

"It was another public service we provided, and it encouraged people to make a call on the phone," Bade says.

The impact on police relations has been a gradual

thing, Joseph says. "Over time, as issues would come up and we would have occasions to talk to the police department we would educate them about the Silent Witness program. It absolutely has made a difference."

The relationship with Silent Witness proved to be especially valuable during a rash of area coin box thefts that started occurring shortly after the APA launched its signage program. Silent Witness connected APA representatives with a Phoenix police representative who took on their case.

"They really worked with us to try to apprehend the individual," Joseph said. The thief was never arrested, but the crimes did stop. "We got tremendous support through Silent Witness," Joseph says. "It was just a real benefit as far as getting us to the right people."

Investing in the community

Payphone provider John Porter has taken steps of his own to improve payphone-government relations and help his community. Porter, president of New York City-based East Harlem Payphones, serves on the board of the Independent Payphone Association of New York (IPANY).

Several years ago, Porter and other New York PSPs spent \$3,000 to print posters promoting a New York Police Department anti-graffiti program. The program offers cash rewards to those who provide tips about graffiti that lead to a conviction. "It's just a pet peeve with me," Porter says. "I believe no graffiti helps enlighten a neighborhood."



Fitzroy Denton and thousands of other south Florida residents were grateful to have payphones to use after Hurricane Wilma, especially since most cell phones and many land lines were down.



Elaine Sanchez used this payphone in Coral Springs, Fla. to contact her family and friends after Hurricane Wilma.

Porter placed the posters on 200 of his booths in Manhattan in late 2007 and in 2008. Some of them still are up, and the police have placed posters as well, including displays at city bus stops.

The other payphone providers who contributed and displayed the posters include American Pay Communications, Crescent Star, SAC Vending and Nexus Payphones. Porter later learned that the police department's anti-graffiti initiative had awarded \$45,000 in rewards (usually \$100 to \$300 each) in the past three years. The efforts of the New York PSPs contributed to that success. "It was personally satisfying," Porter says.

Porter also has worked with the Westchester County District Attorney's office to provide call detail data for a rape investigation, and he's confident that he's not alone. "I know that many PSPs have stories they can share where they helped the police," he says.

Point, counterpoint

In Jacksonville, the FPTA will continue urging city officials to consider keeping public payphones in place. The city has argued that even with its proposed ban, plenty of payphones would be available on private property.

The association argues that there are few payphones on private property in the downtown zone and only five outdoor phones. The city also contends that many phones are available in government and social services buildings to meet the public's needs. The FPTA argues that there are limited phones in these locations, that most pedestri-

ans don't know where they are located, and they only are available during business hours.

Jacksonville has responded by issuing a request for proposal (RFP) for "emergency phones" that would accommodate emergency calls. The FPTA has since pointed out that payphones not only handle emergency calls, they serve as lifelines for the poor and homeless who need communication services.

As for the claim that payphones promote loitering, the FPTA has suggested that PSPs can configure payphones to block incoming calls and post signage indicating they cannot receive calls, which would remove the excuse of waiting by payphones to receive calls. "No loitering" signs could be posted as well.

Finally, the association is recommending a city payphone permitting system. The idea is to create a system that is not overly burdensome or costly, while still providing accountability for payphone providers. This approach would help ensure payphones are kept clean, working, non-intrusive and as safe as possible, Renard said. It also would keep phone services in the hands of the people who need them.

"Hopefully, we can work with them," Renard says. "Payphones really are a lifeline for those without phones. These people rely on payphones for their everyday communication needs. And clearly, in emergency circumstances, when people need help, they make those calls from payphones. Time and time again, the payphones have worked." ■

Flori Meeks is a freelance writer who is based in Houston. She has 21 years of writing and editing experience, and has been writing for *Perspectives* for 10 years.

My favorite tool

It's no surprise that PSPs have some creative choices

They're faithful. They get us out of binds. And in many cases, they can improvise. In the payphone industry, tools can be a behind-the-scenes hero of a well-run route.

Perspectives recently asked payphone service providers (PSPs) to tell us what their favorite tools are and why these devices mean so much to them. Like the tools themselves, the PSPs' answers ran the gamut, from failsafe classics to improvised makeovers that have been known to save the day.

It does the job

Robert Wellings, for instance, is all about thinking outside of the box. "My favorite tool is a piece of coat hanger you get from the dry cleaner," says the owner of Phoenix, Ariz.-based American General. "I have several of them I've bent into hooks."

The hangers come in handy, Wellings says, when he's trying to clear jams from the coin mechanisms. "The coins get under the relay, which causes a total problem."

Wellings cuts the hangers into snips before bending them. "I can get in very narrow places and hook over a nickel, dime or quarter. I'm also willing to do brain surgery."

Few tools can compete with the wire hanger because of the cost factor. "This stuff is totally free. They're strong enough to do what you need, and they're weak enough to cut. They can get into small places so you don't have to disassemble the phone."

Jerry Rubin, owner of A.J. Ventures in Salem, Ore., looked beyond his tool belt for a favorite as well. "In my case, I think it's my van," he says. He has used cars and a pick-up truck over the years, but he invariably would forget something when he arrived

on site for installs, removals or maintenance work. In 1992, he bought a van with a tool box attached to the back. "Now I have everything. It's a mobile workshop. Everybody who goes on the road a lot has to use their vehicle as a tool."

Tried and true

Jim Hall, the owner of Action Vending in Tucson, Ariz., questions the whole concept of a favorite tool. "That's an oxymoron — a tool involves work. That's like saying what's your favorite checking account?"

When pressed, however, Hall says he would select the buttset, which is of course used for telephone line diagnostics. "That allows us to verify that there's dial tone on the line and that there are security features in place that block certain call types. Also, is the payphone sending the right FLEX ANI code? There are so many numbers it boggles the mind. With a buttset, I can go through and dial the numbers and make sure they're working."

"It's a real, real handy tool for payphone professionals."

Buttsets represent a serious investment for a PSP, Hall says. Buttsets run from just over \$100 to \$500. The higher end sets offer higher quality and more features than those on the low end.

"That tool, because of its cost, and the drill we use to drill in concrete to mount posts — that costs \$800 — those are the only tools I make employees responsible for. We keep the drill locked in a vault, and buttsets are to remain with the technicians at all times."

Buttsets are high on Jim Nesselhauf's list, too.



"Everybody's got to have a buttset," says Nesselhauf, the owner of Joltran Communications Corp. in St. Louis. "That's what tells you if you have dial tone. Before you do service you have to make sure you have dial tone."

Buttsets are an essential, Nesselhauf says, but a phone installation will require a long list of tools, everything from literally the technician's eyes — used to locate the interface and map out a payphone location — to wheelbarrows and hoses for building the concrete pad. The job requires a hammer drill, anchor bolts, wood screws, wedge clips, eye hook ratchets, pliers, wrenches and screwdrivers, to name a few.

Back at the office...

Art Falcon III, owner of Advanced Telecom in Fresno, Calif., says his favorite tool can be found right in his office. Falcon says he's most fond of his Protel ExpressNet, the program he uses for payphone net-

work management. "I'm more on the back end of the operation," he says. "I use a couple of other network management programs, but I use that one all day long. It's the old tried and true payphone software. It the most easy to use, reliable software I work with."

Falcon estimates he's been using the software for 15 to 20 years. "It's just solid," he says. "It does everything we need it to do."

Now if someone asked Falcon what the most commonly used tool is, he would have answered "screwdriver." "A screwdriver is what everybody uses," he says. "It's not my favorite, but you can fix just about everything with a flat head screwdriver." ■

Flori Meeks is a freelance writer who is based in Houston. She has 21 years of writing and editing experience, and has been writing for *Perspectives* for 10 years.

the question

by Flori Meeks

What sideline businesses have you tried?

Guide to size

Small PSP – 200 phones or less
Medium PSP – 200 to 1,000 phones
Large PSP – 1,000+ phones

Editor's note: In case you missed it, our "Question of the Month" column debuted in the May issue. Each month, we're going to ask payphone service providers (PSPs) around the country one question and publish their answers here. Occasionally, we'll ask for input from vendors as well.

Under V&B Communications we've got payphones, we've got ATMs and we've got air/vac machines. We also do residential wiring. You've got to do whatever you can do to make money. We just started with the ATMs this year. We have five now, and we're looking to put in 30 to 50 by the end of the year. It's like payphones used to be; that's the kind of money they're making.

Scott Jones
V&B Communications Inc.
Deland, Fla.
21 payphones

I don't have a sideline business. I'll be 63 in July or I definitely would be trying ATMs or air/vac machines. I'm not selling the business because it's generating more cash than it would if I sold it.

Myron Bloom
Smart Phones
Norcross, Ga.
250 payphones

I have a motel that I run. I've been doing that a few years, and that helps pick up the slack. I have a couple of air machines, a couple of ATMs. I've tried a lot of things, but I haven't gone gung ho into anything. I'm not sure what will happen next with the payphone business, but we're waiting to see what comes along.

We tried those Internet kiosks once. That didn't work out too well. We never seemed to make a go of it. It was going to take four or five years to get our money back unless we just threw it out, and that's what we ended up doing.

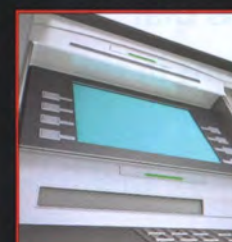
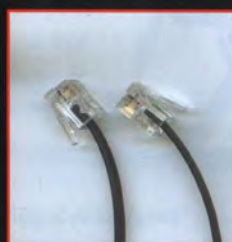
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New Bedford, Mass.
450 payphones

I've been a home inspector in this area for 34 years. Actually I was going to retire with payphones. It doesn't look like that's going to happen. Home inspection is my main occupation; it's been real compatible. I have my own schedule, and I don't have a whole lot of phones, but some are still making money.

Erwin Cox
Coin Tel Communications
Russiaville, Ind.
12 payphones

We've had really good success with prepaid cards and air/water machines, but even better success with point of sale (POS) terminals. We look at our customers and see how many ways we can diversify with that customer. Now, if we have a location where the payphone isn't doing well, but we're making money on our other products, it balances out and isn't as big of an issue.

Chris Miller
North Texas Payphones/Unique Communications
Medium-sized PSP
860 payphones



I'm an artist, a writer and a private investigator. With the economic downturn, everything is down, all of the extra jobs. Right now, I'm in the process of launching a comic book in June or July, American Screaming Eagle. I also write a comic strip, Tippy and Rachel.

Richard Hoffman
RHI Telecommunications Inc.
Somerset, N.J.
Small PSP

Air machines. It's going really well. Air machines don't go down like payphones do.

I tried selling things on eBay. It worked for a month, and then it didn't. There's too much competition out there.

Randy Cromar
Public Phone
Salt Lake City, Utah
150 payphones

I do installations for DirecTV and Dish Network satellite TV. It's going pretty well; it's part of my portfolio. I also do payment processing systems for credit cards like Visa and MasterCard. I help merchants with that and deposits from point of sale transactions.

I went from 200 payphones to 15, so I had a lot of time on my hands.

John Brake
All Area Telephone
Chicago, Ill.
15 payphones

We're 100 percent payphones, but it's been slow. I only have a couple of phones.

Broney Clanton
Quality Phone Corp.
Baltimore, Md.
Small PSP

I am doing air and vacuum machines. I don't have many out there because it's so competitive. And I do have a phone system company. We do computer networking, cabling and we sell phone systems.

We tried to sell phone cards, but we were not successful. The cards worked at first, but then they quit working. We got ripped off.

Harry Crawford
Phone Pro Communication
Cedar Park, Texas
Medium-sized PSP

We do ATMs. It's good. We're hanging in there. It comes and goes.

Rafael Espinal
R&B Communications
Port Chester, N.Y.

(Editor's note: For more information about Unique Communications' POS program, please see Page 21.)

Flori Meeks is a freelance writer who is based in Houston. She has 21 years of writing and editing experience, and has been writing for *Perspectives* for 10 years.

Next month's question

What percentage of your phones are semi-public, where the location pays you to keep a phone there? Do you do a sliding scale or a flat fee? When you make this offer, are location owners generally receptive or not?

If you'd like to answer this question for us (and we hope you will), please contact Tracey Timpanaro at (281) 646-0051 or via e-mail at tat66@apcc.net. It'll be easy, we promise.

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psp spotlight

by Flori Meeks

It's always an adventure

This entrepreneur has enjoyed every moment of his varied career

Doug Wagner's payphone business has put him in some unique places and situations, but not once, he says, has operating a route been boring.

"It's a fun business; it gives you an opportunity to talk to people," says Doug, who founded Capitol Communications in 1995. Today, Doug runs the Madison, Wisc.-based business with the administrative help of wife Theresa Wagner, who's known to family and friends as T.

For Doug, the human element has been the best part of the job, whether he's striking up conversations with people he meets in the community or sharing time with family. Some of his fondest memories involve the road trips across Wisconsin he made with his daughters when they were little. "Up we'd go," he recalls. "We'd get the kids in the car and empty those phones. I enjoyed it."

Staying loose

There was a time when Doug aspired to work as an electrician. But around the time he applied for a state electricians' training program — the mid 1980s — Wisconsin was in the throes of a deep recession. Doug was among 300 to apply and not among the three from Madison to be accepted.

To make a living, he became a pizza deliveryman. "You have to have a job, and it was bad in the Madison area, so the pizza guy I was," Doug says. "I made good money doing it." Doug delivered

largely to college students who lived off campus and ordered pizza almost every night.

But Doug still wanted more for himself. After electricians' school didn't pan out, he applied for a spot at a phone school, and this time, he was accepted. After completing his training, he found work with a company that sold phone systems and payphones.

By the mid-1990s, Doug decided he was ready to start a phone systems business of his own, so he created Capitol Communications. A number of his phone system clients made the choice to continue buying from him.

Doug promoted his company further with a mass mailing of small green cards to an area industrial park. The cards served as a company introduction of sorts. They listed Capitol Communications' products and services and displayed a photo of Doug. "We saw



Doug Wagner is happy to have incorporated his entire family into his payphone operation. Doug is pictured here with his wife Theresa, son Bee and daughters Donna (in dress) and Gracie.



Clearly, Wagner's daughters were interested in phones at an early age. Gracie holds court in the middle photo and Donna graces the other two.



an 80 percent response rate from those cards," he marvels. "People saved those little green cards. Things started getting busy."

Doug's good fortune would continue. Shortly after he started the company, a retiring business acquaintance offered to sell Doug his payphone company. Doug, who had witnessed the demand for payphones firsthand at his previous job, accepted the offer. Two years later, Doug bought a second payphone company from the same man.

His route was spread through northern Wisconsin, along with Illinois and Iowa. At the company's peak, it had more than 80 payphones and rented out about 50 desktop phones. Doug has bought most of his phones from people getting out of the industry.

From the beginning, Doug was keenly aware of the competition posed by cellular phones. "We had to pick our locations wisely," he says. He placed a large percentage of his payphones in bars, and many of these are still good locations today.

Even so, he and Theresa estimate that they've gradually scaled back to about 20 percent of their original inventory over the years; the business is now down to about 20 payphones and five tabletop phones. Doug and Theresa still operate in bars, but they've gravitated toward small towns with poor cell phone reception and inner city locations. It's those settings that have kept the business afloat, Doug says, and they've kept it interesting.

Invested customer base

In Milwaukee, Capitol Communications maintains outdoor payphones that offer 25 cent local calling. Doug has gotten the word out that the 25 cent calls will continue as long as the payphones aren't vandalized. If the phones were to be abused, the company would pull them, which means area residents would be left with more expensive options. Last summer, a local grandmother and frequent user of one of Capitol Communications' payphones caught a vandal in the act. Within minutes, she chased the vandal away from the payphone with a baseball bat. "She considered it her payphone," Doug says.

He figures he's doing something right there. "That phone is my best phone," he says. "It gets 1,400 calls a month."

"There is money to be made in this industry," Theresa adds. "You have to be willing to take risks."

Capitol Communications still rents out the occasional tabletop phone. Theresa has rented some to parents who wanted to limit their teens' phone usage. The phones can be set to either allow free calling or calling for 25 cents. The parents were going with the paid option and requiring their children to fund calls with their allowance. "So for the kids to use the phone in the house, they had to work for it," Theresa said.

Doug also has maintained the phone systems end of the business, which continues to be very strong. In fact, a number of the relationships he's created with payphone location owners have led to phone system sales. "We were in all of those places anyhow," he says. "So we turned that good will into business. A lot of taverns buy phone systems."

As for the phones Capitol Communications no longer uses, Doug and Theresa would rather find

Doug and Theresa have had success promoting their company at tavern trade shows.

productive uses for them than keep them in storage. The couple recently joined a barter group that has allowed them to trade phones for needed services. They've also sold some on eBay.

Doug and Theresa have become very fond of their bar clients and the opportunities they provide. A number of the Wisconsin taverns with their payphones host tremendously popular fish fries on Fridays and Green Bay Packers days on Sundays. The payphone usage has been good there. "In Wisconsin you drink beer at 7 in the morning on Sundays and bet on the football games," Theresa says.

"It's like a frenzy," Doug adds.

Some of the bars and businesses they serve are in what one could call rough neighborhoods. One of the service station owners Doug works with keeps a sawed-off shotgun behind the counter. One day, while Doug was servicing a payphone, the owner told him to stay inside because something was going down outside. Doug spent the time chatting with a group of older men that like to hang out there. For him, the chat was a treat. "They remember how Milwaukee used to be," Doug says. "Milwaukee was a very industrial city. You could get a job right out of high school."

Industry ties

In the mid-1990s, after establishing Capitol Communications, Doug joined the Wisconsin Pay Telephone Association, but his involvement tapered off over the years. "I just got too busy, just crazy busy," he says. He remains a member of the American Public Communications Council Inc. (APCC), and has attended a number of the association's trade shows.

"We used to go on a regular basis," he says. "We took our kids with us." Now that the Wagners' children are older and involved in more activities, attending shows has become a challenge. "But that was a very good way to spend your week," Doug says. "You could talk to people and get ideas." The show booths were good resources, too, and a good place to find tools and other industry-related supplies, he says.

When he's able, Doug tries to network at local tavern and restaurant industry shows. "You put in the time, you get the business," he says.

For Doug, juggling the different components of his business has become an art. "I'm never going to get rich doing it, but when I'm not doing phone systems I do payphones," he says. "I never did do ATMs



or air/water machines. I'm too busy. The recession has not really affected me."

Doug says he gets most of his phone system business by word of mouth. "People learn to be dependent on you because they trust you, and they send you referrals," he says. At one point, he kept a large ad in the phone book. But during a five-year stint with no ad, phone system business remained steady. Today, he keeps a small ad there just to assure people he's still in business.

As long as they remain diligent about finding business, Theresa sees a strong future for the payphone side of the company, too. "To make a business now, it's totally changed," says Theresa, who also works as a hospital nursing assistant. "You have to find the need; the need doesn't find you anymore."

Doug's goal is to keep his business strong while maintaining time for Theresa and their daughters, 11-year-old Donna and 9-year-old Gracie.

He says he's also grateful for the time the business gives him with his 37-year-old son, Bee, who helps his dad and also runs a Madison-based computer services company.

The Wagners also devote a considerable amount of time to helping out their parents, who are in their eighties. Even while visiting them at the senior communities where they live, Doug finds himself chatting with the people he encounters, just like he does on the job. "These guys were in business once; they weren't sitting around. Just get them talking, and you'll learn a lot." ■

Flori Meeks is a freelance writer who is based in Houston. She has 21 years of writing and editing experience, and has been writing for *Perspectives* for 10 years.

legal & regulatory

by Dan Collins

APCC requests assistance from SBA

In an April 22 letter to the head of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), APCC President Randy Nichols requested the SBA's assistance in ending the unfair, discriminatory regulation of hundreds of small payphone service providers (PSPs) that are being denied the opportunity to make direct contribution payments to the Universal Service Fund (USF).

Under the current procedures of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), which administers the USF for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), PSPs whose annual contribution to the USF would be less than \$10,000 cannot contribute directly to the USF. Instead, these so-called "de minimis" payphone providers are compelled to pay much higher USF pass-through charges assessed by the local and long distance carriers from whom the PSPs obtain network connections for their payphones. Larger, non-de minimis PSPs are allowed to pay their USF fees directly to USAC and therefore avoid the pass-through USF fees from their carriers.

According to Nichols, the average pass-through charges that telephone companies impose on a de minimis PSP are more than triple the amount that the average PSP would pay if it were allowed to pay directly. As a result, the smaller, de minimis PSPs incur a cost burden that is far greater than the costs incurred by larger PSPs.

As USAC's treatment of the de minimis PSPs is not mandatory under the FCC's rules, Nichols believes USAC's refusal to directly accept USF contributions from de minimis PSPs unfairly discriminates against small businesses. In conclusion, Nichols asked the SBA to contact Acting FCC Chairman Michael Copps and urge him to instruct USAC to accept USF contributions directly from de minimis PSPs.

Changes coming to the FCC

On April 29, President Obama nominated Mignon Clyburn to fill one of the two open seats on the FCC.

Clyburn has served as a commissioner on the South Carolina Public Service Commission for the past 11 years. She previously worked as publisher and general manager of a weekly newspaper in Charleston, S.C. Clyburn also is the daughter of the U.S. Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C., the third highest ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives. The Senate is not expected to act on Clyburn's confirmation until some time this summer.

President Obama's choice to replace Kevin Martin as chairman of the FCC, Julius Genachowski, still awaits confirmation for the position by the U.S. Senate. A confirmation hearing for Genachowski, previously scheduled for May 12, was postponed and was not expected to be rescheduled until some time after Memorial Day.

According to press reports, Genachowski's nomination had been placed on hold by Republican senators pending their recommendation to President Obama for a nominee for a Republican seat on the commission. FCC Commissioner Michael Copps has been serving as acting chairman of the agency since Martin left earlier this year.

In addition, President Obama has nominated FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein to become administrator of the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS). The RUS recently received \$2.5 billion to expand broadband service in rural areas.

Adelstein's nomination must be confirmed by the Senate and, according to press reports, Adelstein does not plan to leave the FCC until at least one of the two current commissioner vacancies is filled. This is due to the fact that his departure before then would leave the FCC with only two out of the five commission seats filled, and therefore a quorum could not be reached.

Finally, the current term of FCC Commissioner Robert McDowell expires on June 30. It is not known at this time whether McDowell will be appointed to an additional term on the commission. ■

Dan Collins is corporate counsel for the APCC.

industry briefs

product news

North Texas Payphones

North Texas Payphones/Unique Communications has diversified the point of sale (POS) terminals it offers location owners and is now offering opportunities for other payphone service providers (PSPs) to become program agents.

The terminals allow customers to recharge cell phones, pay utility and cell phone bills, and buy gift cards, long distance cards, and prepaid debit cards.

The prepaid debit cards have been especially popular, said company spokesman Chris Miller. He estimates that business in that category has increased 200 percent during the last six months. "The economy is bad; people have maxed their credit cards, so they buy these," Miller said. "Some people have experienced identity theft, so they want a prepaid debit card. Parents buy them for college kids so the kids don't run up their credit cards."

The prepaid debit card terminals allow users to select a carrier and the amount of money they want on the card, real time. "Before you leave the store, the money is in your account," Miller said.

The terminals also allow agents to track sales activity in real time from the Internet.

So far, Miller said, sales activity has been very strong in ethnic neighborhoods, where customers can add funds to cell phones in 26 countries. This has been very popular for Mexico, Latin America and the Caribbean.

North Texas Payphones offers its agents extensive training to prepare them to enter the POS business. The training is a worthwhile investment of their time, Miller said. "It's pretty easy to sell to one store owner, but it's harder if you have a chain of 50 stores," he said.

The program provides opportunities PSPs wouldn't necessarily be able to access if they attempted to sell these terminals on their own, Miller said. "Because we have a network of 1,000 to 2,000 locations, we get aggressive discounts from the carriers," he said. "If you go out and do this on your own, the numbers wouldn't make sense."

The company plans to continue growing its POS offerings, Miller added. "We're always looking to add value with the terminals. Our mindset is, how many things



can we run through the same unit. How many different types of transactions can we process?"

North Texas Payphones is based in Hurst, Texas. For more information, call (817) 966-3024.

people & places

Pay-Tel Communications

Pay-Tel Communications Inc., an inmate telephone service provider since 1989, has won the 2009 Piedmont Business Ethics Award in the mid-sized company category.

The award was presented by the Greensboro Chapter of the Society of Financial Service Professionals and sponsored by the local chambers of commerce, five area university business schools and several local businesses. The trophy was



President Vince Townsend

awarded to Pay-Tel in recognition of the company's commitment to ethical business practices in serving its law enforcement clients and the customers using its service.

An independent panel of judges comprising deans, professors and directors from five colleges and universities selected the award recipients — small, mid-size and large categories — from a pool of 110 nominated entrants based on a wide array of criteria. Among the factors for awarding Pay-Tel are the company's code of ethics, fair call rates and low customer fees.

Also considered was Pay-Tel's more than 20 year commitment to regulatory compliance, which has resulted in a record of zero formal complaints. The company's customer friendly programs were noted, including its new three-way call detection technology. Pay-Tel regularly surveys its customers to identify ways to improve its service and programs.

Pay-Tel was recognized for its outstanding commitment to employees, as well as employee health and wellness initiatives. Its on site fitness center enables employees to utilize such fitness and nutrition programs as individualized assessments, group exercise sessions and educational seminars — all at no cost to the employee.

The award to Pay-Tel also recognized the com-

pany's support of civic and charitable endeavors through financial contributions and staff involvement. These programs include the D.A.R.E. drug education program, youth homes in multiple states, Special Olympics and the High Point Jail Ministry. As a result of this award, Pay-Tel was automatically entered in the national 2009 Business Ethics Award competition.

TNS Inc.

TNS Inc., which provides data communications services for transaction-oriented applications, has closed its acquisition of the Communications Services Group (CSG) from VeriSign Inc.

The purchase price paid to VeriSign Inc. was approximately \$226 million in cash, subject to post closing working capital adjustment, and was funded by TNS through the proceeds from a new \$230 million term loan facility.

This acquisition brings TNS into the roaming and clearing services market provided to the wireless telecommunications industry. TNS has announced plans to integrate its acquired assets into its Telecommunication Services Division (TSD).

"This acquisition offers TNS a great strategic, financial and operational fit," CEO Henry Graham said. "It effectively scales TSD, joining our existing core competency in providing network connectivity, validation and billing services to the U.S. telecommunications industry with CSG's customer breath, product set and R&D capability."

In other news, TNS has named telecommunications industry veteran Michael Robinson to head its TSD. Robinson joins TNS from Leadege Catalyst, an executive advisory firm he founded.

"We are thrilled to have Michael Robinson, a proven telecommunications and wireless technology executive, join the TNS team," Graham said. "His depth of experience in business development and bringing successful products to the global marketplace offers a tremendous and timely addition as TSD becomes our largest division and pursues its future growth opportunities."



Michael Robinson

CTI gives away Vegas trip

Congratulations to Hylton Landauer of Commercial Pay Phones, who won a trip for two to Las Vegas courtesy of CTI Operator Services. CTI gave the trip away as a promotion during APCC 2009, which was held May 20-22 in Washington, D.C.

Landauer and a companion will receive tickets to a Las Vegas show, as well as air fare and a 3 day, 2 night stay at one of the following hotels: Caesars Palace, Bally's, Harrah's, Paris, Flamingo or Rio. Congratulations and enjoy your trip.



Prior to founding Leadege Catalyst, Robinson built and restructured privately funded early stage companies. He also has held several executive positions in the public company market, including a stint as senior vice president of product management for Sprint Corp. In addition, Robinson has served on the boards of directors and advisory boards for a number of corporations.

For more information about TNS, visit www.tnsi.com.

New York City

New York City Council approved legislation May 6 designed to address graffiti that uses etching acid to mark glass.

The bill requires anyone buying etching acid to show identification that includes name and address information. Stores will keep records of the data for one year. The information will help the city enforce an existing law banning those under age 21 from buying etching acid.

The bill is good news for the city's payphone service providers, said Lester Shafran, executive director of the Independent Payphone Association of New York (IPANY).

Graffiti created by etching acid cannot be removed, and it forces property owners to replace the marked glass.

"This bill is going to save the members of IPANY thousands of dollars in

replacing destroyed panels and kiosks," Shafran said. "If a kiosk is destroyed in New York City, it subjects the owner to fines."

PSPs are required to keep kiosks well maintained, not only for efficient use, but also in appearance.

"I thank the New York City Council and the mayor for being sympathetic to our issue," Shafran said. ■

Thank you

APCC offers its most heartfelt thanks to those of you who made APCC 2009: The National Conference a success. From the exhibitors to the sponsors to the attendees who visited Capitol Hill, we are grateful for your support. A full trade show wrap will be published in the September 2009 issue.



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(717) 697-5948
11 a.m.
Harrisburg Hershey Sheraton
November 11

Independent Payphone Association of New York
(718) 776-8179
4 p.m.
September 16
Crowne Plaza La Guardia

Midwest Independent Coin Payphone Association
(636) 922-5213
7 p.m.
Holiday Inn - Oakland Park (airport)
September 9
December 2

San Diego Payphone Owners Association
(888) 289-0011
9:30 a.m.
Cocos Restaurant
La Jolla
July 16
September 17
November 19

All dates are subject to change; please verify with state associations prior to making travel arrangements.

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last word

by Alan Rothenstreich

Accidents happen

... but it might not have to be a total loss

It's a familiar scenario: you poll a payphone in the morning and it fails to respond.

Such was the case for me one morning, so I sent a technician to see if the phone was working. Imagine my surprise when he called to say that the phone had been hit by a car and knocked over. Unfortunately, it was a total loss, as everything was hauled away when the accident was cleaned up.

Many payphone service providers (PSPs) have determined that it is not economical to have insurance that protects equipment from theft or damage, so you might be prepared to just "write off" such an incident. But wait, it may not be a total loss.

Start with the site owner

If something like this happens to you, the first thing to do is ask your store owner if he knows what happened, and from there ask the neighboring stores. They may not know anything, but you can probably narrow down the time frame as to when the phone was hit. You also have the time the phone responded to your last poll.

The next thing you should do is go to your local police precinct and ask if someone reported an accident. If your phone was mounted securely, any vehicle that hit it with enough force to knock it over very likely sustained damage. The owner is probably going to file an insurance claim, which means a police report will be required. This report will also include any information about a witness that may have seen the accident.

Next, you should put together an estimate to restore the phone to service. You should include the cost of the phone, pedestal, mast, bolts, cement work and installation.

Next up: the insurance company

Now it is time to call the insurance company. The insurance code on the police report will help you identify the insurance carrier. Most states have a Web site where you can search a database of codes that will provide the name of the insurance carrier and the contact information.



February 22, 2008 • 3:30 a.m. • Manhattan — accident on 53rd St.



December 17, 2008 • 4:20 a.m. • Manhattan — accident on 51st St.

If the code belongs to a reputable insurance carrier, the company will take the information about the claim, and within 72 hours an adjuster will contact you and ask you to fax the estimate of damages. After that, the adjuster will do some research as to who is at fault and confirm your estimate. To save time, you should proactively provide actual invoices or letters from the suppliers to the adjuster.

If you ever have to deal with smaller insurance companies, your patience will likely be tested. The ideal way to deal with these companies is to be tenacious and document everything from the first phone call to each message you leave for the representative assigned to your claim.

In the case of an insurance company that is not cooperative, you should contact any witnesses and take statements from the store owner. With these records, the smaller insurance companies will usually make an offer to settle, which is not ideal, but getting something is better than nothing. At least it wouldn't be a total loss. You can then write off on your taxes the difference between your claim amount and the settlement you received.

As for the claim I referenced above, with perseverance and resolve we were able to collect a settlement from the insurance policy that covered the cost of the installation and equipment. It was definitely worth the effort. ■

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The Secret is Out... AT&T is aware of pirates...



It's not any more complicated than that. AT&T is aware of the fraudulent programs that exist and are being sold to PSPs. These programs may use the AT&T name in the prompts to the caller, but they are not legitimate AT&T authorized products. Quite simply... it's brand piracy and it's illegal. Fraud Field Inspectors are inspecting payphones for the unauthorized use of the AT&T name when calls are routed to OSPs other than AT&T. Now is the time to be sure you are using the only authorized AT&T product.

G-FIVE is pleased to add the only authorized AT&T *91SM Alternate Platform to their products for payphone owners. The signage on the payphone for COLLECT CALLS TO AT&T DIAL *91SM, with the authorized use of the AT&T logo, lets the consumer know they can expect AT&T quality and the lowest AT&T rates when using AT&T *91SM. And, AT&T's *91SM Alternate Platform offers billing options for Collect to Cell, Bank Card, and Destination Pays in order to provide payphone consumers the ability to get as many calls completed as possible. Don't miss out on this great opportunity to provide your payphone consumers with the genuine AT&T *91SM product!

Other G-Five Products:

- AT&T Directory Assistance, Automated and Live: 31 cents
- AT&T 1+: 2.5 cents per minute
- AT&T Dial Tone
 - California, Urban Areas: \$14.53*, plus EUCL
 - Bell South Region Coming Soon
- NEW-Texas, All AT&T areas: \$18.85, plus EUCL

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