
Final Proposal for **Telecommunications Billing Guidelines**

A Consultation Document

The Supreme Council of Information & Communication Technology “ictQATAR”

25 January 2009

COMMENTS DUE BY 26 FEBRUARY 2009

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1. Background: ictQATAR's final proposal for Telecommunications Billing Guidelines

In August 2008, ictQATAR issued a consultation document regarding its proposal for telecommunications billing guidelines asking stakeholders for their views on the subject. ictQATAR received 68 responses in this regard. The comments received from stakeholders have been taken into account in this final proposal. All comments received in response to ictQATAR's consultation in August can be found on its website at www.ict.gov.qa

ictQATAR now invites all interested parties to comment on its final proposal for telecommunications billing guidelines, which is detailed below. All comments are due no later than 3:00 p.m. on the 26th of February 2009.

2. How to Submit Comments

All interested parties are encouraged to submit final comments regarding any aspect of ictQATAR's proposal for Telecommunications Billing Guidelines. Comments should be organized in a manner consistent with the organization of the proposed final guidelines.

ictQATAR asks that respondents, to the extent possible, support their comments with examples or any relevant evidence. We will usually publish all comments or a summary of the comments on our website at www.ict.gov.qa to ensure a completely transparent process.

ictQATAR will take into consideration all comments received but is under no obligation to adopt or implement any comments or proposals submitted.

ictQATAR prefers that comments are sent by email to consult@ict.gov.qa. Parties who choose to submit comments by post or courier may do so at the following address:

Regulatory Policy and Economic Affairs Department
Regulatory Authority
ictQATAR
P.O. Box 23264, Doha, Qatar

Comments that are sent by courier or post should include an electronic version, preferably in a CD Rom format, in addition to a hard copy.

For more information concerning this consultation, contact Duha Al-Buhendi, Regulatory Policy and Economic Affairs Department, at 4995332.

3. Purpose & Summary

The purpose of ictQATAR's Telecommunications Billing Guidelines is to ensure that consumers have the tools they need to understand their telecommunications bills, identify billing errors and avoid being charged for services for which they have not subscribed. Consumers should know who is asking them to pay for a service, what services they are being asked to pay for and how to dispute any unauthorized or incorrect charges. They should also be able to receive their bill on a timely basis and in a format that is easily accessible.

ictQATAR's final proposal for Telecommunications Billing Guidelines requires Service Providers to meet minimum requirements for 10 key billing areas. These areas include:

- (1) Bill Format
- (2) Access to Billing Information
- (3) Customer Information
- (4) Service Provider and Additional Billing Party Information
- (5) Descriptions of Billed Charges
- (6) Disconnection
- (7) Disputing Charges
- (8) Billing Accuracy
- (9) Billing Timeliness and
- (10) Payment.

Service Providers will have 90 days to ensure compliance with these guidelines once they are issued.

These guidelines will be binding and apply to all telecommunications Service Providers. Service Providers, according to the 2006 Telecommunications Law, are persons who are licensed to provide telecommunications services to the public or own, establish or operate a telecommunications network to do the same.

4. Telecommunications Billing Guidelines: An ictQATAR Final Proposal

The 10 guidelines proposed below are intended to set minimum billing standards for Service Providers in Qatar so that customers may be assured of receiving a standard level of fair billing practices. These guidelines have been revised to take into account the comments received from the public consultation process initiated in August 2008. The guidelines do not address wholesale billing or matters related to pricing and apply only to postpaid customers. ictQATAR has also taken care not to propose overly descriptive guidelines so as to allow Service Providers flexibility in meeting the requirements in a way that promotes competition and customer satisfaction.

1) **Bill Format**

Service Providers should provide a single bill for all telecommunications services. For example, customers should not receive separate bills for wireless and landline services from the same service provider. Bills should be clearly organized and the information presented should avoid unnecessary complexity, be straightforward and unambiguous.

Service Providers are required to provide billing invoices, free of charge, in a format that is accessible to all customers, including those with disabilities. Formats that will assist people with disabilities include Braille and larger fonts for the weak sighted. Due to the substantial number of non-Arabic speakers in Qatar, ictQATAR also requires that bills be available in both Arabic and English or be bi-lingual.

2) **Access to Billing Information**

All customers must be sent a written billing invoice by post unless the customer agrees with the Service Provider to receive a bill through a different means, such as electronically via the Internet. Customer bills shall be sent by a means that ensures the confidentiality of the customer's telephone number and/or account number.

Service Providers shall provide electronic access to billing information such as via stand alone customer kiosks and via the Internet so that mobile customers and customers without post boxes can access billing information in a timely fashion. Electronic access to billing information must be quick, simple and easy. For example, customers should be able to instantly receive authorization and any needed passwords to access such systems through on-line systems without having to go through a lengthy approval/application

process. Customers should also have access to a minimum of 3 months of online billing statements.

3) **Customer Information**

To ensure that customers are able to easily verify that the bill they have received corresponds to the services for which they have subscribed, ictQATAR requires that every bill contain information that clearly identifies the customer. At a minimum, this information should include the name of the customer, the customer number, account number and email or postal address. For business customers, this information should also include the location of the telephone line; i.e. building/villa number.

4) **Service Provider and Additional Billing Party Information**

Every bill shall include the name, address and toll free contact number of the Service Provider. This information shall be clearly and prominently displayed on a bill. The name and toll free contact number of any other billing party associated with charges appearing on the bill shall also be clearly indicated on the bill. Where charges for two or more billing parties appear on the same bill, the charges should be listed separately by billing party.

The goal of this requirement is to enhance the ability of customers to review individual charges on their bills and avoid fraud by detecting charges for services for which they have not subscribed.

This requirement does not extend to companies with which a Service Provider has a roaming agreement.

5) **Descriptions of Billed Charges**

All charges appearing on a bill must be itemized and accompanied by a brief, clear, non-misleading, plain-language description of the service being rendered. The method of calculation for all charges must be clearly presented on the bill so that customers can easily assess whether the costs of the requested services conform to their understanding of the price charged.

The charges included on a billing invoice should include all charges related to a current billing period to the extent possible. In any case, a Service Provider must not bill for

charges for the first time if they are older than 90 days from the date of the charge, unless otherwise agreed by the customer.

All services charged on a per unit (e.g. msg/MB/min) basis must include the:

- ▶ name of the service
- ▶ date of service
- ▶ time of the service
- ▶ duration of the service, if applicable
- ▶ number called
- ▶ location of the number called
- ▶ charging rate/calculation method
- ▶ all related charges, promotions and discounts
- ▶ total charge.

For customer equipment or other non-call/unit charges, Service Providers must list each item and the amount billed.

Service Providers may offer customers an option to opt-out of receiving itemized billing for all telecommunications or specific telecommunications services if the customer wants to avoid lengthy billing statements. However, these customers shall still receive a billing summary and be able to view their full billing statement on an itemized basis through an electronic means.

6) **Disconnection**

Service Providers must clearly inform customers on a bill when non-payment of a service or group of services will result in full or partial disconnection of a service/s.

Before disconnecting a customer for any reason, the Service Provider must first notify the customer in writing of any planned action to disconnect the customer. This notification period must be no less than 2 working days prior to the planned disconnection. Written notification may be sent by post, email or SMS for example.

7) **Disputing Charges**

Service Providers must provide a toll free billing number(s) in addition to a customer service number by which customers, both corporate and consumer, may query charges

related to their bill and register a dispute over the phone. The toll free number(s) must be prominently displayed on the bill so that it is easily noticeable by customers. Service Providers must also provide a means for customers to dispute charges in writing, if they so request, by providing a mailing address or electronic means of communication (email, website, fax etc...).

To ensure that customers are not intimidated into paying for charges that they believe are incorrect, Service Providers must clearly indicate that a customer will not be disconnected from a service while the dispute is under review. They must also clearly indicate that a customer is **not** liable to pay the charges that are under dispute while the dispute is still on-going. Customers will be liable to pay for any charges that are rightfully due.

Service Providers shall promptly resolve any billing disputes and do so no later than 30 days from when the dispute was filed. The 30 day dispute resolution period may be extended if both parties, i.e. the customer and the Service Provider, are in agreement.

8) **Billing Accuracy**

Service Providers are required to ensure the accuracy and reliability of any billing system used in connection with the provision of telecommunications services to the public. Service Providers should keep reports of call start times errors, call duration errors, call number errors, price errors and disconnection errors and other types of errors that can be used to demonstrate billing accuracy.

Customers will be entitled to a refund or a credit to their account if this accuracy cannot be demonstrated in regards to disputed charges.

9) **Billing Timeliness**

Service Providers must ensure that customers are provided with a telecommunications bill on a timely basis and no later than 20 days after the closure of a billing period. A billing period is approximately 30 days or one month in duration. SMS alerts or other forms of messaging alerts do not constitute as billing invoices.

Service Providers are encouraged to make use of innovations such as electronic access to billing information as a means to ensure timeliness in market where the population is increasingly mobile and where the postal system cannot always be relied upon.

10) Payment

Customers must be given a period of no less than 30 days from the date a bill is issued to make payments for any outstanding charges. The issue date of the bill must be clearly indicated on the bill.

Service Providers must provide and inform customers of all payment options – direct debit, credit card payments over the phone, electronic means, post and/or over the counter (e.g. customer service center) and ensure that the necessary steps have been taken to safeguard the security and accuracy of all payment transactions to the extent possible.

Customers must be able to verify that their payments have been received by acknowledgment of payment on their next bill, by calling the Service Provider's billing customer service number or via other mechanisms chosen by a Service Provider such as on-line enquiry mechanisms, the Internet or interactive voice response services.

5. Closing Date for Submitting Comments

All comments must be submitted in writing no later than 3:00 pm (local time in the State of Qatar) on the 26th of February.