

CONSUMER'S CORNER: SKYPE AND TELEFÓNICA from Mario Blancke

Not long ago, having an Internet connection in rural areas was almost a privilege. Initiatives such as GUADALINFO, an initiative of the Andalusian Government to encourage the spread of the internet, could only succeed if the technology was there to bring the internet to houses in outlying areas.

The **Ley de Impulso de la Sociedad de la Información 56/2007 de 28 de diciembre** (a law designed to boost the use of the Internet) obliged Telefónica to extend the offer of ADSL to cover all of the country by the end of 2008. However, as someone on one of the forums quipped: "Not even the cows in my village will believe that!" It has been the private companies offering internet by WiFi and WiMax that have provided the solution. The problem, however, is the cost depending on the service provided. Many of us have opted to purchase an internet connection in addition to our telephone with Telefónica. Consequently, we end up paying twice: for our internet connection as well as the standing charge for our phone line (about 13€ per month).

What has SKYPE to do with all this? SKYPE is without doubt one of the most popular Internet applications, offering VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol). In simple terms this is the transfer of the sound of our voice via the Internet. Why should we use SKYPE? Because it is free! (depending on exactly how it is used.) Here we give some examples:

1. I want to speak with another person anywhere in the world and this person also has SKYPE installed on their computer and it is switched on. (It costs nothing to install SKYPE on your computer.) These calls are called SKYPE to SKYPE and are free at all times. If in addition you have a webcam, you can enjoy a video call.

2. Calling a land line using SKYPE. The cost of calling a landline using SKYPE is considerably cheaper than by the traditional method. There are also several packages available. I personally have the Plan Europa. It costs 6.50 € per month and allows me unlimited calls to landlines anywhere in Europe.

The drawback is that calls cannot be received from landlines using SKYPE. This limitation does not exist in some other European countries, UK, Netherlands, Lithuania, etc. There it is possible to pay for a SKYPE number which works just as any other landline number. There is even SKYPE mobile that you can use anywhere, with no need to be in front of your computer. Could it be that Telefónica has had a hand in the fact that these options are not available in Spain?

Because of this, many SKYPE users keep their telephone so as to continue to receive calls. For some months I had been toying with the idea of cancelling my contract with Telefónica and so stop having to pay the standing charge. If anyone wants to call me there is always my mobile. I finally called Telefónica on 1004 to cancel my contract and, what a surprise! they offered me an alternative that few people have heard of: **Línea Cero**. With this you continue to have your land line but without having to pay the standing charge. You just pay for the calls and for the hiring of the equipment, if you haven't provided your own. The charge for calls is a little higher but if you use SKYPE for your calls to landlines, then this is immaterial. One condition is that you must use the telephone to call out at least once every three months; otherwise your contract reverts to what it was before. This is not a problem as you would need to use the landline anyway for calls to 900 numbers, something which is not possible on SKYPE.

Conclusion: If you have ADSL via a WiFi system, rather than through your landline, you can reduce your Telefónica bill considerably.

- Download SKYPE to your computer – it's free to do so. If your computer doesn't already have a microphone and speakers, buy a headset with earphones and a microphone (about 5€).

- Call Telefónica (1004) and ask to change to **Línea Cero**. You can receive calls on your phone but make them via SKYPE and you save the standing charge that you formerly paid to Telefónica.

Make sure they don't charge you just to change the contract into Línea Cero.

For more details (in Spanish):

http://www.movistar.es/on/io/es/atencion/consultas_y_dudas/contratos/telefonía/c_p_contrato_cero.pdf