



Frequently Asked Questions: TouchTone Communications

I've never heard of TouchTone Communications. Who are they?

TouchTone Communications is a full service provider of communications, data transmission and long distance telephone services. The company was established in 1993 with the expressed goal of offering the highest quality communications services at the most competitive prices possible while maintaining an unsurpassed level of customer service.

They are one of the newer long distance providers built from the ground up following the collapse of the more "traditional" long distance carriers. Learning from the mistakes of companies like AT&T, Global Crossing and Worldcom and unburdened by the need to upgrade an aging network, TouchTone Communications has been able to quietly launch operations exclusively with state-of-the-art fiber optic technology together with a dedicated focus on providing the highest possible quality of customer service.

Today, TouchTone Communications serves tens of thousands of business and residential customers across the country and is one of the fastest growing communications providers in the U.S. They do no advertising which is why you probably have not heard of them before.

What services do they offer?

Available products include switched and dedicated voice lines, toll free services, calling cards, dedicated data services, unlimited long distance and international communications among others. In addition, all of these products are priced to beat the most competitive rates in the industry.

Is their service of good quality?

TouchTone primarily employs the nationwide Qwest network as their underlying carrier. Calls are the same as utilizing that network directly and is not a problem! The TouchTone network exclusively uses state-of-the-art fiber optic technology to minimize fading, interference and noise for outstanding call quality.

Is this service available in my area and am I eligible for it?

TouchTone long distance is not available in Alaska or Hawaii. In all other states, TouchTone long distance is available to all phone customers on all phone lines regardless of who provides your local telephone service. Though originally designed for business customers, the service is now available to individuals, organizations and homes as well.

So they provide both business and residential long distance service?

Yes, but a separate application will need to be filled out for each.

Are the tolls the same for businesses and homes?

For the same level of service, yes.

Are the rates the same for days, nights, weekends and holidays?

Yes, the rate is always the same regardless of the time or day of the week.

If there is a problem with TouchTone's long distance service, is technical assistance available whenever I might need it?

Technical service assistance is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

How much does it cost to switch to TouchTone, and will they reimburse my switching fees?

Your local phone company will charge you a one time fee for switching long distance carriers, normally \$5-\$10. You can confirm this directly with your local phone company. To get your switching fee paid by TouchTone, send a copy of your local telephone bill showing the switching charges to TouchTone with your first TouchTone bill, payment and include a short note requesting credit for the switching charge. TouchTone will issue the credit to your long distance account. It is not automatic, but if you remember to ask, they will credit or reimburse the switching costs to you. TouchTone guarantees a seamless transition when switching from your current long distance provider to TouchTone.

Does TouchTone have "live" customer service representatives available via toll free phone?

Yes, your toll free Customer Service number will be sent once your application has been received and processed. Customer service at TouchTone is usually described as prompt, polite, courteous and helpful. We've used it and were pleasantly surprised! Connection times were less than a minute and our problem was solved quickly without delay. Imagine calling customer service at a long distance carrier, and actually finding it to be a pleasant experience! The reason is that, to a smaller company, each customer is precious, so they try particularly hard to excel at customer service. They realize that there are plenty of other choices for your long distance business and that customer service is a problem with most other phone companies.

My local phone company needs TouchTone's "PIC code" in order to change my service. What is the PIC code and do I need to provide it?

It is premature at present to change your PIC code. This code number is assigned to each long distance provider and tells your local phone company which long distance service you have subscribed to. In order to switch, you must first submit an order for service by filling out the simple TouchTone application form. You will then receive an email with more information about the switching process.

After your order is submitted, TouchTone will set up your account and TouchTone's underlying carrier will contact your local telephone company to make the switch. Unless you have a PIC freeze on your local service, or some other reason preventing the switch, it should occur automatically. As soon as your account is set up by TouchTone, their customer service department will tell you how to confirm that the account and service is set up and working properly. As mentioned earlier, TouchTone guarantees a smooth and unnoticeable transition..

Changing the PIC code prematurely may cause either a complete loss of service or billing directly from the underlying carrier at MUCH higher rates than those charged by TouchTone.

What is a PIC freeze or block?

This is a service provided by your local phone company specifically to prevent unauthorized changes in your long distance phone service. If you currently have such a PIC freeze or block in place, you will need to contact your local phone company and have it removed in order to allow TouchTone to become your new long distance carrier. You may resume the PIC block instructions once the new service has begun and been verified. In fact, we recommend starting such a block once TouchTone has become established as your new long distance provider.

Will switching to TouchTone affect my local phone service such as caller ID?

There will not be any noticeable change in your local service which will continue to be provided by your local carrier.

What is the rate for Directory Assistance?

The rate is \$0.85 per call.

Are these rates just promotional or are they permanent?

TouchTone has never raised rates for existing customers and they say these rates are permanent. However, all long distance companies have the right and ability to raise rates with or without notification. That's why it is strongly recommended that customers check their phone bills carefully on a regular basis regardless of the provider they are using.

How come their rates are so low?

TouchTone has their own telephone switching system so they don't have to pay switching fees to the local carriers which saves money. They buy unused space in bulk from the major carriers at significant discounts they can pass on to their customers. TouchTone's operations are extremely efficient and streamlined without the high overhead costs of most carriers and they do no expensive advertising. The combination of all of these measures provides very significant cost savings which TouchTone passes on to their customers resulting in extremely competitive rates.

Are there any billing fees or set up fees for TouchTone's service?

No. There are no billing or set up fees with TouchTone.

Are there any monthly fees if I don't use the long distance service that month?

No, none.

Is there any long-term contractual obligation on my part if I sign on with TouchTone?

No and you can change back to your current long distance carrier at any time.

How long does it take to transfer service to TouchTone?

TouchTone sets up new accounts in 3-4 days after submission of the written order for service. Complete activation by the local phone company usually takes 2-3 days. So in total, most accounts are set up and fully operational in 5-7 days.

Should I call my current long distance carrier in order to switch to TouchTone?

No, there is no need to contact your current long distance carrier. Once the change is made, your local phone company will send an electronic notice to your current provider indicating that you've switched long distance services. After your TouchTone service has been confirmed to be properly set up and fully functional on your line we do suggest you make one phone call to your previous carrier to make sure they've received and correctly processed the cancellation request for your account.

I'm not sure who my current long distance provider is. How can I find out?

Call 700-555-1212 on your main home or business phone. You will hear a recording detailing your current long distance provider.

What is meant by "six second increments" and is it a good idea?

Six second increments means that you are charged only for the actual time of the call to the nearest 0.1 minutes. This usually means a slightly smaller bill since the call time on the bill is more precise. If you make a call for 3 minutes and 12 seconds, you are only billed for 3.2 minutes instead of 4 minutes. Six second billing increments is considered a very desirable feature in any long distance service plan.

What is meant by "local toll" or "intra-Lata" calling?

"Intra-Lata" means calls within your regional local toll calling area or LATA. A LATA is a geographical area in which your local telephone company is allowed to carry not only local calls, but local long distance toll calls as well. These areas were defined by law at the AT&T divestiture in 1984.

The first section of the white pages of your local telephone directory probably has a map of your local LATA area. This is rarely called a LATA Map. Instead it is usually referred to as a "guide to long distance", "measured toll", "extended calling area", "extended area service", "local toll calling", "itemized calling", "regional toll calling" or similar.

There is also a map on-line, though not very detailed, at www.robotics.net/clec/LATA_Map.html.

Your phone line has only two standardized long distance settings on it. One governs Intra-Lata (inside the LATA area) and the other setting governs Inter-Lata (outside of the LATA). These are sometimes referred to as "instate" and "out of state" long distance. While this is technically not correct, it is often simpler to think of them that way. The rate for Intra-Lata calls is the same as the instate rate for most long distance carriers.

So "Intra-Lata" is long distance within a state and "Inter-Lata" is long distance between states?

Yes, that's essentially correct.

Does TouchTone offer "Intra-Lata" or "local toll" calling, and if so, what is the rate?

Yes, the service is available from TouchTone. Just make sure the "Switch Intra-Lata" box is checked off on the application. The rate should be clearly listed underneath, in the section labeled "Intra-State".

Why is the "Intra-Lata" rate generally higher than the "Inter-Lata" or state to state rate?

In most states, the "Intra-Lata" rate is considerably higher than the "Inter-State" or state to state rate. The reasons are less competition within states, higher costs of dealing with local telephone carriers and regulatory differences. Optimal long distance plans have "Intra-Lata" rates that are close to or the same as the state to state rates.

Do I have to sign up for both "Intra-Lata" and "Inter-Lata" with the same company?

No. You can select either or both. Just make sure the appropriate boxes are checked on the application. For maximal savings, most people prefer to switch both together but they can be split if you so choose.

Do any "extra" digits needed to be dialed to use TouchTone's long distance service?

No, TouchTone uses normal 1 + area code + number dialing. No special access codes or 10-10 dialing is required.

Are calling cards available and, if so, at what rate?

Yes, they are available. The domestic rate for ALL TouchTone calling cards made anywhere in the Continental U.S. is 8 cents per minute. If made from a U.S. public payphone, there is a \$0.55 connection charge. Calling card calls are billed in one minute intervals. Global calling cards are also available.

Is toll free service available and, if so, what is the rate?

Yes, toll free service is available. Cost is the same as the rate plan for your state plus a nominal service charge of \$1.99 per month per line.

If I use my cell phone for long distance, why should I also have TouchTone?

Your cell phone usage is not free. Actually, you've already paid for the service up to your maximum number of minutes per month. Most cell phone users pay for more minutes a month than they actually use. You would pay from 35-45 cents or more per minute if you go over your prepaid limit. Regular landline phones still have better overall call quality and most businesses can't run on just cell phones. There are no "dead zones" and no batteries to run down as with cell phones. Also, you never know when you may want to make a call on your regular phone or if you need to make international calls. If so, you would pay a very low rate with TouchTone while receiving excellent service and outstanding call quality. And if you don't choose to use it, you pay nothing.

What about international calls?

TouchTone's rates to foreign countries are extremely competitive. For example, here is a partial listing of typical call rates per minute from the United States:

Canada is \$0.05, Australia is \$0.055, Argentina is \$0.065, China is \$0.055, France and Germany are \$0.05, Hong Kong is \$0.07, India is \$0.19, Israel is \$0.065, Japan is \$0.059, Mexico is \$0.06, Philippines is \$0.24, Russia is \$0.09, Poland is \$0.06, Sweden is \$0.05, South Korea is \$0.07, Taiwan is \$0.07, and the United Kingdom is \$0.05.

Does TouchTone offer an unlimited calling plan? Does it include any foreign countries?

Yes, TouchTone has an unlimited calling plan.. The cost is \$49.95 per line per month. It includes unlimited calling both In-State and State-to-State in the Continental U.S. and Canada as well as 30 foreign countries such as China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Mexico, Russia, Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

Can I set up automatic charging to my credit card?

Yes. When you get your first bill, just check the box indicating you wish to charge the bill directly to your credit card.

How do I sign up?

Just fill out the attached application and fax it to 1-800-266-4011.

Can TouchTone provide service to a professional or business organization? What about a very large business or a non-profit organization?

Yes, TouchTone can provide communications services to all of these entities including businesses of all sizes and non-profit organizations.

Does TouchTone have a website? Can I sign on there?

The website for TouchTone Communications is www.touchtone.net. You cannot sign on directly at their website as they prefer to work through agents or directly through sponsored applications like this.

What if I still have more questions?

Then you'll need to send me an email at: swleslie@pol.net and I'll be happy to answer your questions.