

'That Number's In The Book'

Michigan Bell says it could reduce operating costs by at least \$1.5 million a year across the state if more customers would consult their books before dialing "411" for directory assistance.

The problem, according to local Bell manager Robert L. Kilpatrick, is excessive use of "411" service. He said the service is growing at a rate of 10 per cent a year.

"Of the some 637,000 calls a day now handled by our '411' operators around the state, about half are for numbers which can be found in current directories," Kilpatrick explained.

In an effort to contain this growth and encourage customers to check their directories, he stated that Michigan Bell's "411" service concept will now be aimed primarily at providing new numbers not listed in current directories.

"Our operators will answer '411' calls with the phrase 'New Number Information.' In addition, callers will clearly tell callers when the numbers they've requested are already listed in the phone books," he said.

"Recent surveys show that about 10 per

cent of telephone customers make about 50 per cent of all directory assistance calls. That means a majority of customers is bearing the burden of cost for the small per cent who regularly make excessive use of the service," he added.

"Michigan Bell spends about \$6 million a year to publish the directories and over \$10 million a year on directory assistance. Obviously, a significant portion of the cost of '411' service is used to supplement the service already provided by the directory."

"What we are attempting to do," he

explained, "is to bring the 10 per cent growth rate of '411' more closely in line with our annual three per cent average rate of growth in basic telephone service."

"In other words, our '411' service has grown about three times faster than our basic service. This realignment could save us at least \$1.5 million a year."

He noted that a test of the "New Number Information" concept was recently conducted in Kalamazoo, and it reduced "411" volume by more than seven percent in the first week.

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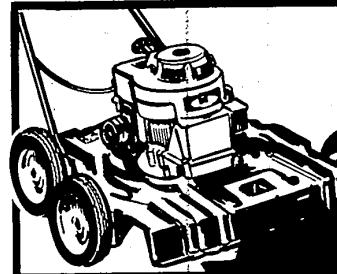
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