

Marty Taylor's Cell Phone Savings Secrets

How to make wireless phones pay off

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Staff Reporter

Marty Taylor speaks quickly. A wellspring of information, she can spout facts and figures, compliments and critiques, about every local wireless provider.

With two decades in the industry, Marty Taylor, now owner of Wireless Resolutions in Joppa, Maryland, said companies waste millions of dollars annually because they allow their wireless providers to manage their accounts and make decisions for them.

Ms. Taylor has more than 550 clients nationwide who are outsourcing their complex wireless expense management to her company. Businesses like Freedom Services in Pikesville, Ambassador Services in Owings Mills, Master Care Flooring in Arbutus, and Classic Landscaping in Frederick, have turned to Ms. Taylor to save them money by managing their monthly statements and negotiating with the wireless companies.

How does it work? Ms. Taylor spoke recently with the BALTIMORE JEWISH TIMES.

BJT: Your Company audits wireless phone bills for big and small businesses. How did that happen?

Ms. Taylor: I have worked for all the wireless carriers and was constantly chastised because I would focus more on finding billing errors and bringing attention to them rather than focusing on making profits for the provider I was working for. I was always reminded that I was not a customer service representative, I was in sales. But I disagreed. I felt I couldn't sell phones and service when I knew my customers were being overcharged. I felt I couldn't face a customer who had been with me for 10 years, knowing I was being told to overlook so many errors and leave it up to the customer and the customer service department to figure it out. Every month, I would look at my customer's accounts and find billing issues, junk fees and other errors. One day I decided to do some research and discovered a statistic that made my head spin. The statistic said that these wireless providers brought in an extra 60 million dollars last year from over-charging their customers. That is when I made the decision to stop working for the provider and start working for the customer.

It started off small. I was just going to contact my existing accounts and tell them I would work for them on the side and help them with their accounts. However these accounts began to spread the word and several news publications picked up our story and before long our small company was overwhelmed with so many customers that needed help! We now have a team of some of the best wireless experts in the industry who felt the same way I did about wanting to bring change to this industry.

BJT: Here are the statistics:

Ms. Taylor: The Gartner Study shows 66 percent of all wireless bills have errors. Eighty percent of most business accounts out there will pay their bills without knowing. Nationally, carriers brought in \$60 million in overpayments last year.

BJT: Do the statistics hold up with your own clients?

Ms. Taylor: I just handled one client who was overpaying \$765 a month. People just don't realize they are over paying and are afraid to not pay what the carrier says is due. I have small accounts that are overpaying by \$200 a month....it effects all accounts, large or small. I've seen clients [overpaying] as much as \$3,000 per month. We have never done a bill review where we didn't find errors or couldn't significantly reduce the bill.

BJT: You would think the companies would notice.

Ms. Taylor: There are many ways to overpay. The company might have been on the same plan for many years when there are newer and less expensive plans available now. Customers don't realize that they are paying for bogus text messages and data charges and what we call other "junk" fees. And they just pay the bill and never question it. In most cases the bills are designed to be confusing and frustrating to the average customers. Businesses just don't have time to figure it all out and they are so

afraid not to pay their bills. The cellular phone is their key to all communications, and they know if they don't pay the bill on time, their phones will be turned off.

The saddest situation is when a customer puts their trust in the provider's representative to tell them the truth. That never happens because the representative is employed to make their company money, not reduce their company revenue and profits. I always challenge a customer to go ahead and let their Sprint, Verizon or AT&T rep to do a bill review for them to see if they can reduce the bill. I guarantee that I can come in right behind them and reduce it significantly more.

BJT: How do companies get away with this?

Ms. Taylor: Because it is such an unregulated industry, no one is watching over it. There are so many hands in the pot that mistakes happen. The turnover is so high in this business that it is hard to find a rep that stays long enough to learn the business.

BJT: How do you know when you see a mistake?

Ms. Taylor: I have never ever picked up a bill I didn't save money on — at least not in the last 15 years. I pick up a bill and do a review, looking at the customer's calling habits and patterns. I'm trained, so it will jump right off the page. I can find up to an average of 5-10 errors on any one bill. Let me give you an example. There is an item called 'surcharges' on the bill. Some of the big providers have been hit with a class action suit because of those. Those are usually between \$25 and \$55. I have a customer right now that has been paying \$180 a month for the last year and for no apparent reason. I'm challenging her wireless carrier about this now. They have already given her credit for the last 3 months.

BJT: Do your fees counteract the savings?

Ms. Taylor: Yes and some. Our bill review is completely free. We charge nothing to go over the bills and look at the account to show a customer how much they have been over paying each month. Then, based on the amount of money we can recover on past over payments and how much money we can save the customer going forward we charge a very small percentage of those savings. Let's just say that a customer may see a recovery of \$2,000 up front and an additional annual savings of another \$18,000 for the year. The customer could pay us as little as only 8% of the total savings. It usually averages to be about \$4.00 a day to have us completely manage their account for them so that they are getting the highest quality service for the lowest cost possible.

BJT: What size business is your service best for?

Ms. Taylor: Any business that has cell phones! We just finished a first year of working with Jones Junction in Bel Air. They have nearly 200 phones. We saved them \$37,000 in their first year. The error was really simple: They are entitled to the Chrysler-Plymouth discount of 18 percent a month. I noticed that earlier this year that discount had just disappeared and their phone bills had gone up \$2,600 a month. Once I got that "mystery error" corrected and all that over payment credited back to the account, we negotiated with the carrier to get them new phones at no cost, cancel some phones they were not using, and lower their bill another \$1,000 a month.

BJT: What is your message to business owners?

Ms. Taylor: We're a great resource when you don't have internal manpower or experts to handle your wireless accounts. It's a happy ending for the carrier and the customer. We're not crusaders against the wireless carriers, but a business needs [affordable] wireless communications to stay open. At the same time, the larger providers like Sprint, Verizon and AT&T don't want to lose customers — and they don't usually know they are about to lose one until it's too late.

The Top Seven:

Seven common mistakes found on a business' wireless bills:

- Junk fees
- Mismatched price plans
- Missing affiliation discounts
- Old price plans
- Available free services they aren't getting and are paying for when they use them
- Telephone numbers on accounts without matching equipment
- Text messaging charges that can't be accounted for

Source: Marty Taylor

The Local Landscape

Maryland Providers:

- AT&T
- Sprint/Nextel
- T Mobile
- Verizon

According to Marty Taylor of Wireless Resolutions:

Most commonly used carrier in Maryland: Verizon

Most commonly used by businesses in Maryland: Sprint/Nextel

Best customer service: T Mobile — rated No. 1 in customer service for the last several years

Worst customer service: Sprint — the company lost 985,000 customers this year because of its customer service problems. Ms. Taylor said that because Sprint is trying not to lose any more business, it is more open to negotiations and could provide a better business deal.

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