

Wrong number

State investigating cellular phone rates

By Ralph R. Ehltnaw
staff writer

The Michigan Attorney General's office is investigating several complaints, including one by a Birmingham doctor, against Ameritech Mobile Communications for tripling its cellular phone economy rates.

"These people are playing games with these rates," said Dr. George Kadian of Birmingham. "It was false advertising."

Ameritech Communications Manager Lisa Elian said the rate increase is entirely legal according to the terms of the service contract all customers sign.

Kadian said he signed eight of his employees up for six months of cellular service last December when the rate was \$7.50 a month. He found out last month though that Ameritech raised the economy rate to \$21.95 a month effective Feb. 19.

"THEY TOLD US there was nothing binding on that (\$7.50) economy rate," he said. "They told us 'Read your contract. There's nothing binding us to that six-month period.'"

Kadian said he was locked into the six-month commitment, and he was under the impression that \$7.50 was to be the rate for six months.

Since he complained, Kadian said Ameritech has agreed to continue charging his employees the lower rate (\$7.50).

Michigan Attorney General spokesman Chris DeWitt said a review is pending on complaints against Ameritech.

He said Attorney General Frank Kelley is expected to make a decision within two weeks. "There have been a number of complaints in the last six to eight weeks," DeWitt said.

'We feel very strongly that we were manipulated.'

— Dr. George Kadian,
Birmingham customer

Kadian said in a letter to Kelley, "We feel very strongly that we were manipulated. We would appreciate the involvement of your office in this situation since we feel that many innocent people, including the elderly, were victimized by Ameritech."

Elian said her company never promised to keep the economy rates at a certain price for any length of time. "The service agreement clearly states that the rates are subject to change," she said.

CUSTOMERS AREN'T locked into any commitment with Ameritech, but rather with the dealers who sold them the phones, Elian stressed. Dealers, she said, often sell cellular phones below cost and make their profits on the commission Ameritech gives them for each new customer.

However, Ameritech requires the customers to remain customers for a certain length of time before paying out the dealers' commissions. So dealers, Elian said, sign customers to agreements to remain customers for varying lengths of time. That's the only way dealers can afford to sell cellular phones below cost, Elian said.

Kadian signed a six-month agreement with MetroCell of Sterling Heights. According to Elian, the equipment agreement with MetroCell keeps Kadian tied to Ameritech. Elian said the new economy rate of \$21.95 per month includes 15 minutes free "air time" per month.

is \$6.05 per month. Ameritech made the change, she said, because more than 40 percent of the economy-rate customers are talking more than 60 minutes per month on their cellular phones. This, she said, makes the new economy rate a better deal for them. Ameritech customers with complaints can call the company's customer service consultants at 1-800-221-0994.

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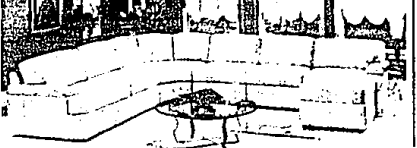
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