

A phone bill could ruin your holiday

Experts from Nuremberg warn: Even if phone calls do not take place you might still be charged for them - 07.15.2011 04:00 p.m.

NUREMBERG - Boredom on the beach? That is not an issue for smartphone owners. A few touches on the display and the world of the internet opens up. Longing for your beloved? One call, and those at home can hear the sound of the sea. However, in many cases there is a nasty surprise waiting in your letter box at home. This nasty surprise is the bill. – Particularly connections that did not take place sometimes do cost a lot of money.



Browsing the internet during your holiday will soon cost you a pretty penny. Whoever watches videos carelessly or looks through a picture gallery, might be faced with an expensive bill after his return.

Foto: dpa

Even Adil Kaya was shocked: His mobile phone service provider charged him 1,700.00 euros, after he had returned from a trip abroad. As a businessman, of course, he makes a lot of phone calls and he also browses the internet abroad. But it was not only the amount which astonished him, it was also the itemised bill. In many cases, calls were charged even though the person he called did not pick up the phone.

He investigated the case not only as a customer who is not prepared to pay for not performed services, but also as a professional: Adil Kaya is the manager of Keynote SIGOS, a company which acts as a kind of stress tester for wireless companies. The Nuremberg-based company has about 200 customers – and big companies such as the Deutsche Telekom or Vodafone are amongst them. – At present the company is informing 41 countries about the latest methods and findings at an internal meeting.

The company Sigos, which was founded 21 years ago and merged with the American telecommunication company Keynote Systems Inc. in 2006, is specialised in locating dead zones for wireless companies, pointing out slow data transfer, checking the audio quality of calls or recording the time required to send a text message.

Approximately 300 simulation boxes are in operation 24/7. They represent up to four mobile or smartphone users and make phone calls around the world, send text messages, browse the internet at home and abroad and, of course, create bills.

Providers are mostly co-operative

The intention is to obtain a service control for providers. In respect of a more and more increasing competition, providers have never been more interested in offering their customers the best possible quality and not to annoy them. That is not always easy, especially when wireless companies have to work together with providers abroad. According to Adil Kaya, some of them might be the reason for the excessive bill he received. Dozens of connections, which are partly listed with just one second of call time, were charged him as usual, -at the minute price-. This does not include the roaming fees, the costs which are produced by logging into a foreign network.

Today, Mr. Kaya knows that he is not the only one. Due to this phenomenon Keynote Sigos purposefully analysed the bills created by the test boxes. The result: Up to 9 percent of the charged phone calls in the world did not take place.

Considering a noticeably high bill after a stay abroad, consumers should definitely check calls that are shorter than a second and report them to their provider. According to Mr. Kaya, they usually were co-operative.

Expensive movies

However, a customer cannot always expect a refund of the costs- and particularly not if the costs were caused by himself. Martin Löhlein, who is also manager of Sigos, especially warns smartphone users, who like browsing the internet, watching movies or downloading books. According to his experience, many customers do not know that providers charge the costs by the data volume and not by the price per minute as in phone calls.

Downloading a text file that is measured in kilobyte costs little money. Having said that if the user clicks on a picture gallery while browsing, the data volume increases a hundredfold – if, for example, the user watches a movie, he will soon reach megabyte. This can cost hundreds of euros.

And even those who do not browse the internet because of cost-consciousness, must make provisions. According to Mr. Löhlein, smartphones download updates automatically and, by doing so, produce costs. However, you can turn off data traffic in the phone settings, making sure your holidays will not be ruined afterwards.