report

BILLING CLARITY

General Market and Minority
Consumer Understanding

Report by

PERCEPTIVE

June 2023

welcome.

CONTENTS

**COMMERCE
COMMISSION
NEW ZEALAND**
Te Komihana Tauhokohoko

Report prepared for the
Commerce Commission.

BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

01

BACKGROUND

The Commerce Commission's Improving Retail Service Quality Final Baseline report identified billing as a significant pain point for consumers when interacting with their retail service provider (RSP) in the telecommunications market.

For example:

22% had difficulties understanding how their bill is calculated;

21% had difficulties understanding the language and terms RSPs use in their billing; and

20% had confusion around the cost of their service because it is bundled with other services or utilities.

There is also evidence to suggest that consumers find billing documentation confusing, overcomplicated and laden with jargon, that it is often difficult to identify billing errors due to the complexity of the bill and that bills often have a complicated layout and do not clearly display the information required.

The Commission wants to reduce the instances of consumers struggling to understand their bills.

OBJECTIVES

OVERALL OBJECTIVES

The overall objectives of the research are to understand:

❯ What are the current issues with billing information formats and language that make them hard for consumers to understand?

❯ What changes to billing information, formats and language will make bills easier for consumers to understand?

❯ This would include helping to increase consumer understanding of what it is that they are paying for and whether the amount payable is inside or outside what they signed up for and why.

❯ What changes to the delivery of bills, such as delivery mechanism, format and content, might help increase the percentage of consumers who review the detail of their bills?

DETAILED OBJECTIVES

Detailed objectives include:

Identifying exactly what aspects of billing are confusing for consumers:

❯ What language terms or jargon makes bills difficult to understand or overly complicated and why?

❯ What about the bill makes it hard to determine how it is calculated and whether there are errors?

❯ Why bills for bundled services are hard to make sense of. What part(s) of a bill's layout or display makes it unclear?

DETAILS TO INCLUDE

To determine the right information, display options, and terminology to include or exclude from bills so that:

❯ Consumers can more easily understand what they are paying for.

❯ Consumers can more easily understand whether the amount payable falls inside or outside the plan they signed up to.

METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative project comprising an online forum, focus groups and in-depth interviews.

STAGE 01
General Market Understanding

METHOD   7-day Online Forum
28 March – 5 April 2023

In this phase, we gained a deep understanding of how most consumers are currently interacting with their bills, where the challenges are, and what we can do to make billing easier for them.

› **n=21 New Zealander Participants.**

› All participants to be responsible for or have shared responsibility for their telco bill.

› Mix of living in main urban centres, provincial towns and rural areas (North Island and South Island).

› Mixed age, gender and ethnicity.

Mobile providers:	Broadband providers:
Vodafone/One NZ (8)	Spark (8)
Spark (5)	Vodafone/One NZ (6)
2 degrees (4)	Slingshot (2)
Skinny (3)	Big Pipe (1)
Kogan (1)	2 degrees (1)
3 out of 21 had landlines	Contact (1)
Bundled bills (7)	Trustpower (1)
Separate bills (11)	Orcon (1)
	Wireless Nation (1)

STAGE 02
Minority Consumer Understanding

METHOD   6 Focus Groups
12 – 19 April 2023

In this phase we spoke to harder-to-reach segments in order to understand how billing challenges effect these segments, and how their understanding or needs differ to the general consumer.

› 2 senior 65+ groups (n=13), 2 lower socio-economic groups (n=16), 1 Māori (n=8) and 1 Pasifika group (n=7).

› All participants to be responsible for or have shared responsibility for their telco bill.

› Mix of living in main urban centres, provincial towns and rural areas (North Island and South Island).

› Mix of age, gender and ethnicity where applicable.

Mobile providers:	Broadband providers:
Vodafone/One NZ	Spark
Spark	Vodafone/One NZ
2 degrees	Trustpower
Orcon	Orcon
MyRepublic	MyRepublic
Kogan	Skinny
	Slingshot
	NOW

STAGE 03
ESL and Vision Impaired Interviews

METHOD   10 1-on-1, in-depth interviews
w/c 15 May and w/c 29 May

In this phase we spoke to ESL and Vision Impaired consumers in order to understand how billing challenges affect these segment.

› n=5 ESL consumers (Nationwide).

› n=5 Vision Impaired consumers (Auckland).

› Mix of age and gender.

Mobile providers:	Broadband providers:
Vodafone/One NZ	Spark
Spark	Vodafone/One NZ
2 degrees	Skinny

GENERAL MARKET UNDERSTANDING

2.1 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

02

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. Consumer **needs and expectations with regards to their telco bills can vary significantly**, particularly when they are on an unlimited mobile plan:

   › Some are happy with short, concise bills provided the charge (if fixed) is the same every month.

   › Others (even on fixed plans) like the detail.

   › Others only want detail if the fixed amount varies.

   › Some like to monitor their data usage regularly.

2. Telco bills need to be able to cater, at some level, for all of these needs, either by providing detail on the bill itself or by clearly directing consumers to the app and ensuring they understand the information is available to them should they want it.

3. Most consumers agree that bills should provide **simple summary information** (first page) and **detail** (second page).

4. Most consumers agree that **excessive advertising**, where it detracts from the billing information, **should be avoided**.

5. Key **areas of confusion**:

   › Jargon e.g. ambiguous words like "other", "price adjustment".

   › A number of consumers have also been caught out with roaming charges.

6. Bundled bills (where energy and telco are bundled) tend to be very dominated by energy information and telco information is treated as secondary.

7. Consumers can be rather **passive about investigating price changes** (month to month) and additional charges, especially if they are very small. There can be a view that it would not be worth their time to query a small additional charge or price adjustment – especially given perceptions of the difficulty in being able to do this either via phone or chat, etc.

8. High trust in total billed amount – Most general market consumers **believe that their bills are calculated accurately** – those that gave a lower score here were more likely to have had an issue in the past.

9. However, for some consumers there is a level of '**trust**' involved in the telco-consumer relationship, which means that provided the bill amount '**looks within zone**' they will often accept it.

This was a qualitative project comprising an online forum, focus groups and in-depth interviews

GENERAL MARKET UNDERSTANDING

2.2 CURRENT BILLING AND PAYMENT PROCESSES

02

PAYMENT FREQUENCY

Consumers on plans receive their bills monthly and (most) also pay their bills monthly.

Mobile, landline and broadband bills are all received monthly (electronically) and are generally paid on a monthly basis. None of the forum participants received a hard copy of their bill in the post.

Payments were made in a range of ways:

> **Most –** by direct debit (bank account or credit card) (for ease).

> **Some –** by automatic payment (for ease – fixed amount).

> **Few –** via a manual payment – with the consumer processing this manually each month (for control).

> **Few –** via the app (for convenience).

For consumers with pre-paid mobiles there is NO BILL received but there is a text reminder when they need to top up.

Most are NOT checking the payment (out of their account/credit card) against the bill they receive – some did this for a while but once satisfied that it is 'generally' correct they stopped.

The main reasons for checking the payment against the bill is if the bill is DIFFERENT THAN EXPECTED. But this can be within a zone of tolerance e.g. $1-$2.

SATISFACTION WITH PAYMENT PROCESS

Most consumers report that they are satisfied with their current payment processes.

There are a range of payment options available to consumers – and consumers understand what these are.

Consumers are choosing payment options that suit their needs, either for ease, control or convenience:

> Arranging payments is considered easy and straightforward.

> The use of **payment reminders** is considered useful by some.

There were very few suggestions for improvements to current payment processes:

> One said there could be better/more use made of QR codes on bills – for quick payment.

> One said they would like to be able to change the payment date for direct debits (more flexibility).

> One said they would like the ability to top up custom amounts for pre-paid mobiles. At present it is fixed increments of e.g. $10, $20 etc. – this means that an account can often end up in credit which is not always what they want – although this may be supplier specific.

> One said there should be discounts for prompt payments.

"Nothing really, for us it is pretty seamless. The only issue would be if we dispute a charge it doesn't appear as a credit until the following month."

"I very much like the ease of my payment process. I have it set up so the money is taken out of my bank account automatically but only on a monthly basis. They always make sure to send reminders, so you know the bill is coming. There is nothing I can think of that I would like to change or add."

"I don't think I would want any immediate changes, it's straightforward through internet banking or on the website with my credit card."

"No. I like the set and forget nature of it."

"Not really. The process has been quite painless."

BILL FILING

Once the bill is paid, consumers will either actively (save) or passively (leave in inbox) a copy of the bill.

Few of the general market participants were deleting their bill once it was paid.

However, there was no evidence to suggest that consumers will re-look at old, paid bills for any reason (other than possibly a tax-related claim).

There is a high level of awareness that they can look up old, paid bills/their billing history on the supplier app should they want to.

Reasons for saving bills (to a file) were:

› Because they may need the bill for business reasons/tax reasons.

› Because of habit – some consumers prefer to keep information on file.

› Because they may also be handling bills for another relative.

_ "Yes. I keep record of them through email. I don't delete my emails, so I am able to easily relocate previous bills, especially power to efficiently compare my previous charges to current charges."

_ "I keep mine filed in a folder with my other important emails. They don't get deleted once filed."

_ "As my [provider] broadband bills are emailed to me as attachments, I do not delete them and keep them indefinitely in my Gmail inbox. My mobile bills, however, are accessed through their apps. I do not download or keep a copy of those. In general, as my bills are very consistent and as they are for personal use, I have never felt it necessary to retain them."

_ "I keep them in my inbox and don't think I have deleted them. I can see them on my apps and accounts if I need to refer to them."

_ "I don't intentionally keep the bills on file but also don't delete the email either. Very rarely do I check the bill and if I do I don't recall ever checking the direct debit against the bill itself."

_ "I print them off and then store in an accounts folder. Once printed I delete the email."

_ "Yes, as I work from home, the bills get incorporated into my accounts. Kept on file for the yearly accounts."

GENERAL MARKET UNDERSTANDING

2.3 UNDERSTANDING TELCO BILL CONSUMER BEHAVIOURS

02

TIME SPENT WITH BILL
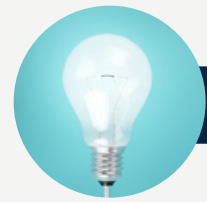
Most consumers spend minimal time checking or reviewing their bills.

MOST consumers describe their bill checking time in MINUTES (and some in seconds) – a minority will take more time.

Overall consumers spend slightly longer checking mobile bills than they do either landline or broadband.

For bundled bills – consumers are more likely to spend longer looking at any energy component rather than telco:

› There is a view that energy usage is more useful to look at than telco to help plan for/ control future usage.

› Energy usage and information on bundles is more dominant on the bills – the telco information is minor part (more information, more visual e.g. graphs/charts).

Where the bill is a fixed amount (e.g. broadband) – minimal/no time is spent reviewing.

Most will check for any variation in their unlimited mobile bill, but if it's WITHIN a certain tolerance level, they won't look in any great detail.

There is no evidence to suggest anyone was referring back to their plan for any reason.

Most have unlimited broadband (so no perceived need to check).

_ *"I spend less than 5 minutes. The [provider] bill is consistent so that is very quick. The [provider] bill gets a bit more attention – mainly checking it is approx. the same amount as the month previous and looking to understand any major variance."*

_ *"I spend very little time reviewing my bill, occasionally if I notice it is higher than anticipated then I will take a look."*

_ *"I usually spend half an hour going through the bill. If I notice some difference, then I spend more time going through them."*

_ *"I tend to open the email and look at it for maybe 30 seconds, as they have all the same information, I don't feel the need to take time to read it. Again, I don't tend to take time looking at any of my bills because they are monthly payments, they tend to be the same amount and nothing changes."*

_ *"I always look at the bills, print them and then click on the actual bill so that I can see exactly what we have been charged for as there always seems to be extras added to the bill (i.e. for Spotify or because we sent photos etc.)."*

_ *"I check the bills monthly when they arrive (3 mins). With [provider] I check my balance etc. every month when I get a text notification reminder to pay. As I forget my balance and plan type (10 mins), I spend more time on the [provider] app as I have to go through it to find the information I want."*

BILL FOCUS

The first item most consumers look at on their telco bills is the current amount owing.

There are NO apparent problems in terms of locating/seeing the current amount owing on telco bills.

APPROXIMATE ORDER OF VIEWING:

The total amount owing (and for some their name, address, the supplier)

The due date (or when the payment will be processed)

Past payments, current charges

A summary of any additional charges (where relevant)

> For some – a quick glance

> For others – a review if anything is different with the total amount owing

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"Generally, just look at amount owing. Only look at the rest if there is a difference, or I'm doing a review if thinking of changing providers."

"Don't glance at call details until unless there is a jump in my monthly charges."

"Usage, previous month, date etc. mainly just look at the amount owing and will only check the bill if the amount seems a little higher than what I'm used to."

"I've never thought to double check I'm paying broadband for the correct house. 😅 Never had an issue at least."

"I just check that we are being billed correctly for the extras that we get with [provider] broadband e.g. Neon, Netflix and McAfee virus protection."

"I look at the total amount and then if that's what I expect I might not look further. If I do I look at the sub sections (e.g. mobile or broadband) to make sure nothing unexpected or that it is as expected. For tolls I might glance at numbers to satisfy myself they are known/ expected. If there are changes (including pricing) I will look further to satisfy myself I understand it all and it seems right."

"I usually look at total charges. If I notice any changes in them, then I go for the individual charges. I usually don't glance at the history of calls or texts."

BILL FOCUS

Some (but not all consumers) will look at a range of other types of information.

More time is spent (albeit minimal) on mobile bills rather than broadband bills.

Additional information reviewed varies by consumer but can include:

› Data usage – trends over certain days (few).

› Itemised calculations to check for any duplications (very few).

› Toll numbers to make sure they recognise them, if they are available – not all are shown on bills.

› How much is left to pay for any hardware, (most where relevant). There is a preference for information that lets the consumer know which of how many payments this is i.e. how many payments are left.

› The pricing plan (few – if there's any information there, but little time is spent).

› That there are no outstanding charges (most) – most consumers like seeing 'previous, current, amount owed'.

› Breakdown of types of call -tolls, mobiles etc, – this is polarised, some do and some don't (because they are on unlimited plans), but some prefer to look anyway, even with unlimited.

Most don't look at:

› The billing period – as they never thought to check this.

CONSUMER CONFIDENCE IN BILLS

Consumers are *generally* confident overall that their telco bills are correctly calculated.

How confident, overall, are you that your telco bills are correctly calculated?

Scale 1 (not at all confident), 10 (very confident)

| 19% | 29% | 29% | 24% |

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Not at all confident

Very confident

53% score of 9 or 10

48% score of 7 or 8
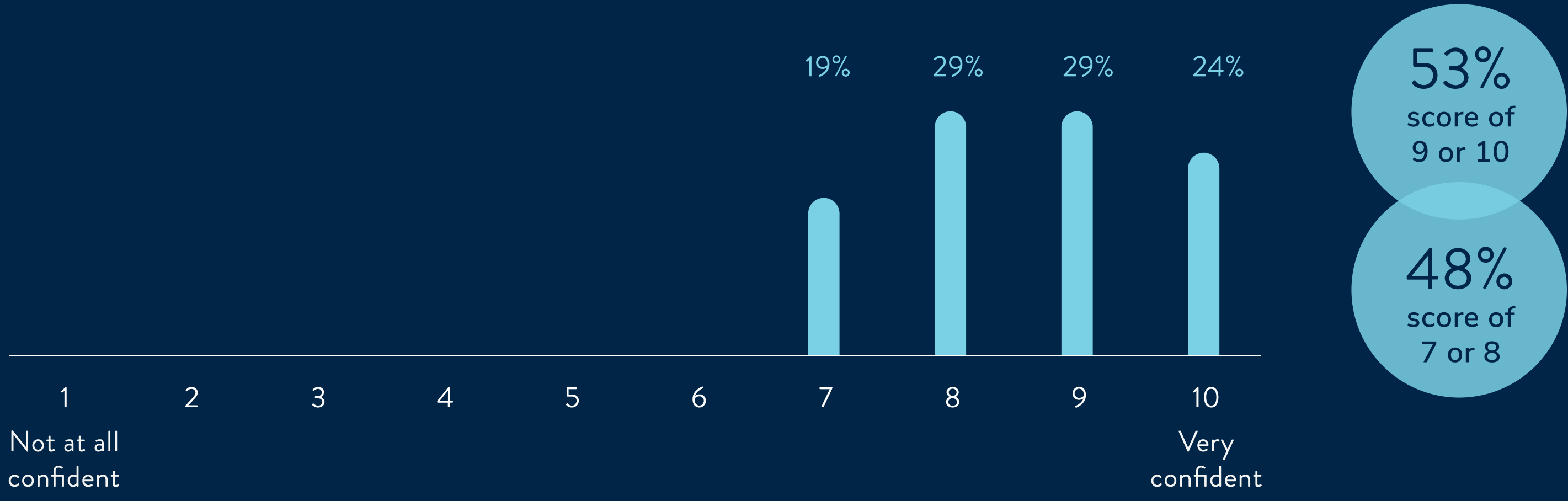
Base: n=21 (small sample size)

CONSUMER CONFIDENCE IN BILLS

Consumers gave different confidence ratings for several reasons, but for some there is an element of trust involved.

Reasons for scores of 7:

> Easier if visually presented.

> Have had errors in the past.

> Only skim over details.

_ *"I think we are good at skimming over the fine details and just tend to look at our name and the amount due."*

_ *"Sometimes I have been overcharged, and if I did not recognise this it would not have been rectified on their behalf."*

_ *"I have had a [provider] mistake in a bill which they corrected."*

Reasons for scores of 8:

> Bills in expected range.

> Assume it's correct/there is a level of trust.

_ *"I assume that my provider has accurate information on my bills and usage, and I have never had any problems or errors on my bill."*

_ *"A lot of bill is fixed price so can be confident on that. If price changes generally the dates are split out to show movements and gain confidence. Variable fees comes down to usage which can be harder. A certain level of trust comes in."*

Reasons for scores of 9:

> Place trust in provider.

> I pre-pay, so feel I have control.

> Monthly charge is fixed, amounts are consistent.

_ *"I place trust in my provider, I do glance and have a check each month, but unless it was seriously too expensive I wouldn't check."*

_ *"I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of our monthly bill as it's consistent."*

_ *"I usually check from time to time to see if I am over charged and in almost all occasions, it is fine."*

Reasons for scores of 10:

> The monthly charge is fixed.

> I review my bill and check the detail.

_ *"The way the items on the bill are itemised. [Provider] also do a good job of explaining how pro-rata pricing works."*

_ *"I always check every charge and if there is any issues I enquire with the provider for clarification."*

_ *"I know the charges which I am being charged with. This helps in knowing the correctness of the bill."*

AREAS OF CONFUSION

Despite 'general' confidence in the final amount, there are still some charges/items that can cause confusion.

There were two key themes in terms of what can be confusing:

1. Awareness and understanding of **roaming/ overseas** charges was an issue (just under half of consumers had been caught out at some stage).

2. Words or phrases without any detail.

Specific comments were around the following:

> Difficulty in deciphering 'final bills' e.g. if changing providers – mainly around billing cycles and dates of billing vs calendar months.

> "CoF" – what does this mean?

> "Subscribed" services – what are these?

> "Price adjustment" – these are often small e.g. 86c and **not questioned**.

> Charges just labelled "other" – also small e.g. 17c and **unlikely to be questioned**.

> "MMS" charges.

> "Premium services" e.g. what is included in this?

> Association discount.

> Telecommunications Development (TDL) information – feels irrelevant.

GENERAL MARKET UNDERSTANDING

2.4 FEEDBACK ON BILLING EXAMPLES

02

BILLING EXAMPLE 1

Name
Address 1
Address 2

Questions about your bill Go to www.company.co.nz/bill

Your account name:
Mobile Account
Your account number: 000000000

Your phone numbers:
000 000 0000   000 000 0000

This is a tax invoice and debit/credit note

COPY-ONLY

Your bill - 22 February 2023

Previous charges	Current charges	The total you need to pay is:

$0.00 **+** $193.62 **=** $193.62

We'll process a direct debit of **$193.62** on **09.03.23** ...less any payments and account credits applied after this bill was created). Please contact us at least two days before that date if you need to change the amount.

Previous charges
Previous balance	$193.32
Payment received 07 Feb - thank you	-$193.32
Previous charges are	**$0.00**

Current charges
Monthly Charges	$193.32
Usage (eg. Calls, Data, Text)	$0.30
Current charges are	**$193.62**

The total you need to pay is **$193.62**
(This invoice includes GST of $17.65)

TELAC59293439796019362

Company New Zealand Trading Ltd Private Bag 92028 Auckland 1142 GST number: 50-852-911

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EASY WAYS TO PAY YOUR BILL
MOBILE APP
Details

DIRECT DEBIT
Details

INTERNET OF MOBILE BANKING
Details

CREDIT, DEBIT CARD OF POLI PAY
Details

NEW ZEALAND POST
Take this payment slip into any Post Shop and pay over the counter. Please note the Post Shop charge a small over the counter fee to process each invoice.

REMEMBER
If you forget to pay by the due date, we may charge a late payment fee - company.co.nz/late payment.
For more information on the different ways to pay go to company.co.nz/waystopay. Terms and conditions apply to all Company products and services. You can get copies at company.co.nz/terms. We welcome feedback. If you have a complaint, please contact us at company.co.nz/complaints. If we cannot resolve your complaint, you can contact Telecommunication Dispute Resolution for independent consideration of the matter at tdr.org.nz

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Your account name: Mobile Account
Your account number: 000000000
Bill date: 22 February 2023

COPY-ONLY

Monthly Charges

The Telecommunications Development Levy (TDL) supports an industry-wide fund, set by the Government, used to invest in better Broadband and Mobile networks and other services across New Zealand. The plan price for each of your eligible Broadband and Pay Monthly Mobile lines below includes a contribution towards this development fund.

Description	Date(s)	Amount (incl. GST)
000 000 0000		
$100 Endless Plan	18.02.23 - 17.03.23	$100.00
Spotify Premium	12.02.23 - 11.03.23	$14.98
Spotify Premium Discount	12.02.23 - 11.03.23	-$14.98
Instalment 10 of 36 - iPhone 13Pro Max 256	21.02.23	$58.33
	Subtotal for 000 000 0000	**$158.33**
000 000 0000		
$35 Endless Companion Plan	18.02.23 - 17.03.23	$34.99
	Subtotal for 000 000 0000	**$34.99**

Total for Monthly Charges		**$193.32**

30 days' notice of cancellation of services is required. You can elect to stop the services earlier, but charges still apply during the 30 day notice period. Early termination fees may also apply if you terminate before the end of any fixed term. Any adjustments (money owed or owing) will show in your final bill. To understand billing go to company.co.nz/bill

For more information on Company Terms & Conditions you can get copies at company.co.nz/terms

Usage (eg. Calls, Data, Text)

All charges related to usage that aren't part of your monthly plan(s).

Date	Time	Call length/Data	Number called	Destination of call	Type	Rate code	Amount (incl. GST)
000 000 0000							
			5 included national mobile calls				$0.00
			1 International Text				$0.30
			Subtotal for 000 000 0000				**$0.30**

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BILL EXAMPLE 1: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

STRENGTHS

Visibility of key information:

› The total amount due is very clear. **Visual clarity** through the use of 'feature' circles/design as part of the billing summary.

› Inclusion of easy to read previous, current, amount owed.

› Name and address is clearly visible.

› Able to locate the account number quickly.

› Stating when and how the payment will be made.

Detailed information:

› The way current charges are broken down (calls, data, texts).

Design:

› Use of bold font e.g. for payment dates, total amount owing etc.

› Use of feature/stand out design elements (circles).

Separate/clear presentation of options:

› Options if you 'forget to pay' your bills and how to pay your bills.

› Clear instructions on cancellations of service (once you find them).

WEAKNESSES

› Whilst the notice to terminate/cancellation of fees information is clear, there is a sense that they are somewhat hidden on the statement.

› There is confusion over the plan names but note that this may be clear if this is **your** plan.

› There are a lot of **different dates** on this bill that are confusing/too many different dates (unclear what the billing period is).
  _ *"Why don't the date periods line up??? They start on different days."*

› The breakdown of usage does not provide enough details – what, to who, when.

› No contact details for enquiries.

› Additional calculations shown on the bill when the net result is zero can be confusing – feels like an internal accounting calculation.
  _ *"It's silly and cluttering having an in and out with the $. If it has to have a line – just leave it at Spotify with no $$ amount beside it."*

BILLING EXAMPLE 2

Tax invoice

Account no.	Invoice no.	Invoice date
000000	623437804	12 Feb 23

Company New Zealand Limited
Address
Auckland 0622
New Zealand

GST reg no: 70 710 455

Name
Address 1
Address 1

Your bill

13 Jan 23 - 12 Feb 23   📱 000 000 0000

Last month
| 12 Jan 23 Previous account balance | $35.36 |
| 28 Jan 23 Payment - Thank you | $35.36 cr |

This month
Plan charges
Pricing plan	$20.86
Subscribed services	$8.69
Other (e.g. Txt-A-Park, Fees)	$0.86

Usage charges
| TXT | $0.34 |

Total before GST	**$30.75**
GST @ Standard Rate	$4.61
Current month's charges	**$35.36**

Invoice total **due 01 Mar 23**   **$35.36**

It's time to get rewarded!

Want access to exclusive offers and experiences, just for being with us? Enjoy early access to NZ's best concerts and events, discounted movie tickets, 2-for-1 offers, competitions and money-can't-buy experiences — all thanks to our partners.

There's something for everyone, so how will you get rewarded?

Manage your account the easy way with the app

Check out how much data you're using, pay your bill, buy Add-ons or get your Company Rewards, all from the app

Download it now at company.co.nz/app

If you have already received this tax invoice either by mail or electronically it becomes a copy of the tax invoice for the purposes of the Goods and Services Tax Act 1985. Copy tax invoices can be used for claiming input tax credits, however an input tax credit can only be claimed once in relation to this telecommunication service.

| **To pay by Direct Debit** company.co.nz/dd-mobile | To pay by internet banking simply search for "**Company**" in your bank's website or app, or use: **Account:** 02-0248-0228009-24 **Particulars:** Name **Code:** 465895780 **Reference:** OOOOOOOOO | **To pay by Credit Card** company.co.nz/pay | **To pay in store** BELAC465895780000003536 |

We welcome customer feedback. If you have a complaint please contact us on 000 from your mobile or 0000 000 000 to any other phone, or email us at company.co.nz/complaint If we cannot resolve your complaint, you can contact Telecommunication Dispute Resolution for free and independent consideration of the matter on 0800 00 00 00 or at www.tdr.org.nz.

‖⁹6 2 3 4 3 7 8 0 4‖‖⁴4 6 5 8 9 5 7 8 0 3   ‖⁸8 7 8

Itemisation
Current charges summary

000 000 0000

Service	Date	Qty	Mins/MB used	Amount	Sub total
Your pricing plan					
Advantage - SIMO	13 Feb - 12 Mar	1		$42.60	
$25 Exclusive Discount	13 Feb - 12 Mar	1		$21.74 cr	$20.86
Subscribed services					
Social Pass Monthly	13 Feb - 12 Mar	1		$8.69	$8.69
Other					
Price Adjustment	13 Feb	1		$0.86	$0.86

Your usage   To see your detailed usage, head to company.co.nz/myaccount

TXT
| Other (Incl TXT voting, content - head to www.company.co.nz/using-myaccount) | - 12 Feb | 2 | | $0.34 | $0.34 |

| Plan & usage charges | $30.75 |
| GST @ Standard Rate | $4.61 |

| **Total current month's charges** | **$35.36** |

To see everything that's included in your plan and to keep on top of what you've been using, head to company.co.nz/myaccount

BILL EXAMPLE 2: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

STRENGTHS

Visibility of key information:

› Clearly shows last month and that payment was made – useful to see last month compared to this month, to see if any significant variation.

› The dates are more clear/more straightforward than Bill #1.

Detailed information:

› The breakdown of costs is easy to read.

› Discounts are itemised.

Design:

› The layout of the billing information is less wordy/less cluttered and easier to read.

› Good use of headings, good use of font size for amount owed.

Separate/clear presentation of options:

› Methods of payment clearly shown.

› Clear information regarding the availability of the app.

› Easy to see 'rewards' information – eye catching, encourages a look.

WEAKNESSES

› The advertising is too large relative to the important billing information – can detract.

_ *"Too large takes up too much room, so the rest of the bill is not as easy to read."*

_ *"This could be smaller and less busy. It makes the whole page messy, crowded and hard to focus on your bill details."*

_ *"This is really distracting to me personally. I would prefer these type of promotions in a separate email."*

› Preference for actual usage to be on the bill – not only on the app (not everyone is comfortable with apps).

_ *"Fairly easy to read, set out well, but I would get frustrated having to look up actual usage on the app"*

_ *"This is fine for those who are tech savvy, and happy to look up their usage, but puts more work on the client to make an effort to check their usage. I would either ignore, or get frustrated that it isn't there".*

› No information about which stores will accept payment.

› Unsure what subscriber services, price adjustment actually means.

› "Other" just uses examples in brackets but does not provide actual usage for this consumer.

BILLING EXAMPLE 3

Here's your tax invoice

Name

Address 1
Address 2

Find out how to update these details

Account Number
00000000

Billing Profile
1-Z5YFST1

Invoice Number
B1-372750561

Invoice date
16 Feb 2023

Billing Period
17 Jan 2023 - 16 Feb 2023

Last month's balance

17 Jan 2023 - Previous bill balance	$60.00	
Payment - Thanks	$61.05	Credit
Total balance carried forward	**$1.05**	**Credit**

Charges for this month

Incl. GST

Your plans and recurring charges	$60.00
Your usage charges	$0.50
Your premium services and content charges	$0.00
	$60.50

Adjustments for this month

Incl. GST

Your debits	$1.05
	$1.05

Your total charges for this month	**$61.55**
This includes GST of $8.03	

Your total amount owing — **$60.50**

Payment is due on 28 Feb 2023. Please ensure you pay by then to avoid a $9.95 late payment fee.

PAY THIS NOW

You've chosen to pay your bill automatically by Credit Card

Any amount outstanding plus a card payment fee of 1.75% will be paid on 28 Feb 2023 by Credit Card, which means you don't need to do anything with this bill. Easy!

Want to pay another way?

If you don't want to pay by Credit Card you'll need to choose another way to pay by 27 Feb 2023.

YOUR USAGE

WAYS TO PAY

YOUR BILL EXPLAINED

CONTACT US

Here's a bit more detail

Name is on a: **$60 Carryover Plan** on **000 0000000**

PLAN	MINUTES	TEXTS	DATA
$60 Carryover Plan	**UNLIMITED* CALLS** to NZ & Aussie	**UNLIMITED* TEXT** to NZ & Aussie	**15GB** NZ Carryover Data

See usage in detail

Account number
00000000

Billing Profile
1-Z5YFST1

Phone number
0000000000

Billing period
17 Jan 2023 - 16 Feb 2023

Plans and recurring charges

Pricing plan	Billing Period	Detail	Charge
$60 Carryover Plan	17/01/2023 - 16/02/2023		$60.00
Total plan and recurring charges			**$60.00**

Usage (Incl GST)

Calls	Calls made	Mins charged	Charge
Calls to NZ landlines	7	29	$0.00
Calls to other mobile networks	10	28	$0.00
Calls to voicemail	1		$0.00
Free calls	1		$0.00

Texts		Quantity	Charge
International texts		4	$0.00
Picture messages		1	$0.50
Texts to other mobile networks		18	$0.00

Data		Quantity	Charge
Data		9.13 GB	$0.00

Premium services and content

	Quantity	Charge
Premium SMS	18	$0.00
Total usage (Incl. GST)		**$0.50**

Total charges for this month	**$60.50**

Here's a summary

Payments

Payment date	Amount	
26 Jan 2023	$61.05	Credit
Total payments received since last bill	**$61.05**	**Credit**

Adjustments Summary

Debit adjustments	Quantity	Adjustment
Card Payment Fee	1	$1.05
Your current month's debits		**$1.05**

BILL EXAMPLE 3: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

STRENGTHS

Visibility of key information:

› Easy to see last months, this months – good use of larger headings.

› Total amount owing is large and bolded – easy to see.

_ *"This is great. The amount owing is in bold and big font.
I don't find this bill to busy on this first page."*

Detailed information:

› Good breakdown of types of calls made/data usage.

Design:

› Overall easier to read than Bill # 1 & # 2.

› Use of quick buttons is helpful.

_ *"Like the quick buttons rather than having to open an app and
navigate around to what I want to see."*

Separate/clear presentation of options:

› Clearly explains payment information (method).

› Clearly shows what's included in the plan.

_ *"This is a great reminder of what the plan you are on includes."*

WEAKNESSES

› Price adjustment wording – not clear what this is.

› Payment due date could be larger.

› What is a "recurring charge"?

› What is "premium service"?

› The presentation of the credit card fee is confusing and does not say credit card fee on the first page.

› Would like information e.g. who was the premium text to and when?

› Use of the wording "your debits" is confusing.

BILLING EXAMPLE 4
A BUNDLED BILL

Page 1 of 3

Freephone enquiries: 0800 00 00 00
Webchat: ask.company.co.nz
7.30am – 6.30pm Mon to Fri
Account balance: 0800 720 022

COPY ONLY

Your Account No: 000000000

Name
Address 1
Address 1

Tax Invoice Date: 08 Mar 2023
Tax Invoice No: 5051357437
Company Ltd trading as Company GST
No: 71-048-870

Hi, here's your bill, it's due on **27 Mar 2023** thank you

Total due
Payment is due on 27 Mar 2023… $397.01

Previous account
Previous balance $462.45
Payments and credits received $462.45CR
Balance brought forward.................................$0.00

This account

Electricity $213.21

Gas $69.32

Phone and Internet $114.48
Plans and usage

Your discounts
Your discounts are shown below

	This account	To date
Plan Name	$9.32	$1169.55
Total	$9.32	$1169.55

Direct Debit

Thank you for choosing to pay by Direct Debit.

The total due of $397.01*, less any payments received since the date of this invoice, will be deducted on 27 Mar 2023.

To make any changes to this, please let us know at least 2 days before the due date.

Any queries, please call us on **0800 00 00 00** before 27 Mar 2023.

Payments by credit card and debit card will incur a 0.8% credit card fee.

Account Name: Company
Account Number: 01-1839-0329105-01

Bill Date: 08 Mar 2023   GST No: 71-048-870
Tax Invoice No: 5051357437
Account No: 000000000

Page 2 of 3

Your bill details

COPY ONLY

Previous account

Payment and credits

Date	Description	Amount
	Amount from previous account	$462.45
27 Feb 2023	Direct Debit Bank Variable	$462.45CR
Balance brought forward		$0.00

Electricity charges - Actual

Supplied to: ADDRESS
ICP Number: 020B626204LCB6C
Period from: 27/01/2023 to 24/02/2023   Your next approximate read date: 23/03/2023

Description	Meter number	Read type	Previous reading	Current reading	Mult	Units	Unit price	Total
	RD112I02681	Actual	140025	140756	1.00			
24 Hour						731 kWh	18.03c	$131.90
Fixed Charge						29 Days	200.00c	$58.00
Electricity Market Fee - No Discount						731 kWh	0.30c	$2.19
Friends Extra Discount								$6.59CR
						Subtotal Electricity Charges		$185.42
						GST		$215.21

Total electricity charges

Gas charges - Estimate

Supplied to: ADDRESS
ICP Number: 0001438275QTF2C
Period from: 26/01/2023 to 23/02/2023   Your next approximate read date: 27/03/2023

Description	Meter number	Read type	Previous reading	Current reading	Mult	Units	Unit price	Total
Gas	03AG0552	Estimate	15591	15620	11.02			
						320 kWh	9.43c	$30.10
Dual Fuel Discount								$8.39CR
Fixed Charge						29 Days	124.00c	$35.96
Friends Extra Discount								$4.55CR
						Subtotal Gas Charges		$60.28
						GST		$69.32

Total gas charges

Average Daily Units

Electricity: Your total usage for the last 365 days is 10404 units (kWh).

Average Daily Units

Gas: Your total usage for the last 365 days is 7334 units (kWh).

We are proud of our service and strive to get it right. If you have any concerns please call us on 0800 00 00 00 or contact us at www.company.co.nz/contact and let us work with you, to put it right, at no cost. In the unlikely event we can't resolve your complaint, for free and independent advice, please contact:
- Utilities Disputes Ltd regarding your electricity or gas on 0800 22 33 40 or www.utilitiesdisputes.co.nz
- Telecommunication Dispute Resolution regarding your phone or internet on 0508 98 98 or www.tdr.org.nz
- Powerswitch is a free and independent energy price comparison website www.powerswitch.org.nz

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Bill Date: 08 Mar 2023   GST No: 71-048-870
Tax Invoice No: 5051357437
Account No: 000000000

Page 3 of 3

Your bill details - *continued*

COPY ONLY

Phone & Internet charges

Phone number: 000000000
Period from: 01 Feb 2023 to 28 Feb 2023

Description	Service	Charging period	Total
Call Charges		01 Feb 2023 to 28 Feb 2023	
Unlimited FibreMax Monthly Charge		01 Mar 2023 to 31 Mar 2023	
		Subtotal charges	
		GST	

Total charges $114.48

Total due $397.01

Total GST for this invoice $51.78

Calling details

Phone number: 000000000

Supplied to:
Period from: 01 Feb 2023 to 28 Feb 2023

Mobile Calls

Date	Time	Call type	Place called	Number	Min : Sec	Call discount	Total
07 Feb 2023	5:09 pm	Anytime	000 Mobile	000000000	0:00:24	$0.00 CR	

Your total calls after discount

BILL EXAMPLE 4 (BUNDLED ENERGY AND TELCO): WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

STRENGTHS

Visibility of key information:

› The breakdown between electricity, gas and telco is clear (3 simple lines with a cost for each).

› The due date is very clear.

› The billing period is clearly shown.

Detailed information:

› Some people like the fact that there is not too much detail (for telco).

Design:

› Good visual presentation of usage but note this is for energy only – not telco.

　_ *"Love these graphs you can see usage at a glance I have this on my power and internet bills and I use the power graph constantly to observe power usage."*

› Good use of bold fonts.

　_ *"Easy to see due to use of bold print, colour, and size of fonts what type of payment plan is in place, or how to pay."*

Separate/clear presentation of options:

› Payment information/method is clear.

WEAKNESSES

› Phone and internet is combined on this bill as one charge, could be separate.

　_ *"I don't like that they've combined internet and phone here, yet they've still got the phone table below. I believe these should just be separate sections."*

› The bill is very cluttered, there is a lot of information.

　_ *"Wow this is really a lot of information all jammed into one place."*

　_ *"Because there are three pages my first impression is that there is an overwhelming amount of information for me to look at and try and understand"*

› Feels like there is duplicated information.

› Some information is confusing.

　_ *"It isn't really clear that the Fibre charge is paid in advance and the call charges are paid in arrears."*

› The energy information dominates, the telco information is secondary – the eye is drawn to energy and may mean less attention given to telco.

GENERAL MARKET UNDERSTANDING

2.5 BILLING – OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

02

LEVEL OF USAGE INFORMATION

There is variation across suppliers in the level of information provided on bills about mobile usage.

Consumers generally fell into three key categories:

1. Those that are on unlimited plans and are not concerned about usage information.

   _ *"I get the details in numeric form. It doesn't matter much too me as I am on unlimited data"*

   _ *"Both my broadband and mobile plans have unlimited data, text and calls so don't track usage at all".*

2. Those that are on unlimited plans but would be interested in more usage information and are unsure whether this information is available on the app.

3. Those that are on unlimited plans and value the level of usage information they get, either on the bill or via the app.

Overall, many consumers see value in a better, more detailed breakdown of their mobile usage which may help them to make decisions about their plans and suppliers. While this appears to be available via apps, not all consumers know this (or use apps).

Some consumers feel that suppliers should be more proactive in assessing usage but in reality, empowering consumers to better understand usage data and what it means may be beneficial.

_ *"My telco bill is missing information on the breakdown of each item description and when the usage is for each charge. More information with detailed dates and amount used will be helpful for me to track my usage."*

_ *"My telco bill doesn't graph usage but if it did that might be helpful to see where there was a usage spike and get me to think about how I am using the services i.e. I recently went to Australia and was surprised to see some of the charges that were applied, will be looking into international fees before my next trip to avoid unnecessary spending."*

_ *"I am with [provider] and I am able to actively see how much data I have used and how many days I have left in the monthly cycle. This helps me see if I am using my data prior to it renewing, although it doesn't really bother me as I have unlimited data, which is great because I use over 5GB a month. I also have unlimited texts and phone calls."*

_ *"Neither of my telco bills provide any data on my usage. In the case of my broadband it is unlimited so not too useful anyway. For my mobile I can check it through their website easily enough. Could be useful having a monthly usage total of mobile data as it may affect what plan I go on in the future."*

ROAMING

Roaming charges have been an area of confusion across forum participants.

A number of consumers have been caught out with roaming charges, usually not more than once, however!

Consumers need to be better informed about the risk of increased charges as a result of roaming and international travel.

_ *"I recently travelled and saw I was charged roaming rates which I couldn't quite understand as I was connected to wifi."*

_ *"I don't tend to think overly about my usual usage month to month but roaming rates and packages are a big thing for me and my business – different countries have different roaming rates. I have a standard package that I have to buy each month for me to make use of contacts in the US and UK, if I don't have that package on my plan then my bill is way higher than what it should be (usually by a few hundred)."*

_ *"In the past (pre-Covid) when I travelled, I usually queried certain roaming charges as they often seemed excessive. That does not happen any more as I have not travelled."*

_ *"When I did travel to Australia I did find the roaming confusing especially with the 24hrs period running from first call/text (and time zones)."*

_ *"The only charges on my bill that I've queried have been around roaming and different charges for different regions that I may not have known about while being overseas."*

KEY FINDINGS

1. Keep the first page simple and uncluttered – what was charged and paid last month, what are current charges, how much is owed and when and how it is to be paid.
   › Focus on the core information on the first page. Don't let advertising detract (placement/size of advertising).

2. Include a second page with detail and/or direct consumers to the app where they can assess any additional charges or general usage information. Include data usage breakdown here.

3. Use headings, colour and bold font, larger font for key information, graphics/visuals. Reduce clutter.

4. Ensure dates for billing period are clear and straightforward to understand.

5. Avoid what seem like internal calculations when the net result does not change e.g. when they debit $x and then credit it straight back.

6. Be clear and consistent on charges e.g. if it's a credit card fee, say "credit card fee", what is the price adjustment for? What is a recurring charge? etc.

7. Include a brief summary of plan inclusions.

8. Avoid jargon, use plain language.

9. Ensure transparency of charges. Avoid 'catch-all' descriptors e.g. other, price adjustment.

10. When a bill is bundled with energy, the energy component dominates, and the telco components get lost. Possibly consider alternative layouts, sections.

11. Ensure consumers are aware of late payment fees, cancellation notice periods and fees etc.

12. Consider how to communicate roaming charges.

_ *"I preferred the one that showed the usage as a graph [NB: this was energy]. Not sure I would use it, but it could be useful for customers. I also liked the payment options in the boxes as it was far easier to read."*

_ *"Layout is very important. Start with summary, then on subsequent pages go into more detail. Make sure everything is split into logical sections, and disjointed text isn't scattered on the page borders."*

_ *"[Bundled bill] is the hardest because there were too many pages and too much information in too many formats."*

_ *"I prefer concise and to the point on the first page, great use of differing colour, font size, highlighting and bold effects to see and understand what the total charges were, as well as a breakdown of what they were for. The payment portion at the bottom was good as it said straight away about the direct debit, but then had details of how to pay for those customers who didn't do DD."*

_ *"Quite often I don't bother to look at the pages beyond the first. It might therefore be a good idea to have all the important info on the first page (total amount, due date, your method of payment) with the breakdowns on subsequent pages."*

MINORITY CONSUMER UNDERSTANDING

3.1 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

03

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. The overall findings from the minority consumer groups (seniors 65+, lower socioeconomic status (lower SES), Māori and Pasifika) were **generally in line** with the findings from the general market consumer research in that:

   › Bills are received monthly, and also paid monthly via a range of different payment options, direct debit, automatic payment, manual payment etc.

   › They are satisfied overall with their current payment processes.

   › Most are in agreement that bills should provide simple summary information (first page) and detail (second page) for those that **want** the detail.

   › Most agree that excessive advertising, where it detracts from the billing information, should be avoided.

   › Key areas of confusion were similar (e.g. use of jargon and ambiguous words), inconsistencies in different sections in the same bill when referring to the same information (e.g. credit card charges) and there were also issues raised with minority consumers about **roaming charges**.

2. Where there were **differences** between general market consumers and minority consumers they tended to be around:

   › Seniors being more likely to check individual amounts on their bill more often.

   › Mixed awareness across seniors about the discounts they are entitled to (e.g. Gold Card etc.).

   › Lower SES consumers more likely to make their payments manually (for financial control purposes).

   › Lower SES consumers being more likely to check itemised amounts on the bill, even where the variation was small compared to last month.

3. Māori and Pasifika consumers were **overall** in line with general market consumers in terms of their attitudes towards, and experiences of telco bills.

CONSUMERS (GENERAL MARKET AND MINORITY) HAVE A LOW INVOLVEMENT RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR TELCO BILL

The key driver behind this is the fact that most consumers are on 'unlimited' plans or fixed charges (broadband).

› While some consumers continue to prefer to at least glance over their bill and others prefer having a break-down of usage (even where the charge is zero), many are comfortable that having purchased an unlimited plan they are 'covered' as far as their telco bills go and generally do not need to worry.

› For this reason, telco bills, in the context of all of the other bills consumers may receive, are relatively low down on their radar.

› Most gave a score of 10 out of 10 for having confidence that their bills are accurate.

_ *"My bill is the same every month, but I'm really pedantic, if it was different I'd query it. I did initially go through my contract line by line."* (lower SES)

_ *"I am on an unlimited plan so I really don't care that much about the bill because I know what it's going to be each month."* (lower SES)

_ *"As far as my bills go, the phone bill is probably the one I think about less."* (Māori)

_ *"The internet bill we hardly look at because we know what it's going to be, it's a fixed charge, but the mobile bill … sometimes when I've got nothing to do I go in and look …but just to pass my time basically, not to scrounge, but just to see how many minutes I've got left."* (65+)

_ *"They are easy and straightforward to read, they give you a breakdown if you want it."* (65+)

_ *"It would make sense to look for people who are not on unlimited plans."* (65+)

EXPERIENCES WITH QUERIES

Most minority consumers consider it to be difficult to query an amount on their bill and so, if it's nominal, will not bother.

❯ Consumers believe that there is no easy way to query a bill.

❯ Most consumers still prefer to be able to talk to someone but accept that this is something that can be difficult (some said impossible) to do (and telcos as well as other sectors are moving away from this).

❯ Most bills will direct consumers online but not overtly for any 'queries'.

❯ This is part of the rationale for people simply not bothering to query a bill if the amount is 'only' a little bit different (the time it will take does not seem worth the effort).

❯ Consumers talked about online chat options but again expressed frustration that it can be difficult to resolve issues using these options.

❯ For larger amounts, they say they would invest the time.

❯ If there was clearer information about a specific webpage to go to query a bill, it may increase the likelihood that people will do so – however the level of skepticism about getting these things sorted is such that if the amount is low, they still may not bother.

_ "With [provider] I check it now because they do occasionally make the odd mistake so I do look at what they've got there, they do owe us credits for different things at different times. I pay by credit card but at my discretion, not on direct debit and maybe that's a security reason so they don't have my credit card on file and hackers take the organisation's information." (65+)

_ "At the end of the month I can't get my head around it ... this is the amount, this is the rebate ... unless it's excessively high [different] I just let it go through." (65+)

_ "We did have a bill at Christmas time where my partner bought a phone and they charged something on it, so we did have to query that, but most of the time we know what we're being charged for, sometimes they charge for a photo and it mounts up a bit, so they catch you like that." (lower SES)

_ "I was with [provider] and it was more than it should have been and so I'd go through and check and 9 times out of 10 it would be wrong, then you've got to contact them, then you've got to put a complaint in, then you've got to wait for them to fix it, it's a very tedious process." (65+)

MINORITY CONSUMER UNDERSTANDING

3.2 SENIOR 65+ CONSUMERS

03

SENIOR 65+ CONSUMERS
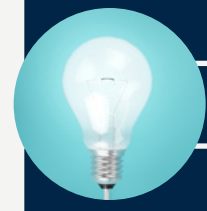
Most seniors (but not all) were more likely to check their bill if the final amount owed differed from their fixed amount, even by a very small amount.

› More seniors seemed more willing to put time into reading through the itemised amounts on their bill.

_ *"If I've got nothing to do I look at my bill."*

› Where the amount is different from what was expected they were more likely to investigate and in most instances were able to identify a picture (or similar reason) for any additional charge (even if they couldn't recall exactly what they sent and when; one was convinced he gets charged for emojis).

› Seniors often used words like 'I assume', 'I guess', 'I'm almost certain' when referring their bill and associated charges.

› Having unlimited plans has meant that seniors, like most other consumers, don't feel as much need to investigate some of the other detail such as (where provided) the number of calls made, tolls etc.

_ *"It doesn't change, little bits mainly for an image on my cell phone, I'm a little bit older as you can see so I get a deal with [provider] where I get $10 credit on my broadband because I've got both my cellphone and my broadband with them."*

_ *"They send phone numbers that we call, but they don't charge us for them so it really doesn't matter, you don't need to check them because the billing is zero for that."*

_ *"There's usually $1 in it each month, give or take what I've done."*

_ *"I open the PDF if I want to see the detail but most of the time I'm just looking at the scale of the bill and if it's just within a dollar I quite often don't bother to open the PDF but every now and again I do."*

_ *"[I look at it] just to see what they've charged me for. This one I've got here says text services, there's a couple of pictures."*

_ *"A quick skim to see if there's nothing what I call extraordinary and as soon as I see something that's [not right] then I will work the numbers back to see where they've tripped up."*

_ *"If I've signed for a $30 deal and its $30.51, I'll look at that and go 'why is it $30.51?', and it's normally an image file which I've sent to someone, so I go in and check that."*

SENIOR 65+ CONSUMERS SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

There were some differences specific to seniors 65+.

› There was mixed awareness of the deals/discounts available e.g. as seniors/ Gold Card holders etc.

› Most were unsure if all telco providers offered seniors discounts, those that received them were aware of the fact.

› There was mixed awareness of receiving discounts for service bundles with the same company – some were aware, others not.

› They were more aware overall of the risk of scams related to their mobile bills – and this did have some bearing on the extent to which they may look at itemised amounts.

› They were more likely to save the bill to a folder (keep the paperwork).

› Like other segments they were also caught out by roaming charges.

_ "I got an amount that was on there for Northern Ireland and I've never rung Northern Ireland and I thought 'well that's odd' so I don't know if it was one of those weird calls that you're not supposed to reply to, so I just paid it, it was only $1 or $2, it wasn't a huge amount of money."

_ "You have to be aware of the scams."

_ "Lately I haven't been checking but a couple of times I've had a call to somewhere like Swaziland, but the amount of time trying to get through to their call centre is greater than the $1 charge. You can spend 2 hours trying to sort out a $1 amount, so it's not worth the effort [happens once or twice a year]."

SENIOR 65+ CONSUMERS

Would like to see on bills ...

› The plan summarised at the top of the invoice part of the document – it's usually somewhere else on the bill. Having this up-front provides an easy quick reference (confidence).

› Preferred order: Invoice, then detail summary, then other information.

› Warnings about roaming, international data charges.

› Consistent descriptions e.g. on one bill the credit card charge was referred to by three separate names/references.

› A more prominent date due and amount due – highlighted, larger.

› More prominent mention of late payment fees.

› Less advertising/smaller size (relative to the invoice information).

› Clarity on what is being adjusted under 'price adjustment'.

› Clarity on bills re: what 'text service' means.

"

_ *"It should say what plan you're on upfront."*

_ *"On my [provider] mobile bill they have the summary on the front page, the next page is some useful information [how to pay etc.] and if you start to scroll you'd think that was the end of the useful information, but underneath that there's all the detail. The useful information should be after the detail."*

_ *"They also label that $1.05 [credit card fee] as a $1.05 credit and so they give a credit first and then they debit it. That's the confusing bit, and then it comes up under 'adjustments', so they should just say it's a credit card charge on the bill."*

MINORITY CONSUMER UNDERSTANDING

3.3 LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS CONSUMERS

03

LOWER SES CONSUMERS HAD FEEDBACK CONSISTENT WITH GENERAL MARKET CONSUMERS

Most lower SES consumers had similar feedback/experiences to the general market consumers other than...

❯ More choosing to pay their bills manually, to control when and how much they paid.

❯ More (but not all) being more likely to investigate an additional charge, even if small (under $1). But note: not all will query this with their provider.

Other than these differences, lower SES consumers had consistent feedback regarding the layout and design of bills, and the presentation of information e.g.:

❯ Detail for those that want it (after the invoice page).

❯ Warnings about roaming charges.

❯ Clarification on some of the descriptions, such as price adjustment.

❯ An easier process to query a bill should they want to, including contact information on the bill.

_ *"I'm very well aware of my monthly amount and if it's different from that I will definitely have a good look and see what they're trying to charge me for and try and understand and I would be contacting them if it was more, but if it's less [small amount] I will leave it."*

_ *"For [provider] I do skim read it for at least a minute, give or take."*

_ *"I compare it with the month before and that's how I see if it's similar and not to worry about it."*

_ *"If it's a few dollars here or there it doesn't really matter to me, because it's usually when I've sent a picture, and there are other bills I get that are more important."*

_ *"If it went up a couple of dollars, then no. But if it was like $15 or $20 different then I'd look at it."*

_ *"Sometimes they're not very clear about the charges, like I went to Fiji and they're not very clear about the charges."*

MINORITY CONSUMER UNDERSTANDING

3.4 MĀORI AND PASIFIKA CONSUMERS

03

MĀORI AND PASIFIKA CONSUMERS ALSO HAD FEEDBACK CONSISTENT WITH GENERAL MARKET CONSUMERS

There were no real differences in the experiences of Māori and Pasifika relative to general market consumers.

Overall, Māori consumers however were slightly less likely to look at their bill in any detail, especially with fixed charges and unlimited plans, and were also less likely to look in any detail if there were any extra small charges.

Pasifika consumers were more similar to general market consumers. They would generally look over their bill and, for any differences compared to what was expected, would look at itemised amounts.

There were more people in these groups who shared bills with other family members and across households.

_ *"There's maybe the odd 50c here and there, but I don't look into too much."* (Māori)

_ *"I don't look at anything really, I pay the $75 and the $35 and that's it. So long as that's paid then I don't really worry about anything else. There might be pictures, I think you pay extra for a pixt or something like that ... but I assume I've sent it and then I know not to do it again, just use messenger instead."* (Māori)

_ *"One thing is with [provider] is that they don't really have a call line, so if you do have any issues you have to wait for a chat bot or something on their website and they're only open something like 9-4.30. If you've got any problems after that you've got no one to call."* (Māori)

_ *"Yes, even for 50c I will check what it is, every time."* (Pasifika)

_ *"I'm pretty happy with my bills, I know what to expect and I look at last months."* (Pasifika)

_ *"I think their current billing is far easier than what they used to do."* (Pasifika)

ESL CONSUMER UNDERSTANDING

04

ESL CONSUMERS

ESL consumers were mixed in their level of English and this impacted on how they were 'interacting' with their bills.

During the recruitment process we found that a larger proportion of ESL consumers, and especially those who were **newer** to New Zealand, were using pre-paid mobiles and were therefore not receiving any billing documentation. The main reason for this was financial control, for this reason we focused more on ESL participants on plans. Most had broadband, however:

Where there are lower levels of English, ESL consumers were likely to rely heavily on other (usually younger) family members to manage their bills.

Where this was the case, these younger family members (ESL but more English proficient) tended to be in-line with general market consumers e.g.:

› Their payment behaviour was via direct debit or automatic payment.

› Limited reviewing of billing detail, unless a larger variation, the amount is more than expected.

› Most did not discuss the bill with their 'older' family members.

› Their general comprehension of bills and billing information was good.

_ *"My parents don't really speak English so I help them with things like their phones and insurance and things like that. They pay the bill but I helped them set it up, but we don't really look at it too much because they have an unlimited plan."*

_ *"[Translated] my son pays the bill for me but he doesn't even read it and tells me not to worry about it."*

_ *"It's the same every month so unless it's different then I don't need to look at it."*

_ *"I'm fairly happy that the bill is correct, it's the same all the time."*

_ *"I've got unlimited broadband so it doesn't really matter."*

ESL CONSUMERS (HIGHER LEVELS OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY)

ESL consumers with higher levels of English proficiency were generally in-line with general market consumers.

These consumers were confident enough with their level of English and with their telco bill understanding.

Similar feedback was raised regarding jargon (price adjustments etc.).

Confusion over roaming charges was not considered an issue by ESL consumers.

Overall, the key issues raised by ESL consumers were to do with:

› **Signing up to plans** (but this is outside of the scope of this research) – this was more challenging for ESL consumers in terms of the interactions they need to have, the wording and jargon on plan documentation etc.

› **Querying bills** – there are issues around the use of chat bots, for some with lower levels of written English, and issues with verbal communication by phone. Perceptions of difficulty in getting their question across, frustration evident from the person on the other end of the line. This can limit their willingness to query bills.

_ *"The more hard part is the plan and getting the information I needed."*

_ *"My written English is not as strong so the only way I can ask about a bill it to do it by telephone which is not always easy to do and it takes a lot of time."*

_ *"My phone bill is ok but I spend a lot more time looking at my power bill."*

_ *"My plan is shared with my wife and the charges are quite fixed."*

_ *"I don't spend a lot of time looking at it because it is always the same, so I don't need to."*

_ *"I think I understand it all ok, it is pretty straightforward for me."*

VISION IMPAIRED CONSUMER UNDERSTANDING

05

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

Some vision impaired consumers defer the management of household bills including telco) to a sighted person (e.g. a spouse) and their experience differed greatly to those who manage alone.

These vision impaired consumers were more likely to express satisfaction with the format and content of their telco bills, and any telco related issues are experienced by the sighted person in much the same way as those identified as part of the general market consumer understanding.

Vision impaired consumers (in this context) do on occasion 'view' their bill using a range of adaptive technology – screen readers, magnification technology – but for the most part do not spend much time reviewing.

Other behaviours are similar to general market consumers e.g.:

› Use of direct debits or automatic payments, bills kept (as emails).

› Fixed price for broadband, so limited reviewing of these bills.

› Unlimited mobile plans, so no perceived need to review.

› Limited reviewing or querying unless the bill is over a certain threshold. Otherwise, behaviours are in line with what we have already heard.

_ *"My wife is sighted so a lot of the time she deals with household bills."*

_ *"I use adaptive technology, it's called Jaws [screen reader], and most of the time it's pretty good but I am experienced with it so I know all the tricks to getting it to work properly … it's generally quite effective when you know how to use it, but sometimes different documents can be difficult to read, like if there are pictures or graphics or logos, it will just say 'graphic' so you don't know what it is."*

_ *"I just look at the amount due because it's the easiest thing to see."*

BILLING ISSUES

Vision impaired consumers who manage their own household bills expressed frustration over the format and layout of their telco bills.

These consumers were using a range of adaptive technology, depending on their level of vision – this included:

❯ Screen readers (Jaws – paid for, NVDA – open-source screen reader).

❯ Screen magnification software.

❯ Braille display – outputs what is on the screen into braille.

The ACCESSIBILITY of bills (bill content and information) was a MORE significant issue for vision impaired consumers than bill comprehension or understandability.

Despite some telco websites having 'help with accessibility' pages, most of these vision impaired consumers were not aware of this (other than one who worked in the blind low vision sector).

Some organisations do vision impaired usability tests of websites, but it appears that these are not conducted on bills, given that bills are the same for everyone.

_ *"Whoever created the system has not been aware of accessibility, they don't understand how it is perceived by someone with a screen reader or braille display. Bills do not work well on these things depending on how they are formatted, it can make it really messy to read."*

_ *"It's all on me, to use the systems I have available."*

_ *"They create a service for the majority, but they need to have a provision and plans in place for us."*

_ *"It's frustrating that the software is not always compatible with the bill, it can blur and jump around."*

_ *"I had a major problem also when I set up my wifi, they told me I had to set up my own modems but then they tell me to look to see whether the green light is on ..."*

_ *"It's so important to me as a customer. I need to be responsible for my bills but if I can't access them or read the information, I can't take action."*

_ *"They give you the usual recommendation [when called] of getting someone else to read it ... it's their go-to response."*

ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGY

None of the adaptive technology available was considered to work effectively with telco bills, as the current layout and format of telco bills is not entirely compatible.

Telco bills sent to vision impaired people are NO different to the bills received by all other consumers but what works for other consumers (in terms of layout, format) does not necessarily work for vision impaired consumers.

This can include:

› The use of headings and columns.

› The use of graphics.

› The colour contrasts (e.g. white writing on a blue background).

› The level of detail on one page (too much for some of the current adaptive technology to cope with). _ *"It's too squashed up."*

› The use of apps – small, difficult to read using adaptive technology.

› The use of icon for buttons (arrows to go forward, press here to … etc.).

› The use of chat bots to query bills – there is a preference for phone contact or physical in-store interactions.

› Difficulty distinguishing between services on bundled bills.

_ *"If the amount I am billed is what I expect, then that's fine, but if it's a higher amount than expected you cannot easily read the detail, so you need to make an effort to physically phone them."*

_ *"The screen reader works on the website but if it's full of graphics and pictures then it makes it difficult. A lot of the buttons are created as graphics so it doesn't work."*

_ *"I have told [provider] this several times that you can't read the bill with the screen reader."*

_ *"The simpler the better because for us there is an extra layer of translation."*

_ *"A lot of deaf-blind people rely heavily on that braille output [screen readers don't work for deaf-blind people]."*

_ *"It's the way the bills are formatted, they're in a table-type format and a screen reader reads left to right, so it will read headings and then the next line and you need to work out which bit of information is under which heading … it's difficult to know what you're reading."*

BILLS FOR THE VISION IMPAIRED – KEY NEEDS
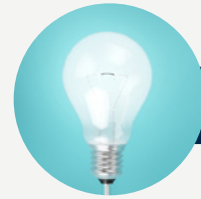
Vision impaired consumers have specific billing-related needs.

> Larger font sizes, where the person has some level of vision. The written content on bills is very small.

> Bills that have less (rather than more) information on each page – the more information, the less likely adaptive technology will work adequately.

> An easy-reader option (easy reader technology) – if possible.

> A DDI for vision impaired people – online queries can be challenging.

> Limited use of icons, bubbles, graphics – these do not translate well (or at all) when using adaptive technology.

> Thought given to colour contrasts – especially for apps.

> More testing of usability from a vision impaired perspective – while this may happen with telco websites, it does not happen with bills.

_ *"App displays do not do proper labelling behind the scenes [icons etc.] … so the screen reader will say 'maybe it's this' or will just call it a button, so if I press it I don't really know what I'm pressing – have I just paid something …"*

_ *"It's even worse for older blind people who struggle with the technology as well."*

_ *"If I call them it can take ages to get through to the right person and then they won't give me the information, I can usually get to the bottom of it [querying an amount] but it takes so much time. I have even had to go to the telecommunications resolution dispute service … which is good because I get a name and direct dial [at the telco] to deal with, it takes the stress out if it."*

_ *"Bills are challenging to read as PDFs. The print is small, the contrast of information [colours] is not that great, the writing doesn't stand out."*

OTHER FEEDBACK

Vision impaired consumers believe there should be guidelines and better advocacy regarding billing.

› There are forums where vision impaired people discuss their issues and telco bills do come up as part of these discussions, in terms of difficulties and frustrations experienced, e.g. "Blind Discuss".

› There is an advocacy group called "Blind Citizens of New Zealand", which may be useful to work alongside.

› There are online accessibility guidelines (produced by Government) but service providers don't appear to be required to follow these as they are guidelines only.

› There was feedback that suggests that it often comes down to the work or advocacy of individuals within organisations and then when these individuals move on, it gets dropped (i.e. back to square one). There is no concerted, organised approach.

"There is nothing in the legislation to say that the bills must be accessible for blind or low vision people."

"There are government guidelines but I don't think there is any requirement that suppliers need to follow these."

"They need to test all documents like this for usability by the vision impaired."

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS – A RECAP

1. This research has identified a number of opportunities to ensure that telco bills are easier for (most) consumers to read, understand and query. These include:

   › Keeping each page simple and uncluttered.

   › Providing more information/breakdowns for those that want it.

   › Using colour, graphics and highlighting to show key information (caveat – not for everyone).

   › Ensuring advertising doesn't detract.

   › Avoiding the use of ambiguous terms, different descriptions of the same charge on the same bill.

   › Avoiding the use of telco jargon.

   › Ensuring clarity of charges on bundled bills.

2. The overall findings from the minority consumer groups (seniors 65+, lower SES, Māori and Pasifika) as well as ESL consumers were generally in line with the findings from the general market consumer research.

3. The segment experiencing the most difficulty with their telco bills were vision impaired consumers.

4. Vision impaired consumers receive the same bill as everyone else but do not always have the same level of accessibility to the information on the bill. Accessibility rather than clarity and understanding is a key issue for these consumers.

   › While they are proactively using adaptive technology, that works ok in other contexts, it does not always work effectively with current billing formats.

   › These consumers also have different needs in terms of the presentation of information, e.g. while the use of colours, headings, graphics are useful for general market and other consumers, this is not the case for the vision impaired.

report

THANK YOU