Michigan Public Service Commission
Outreach and Education Section
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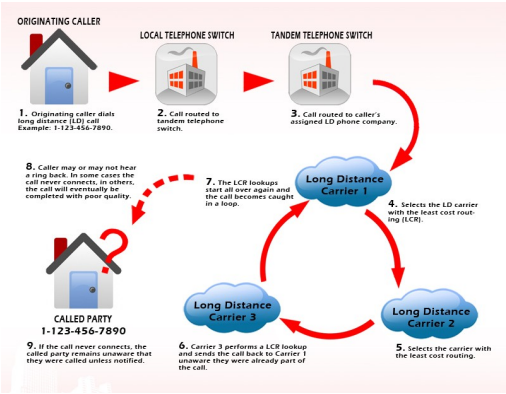
consumer TIPS

Alert 15-29 January 2015

michigan.gov/mpsc

Rural Call Completion



Q: What is the problem?

A: Rural telephone companies across the country, including many in Michigan, have been experiencing "call completion" problems during the past several months. Because rural areas traditionally have higher costs, some of the rates that rural providers charge to other carriers for completing calls are higher than those in more urban areas. This is due to the fact that rural areas are more expensive to serve because of lower population density. Certain providers that route the long distance calls do not wish to incur these higher charges so they either refuse to transport calls on certain rural telephone companies' networks or they route the call in a way to try minimizing the cost. "Least-cost routing" may be cheaper for the company routing the call, but it may also lead to poorer service quality for customers. Many complainants mistakenly put the blame on the rural local exchange provider that is terminating the call when the issue actually arises from the route the call takes before it gets to the rural provider who connects it to the customer. Some issues reported by customers include:

- The calling party will hear ringing but the called party hears nothing
- The called party's phone rings but hears dead air when the call is answered
- Extremely poor quality on answerable calls
- The caller ID display is inaccurate or misleading

Q: What should I do if calls aren't being completed?

A: First and foremost, contact your provider(s) to let them know you are experiencing problems; make sure to provide details. Your provider will not know there is an issue unless you make it known to them. Additionally, if you know the person calling you whose calls are not going through correctly, have them contact their provider to make a complaint. Your provider(s) should work with you to try resolving the issue. You can also file a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Complaints can be filed online at fcc.gov/complaints or by calling 888-CALL-FCC. Your provider may be able to help you file a complaint with the FCC. You can also contact the MPSC's Service Quality Division for assistance with filing your FCC complaint by calling 800-292-9555 or via the internet at michigan.gov/mpsc.

Q: If people are aware of the problem, what is being done to address the issue?

The MPSC is aware of the issue and is working with rural providers to resolve it. However, the problem often involves service providers that are not traditional telecommunications providers, such as wireless providers or companies like Magic Jack. The MPSC does not have regulatory authority over these providers.

The rural telephone companies have a national association working with the FCC to address these call completion issues. The FCC does have authority over these types of providers. In October, Michigan was one of several states to sign off on a letter drafted to bring these issues to the attention of the FCC. The letter outlined negative impacts of the call completion issues and suggested steps the FCC might take to alleviate the problem. The FCC, acknowledging this as a serious issue, recently put new rules in place providing both short- and long-term solutions to rural call completion problems and is continuing to work on the issue. Therefore, we recommend that you work either independently, with your provider, or with the MPSC's Service Quality Division staff, to file a complaint with the FCC.

This information and more can be found at: http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc/0,4639,7-159-16372-268981--,00.html