

What you need to know about mobile data

Australians are spending more time on their mobile phones and we're using more mobile data than ever before.

According to the ACMA [Communications Report 2013-14](#), in the quarter ending June 2014, Australians downloaded 38,734 terabytes of data on mobile devices – a 97.3 per cent increase when compared to the same quarter a year earlier!

With the introduction of 4G, our data needs are forecasted to grow even more. Because of this, it's important to take into account how your provider counts your data and how much they charge for excess data.

Megabyte charging

Did you know that telcos have different ways of counting mobile data? Some count by the kilobyte (KB) and some round-up to the nearest megabyte (MB).

If you look at your phone bill, you'll notice that your data usage is divided into what telcos call 'sessions'. Listed next to each session will be the amount of data used.

If your telco counts data by the KB, generally speaking, you'll be getting more value out of your data allowance because your provider won't be rounding the sessions up to the nearest MB. Plans that round data up to the nearest MB may use up your data much quicker so you may not be getting good value out of your provider.

Excess data charges and SMS usage alerts

When you exceed your monthly limit, your provider will either add an extra block of data to your account at an extra charge (usually around \$10 for 1GB), or charge you a fee for every megabyte used above your limit. Read our article on [excess data charges](#) for more information on this.

Charges for excess data have dropped significantly, so not as many consumers are suffering bill shock. However, 1GB blocks of data may not always be good value or convenient for consumers, especially if these kick in near the end of the billing cycle when you can't use all of the data you've paid for. Make sure you know what your provider charges for extra data so you don't get stung.

Also keep in mind that providers must send you SMS alerts to let you know when you've used 50, 85 and 100 per cent of your monthly data limit. Don't ignore these alerts, they could save you money. Telcos are only required to send these alerts within 48 hours of you reaching a limit, so once you receive the alert, you may have already exceeded your limit!

Currently, Telstra and Vodafone are the only providers to announce real time usage alerts. Telstra has already implemented these while Vodafone will introduce them in 2016. **ACCAN is calling for [all telcos to introduce these](#)**. [Research from the ACMA](#) showed that consumers find these alerts useful, but the delay in receiving them is a major cause of dissatisfaction.

You should also track your data usage using the app provided by your telco. Be aware that the information in your provider's app can also be up to 48 hours old.

If you're always going over your monthly data limit it may be time to look whether your plan still suits your needs. Our [how to use less data on your smartphone](#) tip sheet may also help out.

Data roll-over

Our [research from March 2014](#), found that more than half of mobile phone customers with an included allowance did not use all of their monthly call, text and data inclusions. For a number of years, ACCAN has been calling on the mobile providers to introduce data roll-over so consumers can use the data that they've actually paid for.

In March 2015, we welcomed Virgin Mobile's introduction of data roll-over. On new Virgin Mobile plans, consumers can now roll-over their unused data to the next month.

Optus and Telstra have introduced data roll-over features for pre-paid plans. Always read the critical information summary (CIS) provided with these services because there are conditions that apply to data roll-over, such as how long the data lasts for.

What uses the most data?

- The amount of data used by **streaming services** (Netflix, Presto, Stan) depends on which one you're using and the quality of the video. Streaming High Definition content can use up to 3GB per hour!
- Streaming a 10 minute video on **YouTube** in standard definition uses about 70MB.
- Browsing **Facebook** for 10 minutes uses up about 3MB, but this will be higher if you're uploading or viewing photos and videos.
- Making a 10 minute call on **Skype** uses about 10MB.
- Sending or receiving 40 **emails** without attachments uses about 2MB.
- Browsing five different **webpages** uses about 2MB.
- Navigating for 10 minutes on **Google Maps** uses about 6MB.