

Phone deals getting rare

AT&T rates too high

United Press International
WASHINGTON — The American Telephone & Telegraph antitrust settlement will eventually make life more complicated for consumers trying to bargain hunt for the best telephone deal.

Sam Simon, head of the Ralph Nader-backed National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, also says he fears consumers will be underrepresented in the rate-making process which will occur state-by-state in later years once the reorganization of the nation's telephone system is completed.

The recent agreement between AT&T and the Justice Department to settle the government's long-standing antitrust suit against "Ma Bell" provides for AT&T to divest itself of its 22 operating telephone companies — Illinois Bell, Southwestern Bell and the like.

AT&T will still remain in the lucrative long-distance business where it already has several competitors.

Asked in an interview whether the consumer will have

an even harder time than now figuring out what a telephone bargain is, Simon said, "There's no doubt about it — that and a more difficult time finding out what he's paying for and why."

Simon edited a book called "Reverse The Charges" which addresses both the question of shopping for telephone service and equipment, and the more technical aspects of how regulators determine telephone rates.

He said a wide variety of services and charges are available even under the current system, yet many consumers go on month after month unaware that they could be saving money by buying their own telephone, switching to cheaper monthly service deals or subscribing to alternative long-distance packages.

In the future, he said, the market will become even more complex.

In terms of long distance services Simon predicts, "There will be more of a choice and the choice will be better. I suspect that the (long distance) prices will be driven down somewhat."

His book, available at \$6 per copy from Consumer Press Inc., 910 17th St. NW, Suite 331, Washington, D.C. 20006, offers these tips, among others:

—Consumers in some cities can subscribe to "economy" service for as low as \$3.65 per month and an additional charge of perhaps six cents per outgoing call. In the case of one city, Simon said, the consumer could pay for 100 calls a month and still not have as high a bill as more expensive monthly service arrangements.

—Buying your own telephone will save you from 50 cents to \$2 per month, and eventually pay for the instrument you bought outright. The book also points out the ins and outs of repair problems when you

own your equipment. —If your long distance bills are more than \$25 per month, you can save money on the alternative long distance systems offered by companies such as Microwave Communications Inc., Southern Pacific Communications and U.S. Transmissions Systems.

The AT&T settlement will not be finalized for perhaps two years.

Simon believes the ratesetting process, which the book addresses at some length, is the area where consumers must become more involved to make an impact when the reorganization does occur.

Consumers, he said, "have never been well represented in rate making," something that could change if experts could be hired as intervenors, perhaps through a small tax on each telephone user willing to form such a lobbying group.



staff photo by Peter Rocha

A hustler?

He isn't Minnesota Fats, but Alex Zimmerman of Amarillo keeps on trying in the MSC Gameroom. Zimmerman is a junior mechanical engineering major.

Star Wars expects sequel soon

United Press International
HOLLYWOOD — The second sequel to the biggest box-office success in motion picture history, "Star Wars," has begun production at EMI Elstree Studios in London with a release date of May, 1983.

"Revenge of the Jedi," with executive producer George Lucas at the helm, has taken over all nine sound stages at the studio where "Star Wars" and "The Empire Strikes Back" were filmed.

Western nations debate U.S. trade reduction

United Press International
PARIS — Representatives of all major Western nations assembled Tuesday for a top-secret conference to debate the U.S. request that its allies reduce trade with the Soviet Bloc to protest martial law in Poland.

Diplomats termed this the biggest meeting of its kind since the Cold War. The first session of the two-day closed meeting of the Control Committee on Trade with Communist Countries was to center on Washington's push for sanctions.

The meeting of high-level experts from 14 NATO nations and Japan faced the difficult task of reconciling the positions of Washington and allies reluctant to sever trade ties with the East.

West Germany has expressed the strongest anti-sanction sentiments, both for political and economic reasons. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt does not want to impede his nation's "Ostpolitik," which is geared to rebuilding relations between East and West Germany.

West Germany, which conducts 6.5 percent of its trade with the Eastern Bloc, would lose more than any other Western nation if business with the communist nations were cut back.

France is next in line with 4

percent of its exports going to Eastern Europe. Trade with communist nations accounts for 3.5 percent of Italy's exports and 2.3 percent of Britain's.

Because of the grain embargo, U.S. exports to the Soviet Bloc in 1980 made up only 1.7 percent of its trade. Grain exports have not been affected by the current sanctions.

Hundreds of thousands of West Europeans earn their living from high technology exports to Eastern Europe, while U.S. technological exports represent an insignificant part of American trade to the area.

European allies and Japan have defended continued trade by arguing the only sanction that really would hurt Moscow would be an American grain embargo.

A major topic expected at the COCOM meeting was U.S. criticism of West German, Italian and French participation in constructing a \$10 million gas pipeline from Siberia to Western Europe.

Despite American warnings the pipeline will make the West dependent on Soviet energy supplies, West Germany and France are holding to the deal. Diplomats expect the United States will succeed at least in delaying it.

A protest from Washington

caused the cancellation of a \$185 million sale of equipment for the pipeline by General Electric Co. Now British, Italian and West German General Electric firms may be forced to cancel their contracts with Moscow.

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