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# ACCAN research finds that megabyte rounding might be stealing your mobile data

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network ([ACCAN](http://accan.org.au/)) has launched a research report that found some consumers are losing around 23 per cent of their data to a megabyte rounding rip off. Megabyte rounding happens when a single ‘data session’ is rounded up to the nearest megabyte. A data session can be thought of as each time your smartphone talks to the internet, whether this is to watch a video, update your Facebook or receive an email. As some data sessions are very small, using only a few kilobytes, some consumers are on plans that are using up their data more rapidly. ACCAN is advising consumers to avoid these poor value plans.

The report, [*Megacharge*](http://www.accan.org.au/our-work/research/1176-megacharge)*,* was authored by two UTS Information Technology Engineers, Brett Hagelstein and Mehran Abolhasan, who used software to collect and analyse over 20,000 data sessions from consumer phone bills. The report found that there was a big range in the impact of rounding on mobile data usage. At best, one user only lost one per cent of their data to rounding, at worst someone lost more than 80 per cent to rounding. The median amount people lost was 23 per cent. This means that if you are on a plan with 5GB of data per month, you might only get to use about 4GB before it runs out.

Light data users (those who use less than 500MB per month) were the most significantly affected by the use of megabyte session rounding and typically added around 80 per cent of their actual used data to rounding ‘overhead.’

“Megabyte rounding will have the biggest impact on consumers who are low data users,” said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin. “This is data that consumers are paying for that they don’t get to use. Consumers shouldn’t sign up to these poor value megabyte rounding plans.”

In the last year, six out of eight telcos that ACCAN was monitoring have dropped megabyte rounding altogether (see table below). However, consumers can still get caught out if they sign up to one of the few remaining plans or if they are on an older plan that still uses megabyte rounding. Whirlpool also has a page outlining [how some Australian telcos count mobile data sessions](http://whirlpool.net.au/wiki/mobile_data_sessions). Consumers should look at the Critical Information Summary (CIS) to see if a plan uses megabyte rounding before signing up to it.

“The use of megabyte rounding for mobile phone plans has decreased in the past year. This is great for consumers, but there are still plans out there that can be a rip-off. Before signing up to a plan consumers should do their research to choose one that’s going to give them good value for money,” added Ms Corbin. “We’ll be keeping an eye on the industry to make sure that megabyte rounding and poor value plans don’t make a comeback in the future.”

## Survey data

A brief survey of the over-plan data costs available from major carriers was conducted using the information available on carriers' websites. The results of a survey taken on 26th November 2015 are presented below.

Table 1: Survey of over-plan data costs

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Provider | Type | Billing unit | Over-quota (up to) |
| **Aldi** | Prepaid PAYG | 25KB\* | $0.05/1MB |
| **Aldi** | Prepaid Pack | 25KB\* | $5/300MB (starting at) |
| **Amaysim** | Prepaid | KB\* | $0.072/1MB |
| **Boost** | Prepaid | KB\* | $2/1MB |
| **Dodo** | Prepaid PAYG | MB | $0.05/1MB |
| **GoTalk** | Prepaid | MB | $0.05/1MB |
| **Hello Mobile** | Prepaid | *Not stated* | $0.05/1MB |
| **Lebara** | Prepaid | KB\* | $0.15/1MB |
| **Live Connected** | Postpaid | KB | $0.04/1MB |
| **Optus** | Plan | KB | $10/1GB |
| **Optus** | Prepaid | KB | $5/500MB |
| **SpinTel** | Plan | KB | $10/1GB |
| **TeleChoice** | Plan | 10KB | $10/1GB |
| **Telstra** | Plan | KB | $10/1GB |
| **Telstra** | Prepaid | KB~ | $2/1MB |
| **TPG** | Prepaid | KB | $10/1GB |
| **Vaya** | Plan | KB\* | $10/1GB |
| **Vaya** | Data only | KB\* | $0.02/1MB |
| **Virgin** | Plan | KB | $0.052/1MB |
| **Virgin** | Prepaid | KB# | $0.12/1MB/$2.05/1MB |
| **Vodafone** | Plan | KB | $10/1GB |

\* Indicates advertised changes made between April and November 2015 that reduce the billing units from megabyte session rounding to the value indicated. ~ All Telstra plans use KB billing units, except the Telstra Prepaid Simplicity offer (available since 2011) which has a charge of 10 cents per MB or part thereof. #Excess data on Virgin Prepaid 4G devices uses megabyte rounding.

Megabyte rounding still applies to select plans, for example (24/03/2016):

* Telstra Prepaid Simplicity
* Virgin Prepaid excess data (devices set up for 4G only). You can [turn it off](mailto:https://community.virginmobile.com.au/t5/Phones-knowledge-base/APN-settings-for-Internet-MMS-and-tethering/ta-p/76) but are limited to 3G.
* Dodo Prepaid PAYG
* GoTalk Mobile “Aussie 30” and “Aussie 40” plans

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