

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

ORDER NO 3/2018

In the matter of an application by the Guyana Telephone & Telegraph Company Ltd for an introduction of a tariff for its Subscriber Activated Call Blocking Feature.

PRESENT:

Public Utilities Commission:

Ms. Dela Britton	-	Chairman
Mr. Maurice Solomon	-	Commissioner
Mr. Rajendra Bisessar	-	Commissioner

In attendance:

Mr. Vidiahar I. Persaud	-	Secretary /Legal Officer
Mr. Moorsalene Sankar	-	Financial Analyst I

Guyana Telephone & Telegraph Co. Ltd.

Mr. Mark Reynolds	-	Director, Legal and Regulatory Affairs
Mr. Floyd Rodney	-	Senior Engineer

Guyana Consumer Association

Mr. Patrick Dial	-	President
Mr. Yog Mahadeo	-	Advisor

The Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company Limited (GT&T) has applied to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) for the introduction of a tariff on its Subscriber Activated Call Blocking Feature. This service allows the subscriber to block un-authorized outgoing calls. GT&T is requesting that the Commission consider and approve a monthly tariff of \$310 per subscriber desirous of using the service.

In their presentation GT&T stated that in its June 2014 application for a tariff rebalancing, the Company had applied for a revision in rates for several of its landline value added services. Most of these were approved by the Commission in varying amounts. However, the Subscriber Activated Call Blocking Feature, a value-added service, was inadvertently omitted from the 2014 filing, hence this present application.

The Subscriber Activated Call Blocking Feature is not a new service. In fact, it had been activated for several years and according to the Company there are currently 36,368 consumers who access the service free of charge. The Company views this feature as a service of convenience which adds value to the consumer landline service similar to that of other activated value-added services and for which the consumer pays to the GT&T a PUC approved tariff.

The Company in their submissions stated that the monthly rate of \$310 sought by GT&T, represents a point between the lower and upper extremities of past PUC approved rates for value-added services.

GT&T in its application stated that the Subscriber Activated Call Blocking Features allows the consumer the option for denial of:

- (i) All calls – The customer by way of automated prompt is required to enter a Personal Identification Number (PIN) prior to any call being made except for emergency numbers, GTT Help Lines and Phone Card access (0171); or
- (ii) out of exchange calls, Cellular calls and International Direct Dialed (IDD) Calls. The consumer is allowed to make local calls and Operator Assisted International Calls; or
- (iii) International Direct Dialed (IDD) Calls. The customer can make calls within the exchange, out of the exchange, cellular calls and Operator Assisted International calls; or
- (iv) out of exchange, cellular and all international calls, including Operator Assisted International Calls. The customer will only be allowed to call within his/her exchange; or
- (v) all international calls, including Operator Assisted International calls. The customer will be allowed to call within as well as out of the exchange and make cellular calls; or

- (vi) all cellular calls only; or
- (vii) all International calls, including Operator Assisted Calls and cellular calls. The customer will be only be allowed to call within and out of the exchange; or
- (viii) all international calls and cellular calls, excluding Receiving Party Pays (RPP), Cellular calls, or
- (ix) all cellular calls excluding Receiving Party Pays (RPP) cellular calls; or
- (x) all Premium calls (i.e. calls to 1-900 services). This service is no longer being provided by GT&T and GT&T does not have customers who are receiving this service.

The company stated that it had initially invested USD190,000 for an array of other value-added features that compliments the wireline fixed service of which the subscriber activated call blocking feature under consideration in this application is included. Further to this initial cost, GT&T claims it pays a recurring cost of USD250,008 for the maintenance and upkeep of the service.

In its presentation the company indicated that it was considering a further USD300,000 for the upgrade of this system.

The Guyana Consumer Association (GCA) opposed any imposition of a tariff for this service. It noted the operating cost to the company in continuing the Call Blocking Feature is unlikely to increase. In the circumstances, any tariff approval for this service would represent free cash flow to the company.

The GCA further noted that the asset acquired in the initial investment to provide the value-added services is now fully depreciated. Further, the Association pointed to the quality of service and the downtime of the service which precludes the customer from enjoying a seamless service. In the circumstances, therefore, the GCA has suggested that if any charges are approved by the Commission, it should be user-based and not subscriber-based.

On the question of the annual recurring maintenance cost for USD250,008, the GCA noted that charging for a value-added service that is currently being provided will in no way increase the maintenance cost.

As it relates to the future investment alluded to by the Company, the GCA noted that the future expense of USD300,000 cannot be considered, since this is future cost and bears no relevance to this application.

DECISION

After a careful consideration of the submissions made by GT&T and GCA, the Commission hereby makes the following orders:

- 1) From the date of this Order, the company shall embark upon a sensitization exercise for its consumers regarding the impending tariff, the implementation date and the option(s) available to the consumers.
- 2) The consumer will have the option of choosing any number of the call blocking features at the tariff as set by the Commission.
- 3) That the Commission further orders and directs that where the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) fails, consumers' accounts are to be credited for the number of days the consumers are unable to access any of the value-added services/features offered by the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN).
- 4) Effective from the 1st day of February 2019 the residential consumers will pay a fixed monthly charge of \$30 for the Subscriber Activated Call Blocking service.
- 5) Effective from the 1st day of February 2019 the commercial consumers will pay a fixed monthly charge of \$70 for the Subscriber Activated Call Blocking service.

Dated this the 16th of November, 2018.

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Ms. Dela Britton
CHAIRMAN

..... - sgd -
Mr. Maurice Solomon
COMMISSIONER

..... - sgd -
Mr. Rajendra Bissesar
COMMISSIONER