

## THE STRAITS TIMES

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Oct 7, 2009

Talk on the cheap

Slash local and overseas calls by as much as 60times with new apps like Hoiio and Bounce, says OO  
GIN LEE

TALK can get really cheap on your mobile phone - if you know how.

In fact, slash your cellphone bills by as much as 60 times with new services like Hoiio and Bounce.

For a local mobile call through any of the three telcos, the cost is 16.05cents per minute (cpm).

The new methods bring down the cost to between 2 and 5cpm.

For IDD calls, the savings are even more astounding.

An IDD call made on the cellphone, say using StarHub's 018 service to the United States, chalks up 10cpm for the IDD rate plus the 16.05cpm for the airtime charge.

Total: 26.05cpm.

The slashed cpm rates are between four times cheaper with Bounce (at 6.5cpm) and six times cheaper with Pfingo Talk (at 4cpm).

One more thing: do not be fooled by the 'free IDD to many destinations' sweetener dangled by the telcos.

Only the IDD charge is waived, you still have to pay for the 16.05cpm airtime charge once you bust the free outgoing minutes.

The difference in charges is even more significant when you compare roaming charges.

A SingTel customer receiving a call on his Singapore phone line when in China is charged \$2.30 per minute and \$3 per minute when he calls home.

By comparison, he would have to pay only about 21cpm (10 times cheaper) and 5cpm (60 times cheaper) for the same calls using Hoiio and Bounce.

**Call smart**

These next- generation services make use of two types of technologies - Net telephony and call-back.

Net telephony, or Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) as the geeks call it, is not new.

Skype's PC-to-PC calls are free over broadband.

With SkypeOut, the tech savvy have been making PC-to-phone calls around the world cheaply.

The arrival of high-speed mobile broadband services, which carry voice calls over the data network and start from as low as \$15 per month for unlimited access, has made mobile VOIP a serious threat to telcos' revenues.

Which explains why StarHub launched its own mobile VOIP service called Pfingo in 2007.

Unfortunately, mobile VOIP has not gone beyond the circle of geeks because it is complicated to use.

SkypeOut over 3G, for instance, works only on Windows Mobile phones.

Pfingo Talk is the cheapest at 2cpm for local calls but it works mainly on Nokia Symbian phones.

Alternatively, you can use Wi-Fi to make VoIP calls but there are many areas without Wi-Fi access.

However, the biggest stumbling block is that mobile VOIP does not display your cellphone caller ID and it is complicated to make a call from the phone address book.

Things are changing, though.

New call-back services like Hoiio and Pfingo Bounce make those long-distance calls as easy as the real deal.

Your caller ID can now be shown and with some smartphones like Windows Mobile and Google Android, you can even make calls directly from your contact list in the cellphone.

Call-back services do not make use of VOIP smarts and are not the same thing.

They tap the traditional phone network but the magic is in converting mobile outgoing calls into free incoming calls. Essentially, you key in the phone number you want to call in the Hoiio or Bounce app and press Send.

The service provider calls you back (free incoming call for you) and your friend, and then connects the two of you.

The only time you use the mobile Internet is when you key in the recipient's number. That is when a small data packet is sent via 3G to activate the call-back.

**Look out for the caveats**

Mobile VOIP does not work when you are overseas because the cost of data roaming is just as much, if not more, than voice roaming.

Call-back services try to get around the high cost by having you send only a small data packet.

However, you will still end up paying high roaming fees because you do not get free incoming calls when you are overseas.

The secret: Buy a cheap pre-paid card of the country you are in and make sure that it comes with free incoming calls.

Call-back providers also provide a free Internet VOIP phone number.

You can now forward your mobile calls to that VOIP number and to your overseas pre-paid number, allowing you to take advantage of the cheap call rates when you are overseas.

The process takes time to figure out but with the huge cost savings available, it is worth reading on to discover the secret to cheap chatter.

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How call-back services slash cellphone bills

### **NORMAL CALLS**

You call your friend's number and your telco connects the call. It is the easiest but it costs the most.

### **TRADITIONAL CALL-BACK**

1. You call the service provider's number, it auto hangs up after a few rings. As the call is not connected, you incur no charges.
2. The service provider calls you back, and if you have free incoming calls, it costs you nothing.
3. You key in your friend's phone number and wait for a few seconds.
4. The service provider calls your friend and now connects the two calls.

**Note: The call-back provider takes over the connection of your call from your telco and charges a more competitive rate. Unfortunately, as the call originates from your service provider, your caller ID will not be shown.**

### **CALL-BACK, THE NEW WAY**

1. Install the app (Hoiio or Pfingo Bounce) on your mobile phone and launch the app and key in your friend's number.
2. The app now sends a small data packet over your 3G connection to the call-back provider to initiate the callback. This happens in the background.
3. The service provider calls you back.
4. The service provider calls your friend and then connects the two calls.

**Note: This is closer to making a normal phone call as you simply launch the app, key in the number then wait for the call to be connected. The big improvement is that your caller ID now appears in your friend's phone. Also, the app can automatically access your phone contacts so you can also initiate the call from your contact list.**

### **ROAMING OVERSEAS (INCOMING CALLS)**

1. (a) Before you fly off, set your phone to forward all calls to the VOIP number provided by the call-back providers. It is imperative you do this before you leave Singapore or you will end up paying roaming charges.

(b) When you are overseas, buy the cheapest pre-paid SIM card with free incoming calls and switch SIM cards.

(c) Go into the settings of the app and forward your calls to your new overseas number. Change your "call from" number to the new one too.

2. Your friend calls your Singapore cellphone number and this call is forwarded to your VOIP number.

**(This is equivalent to making a local call which costs about 16.05 cents per minute if you have exceeded your bundled outgoing free minutes.)**

3. The call is now forwarded again by your service provider's servers to your overseas cellphone number.

**Note: You are paying the usual Hoiio/Bounce IDD rates plus the local airtime charges, which are still cheaper than the usual roaming fees. As your pre-paid SIM card offers free incoming calls, you do not use up the credits there.**

## HOW CALL-BACK SERVICES SLASH CELLPHONE BILLS

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**CALL-BACK, THE NEW WAY**

Install the app (Hollo or Pingo Bounce) on your mobile phone and launch the app and key-in your friend's number.

The app now sends a small data packet over your 3G connection to the call-back provider to initiate the call-back. This happens in the background.

The service provider calls you back.

The service provider calls your friend and then connects the two calls.

**Note:** This is closer to making a normal phone call as you simply launch the app, key in the number then wait for the call to be connected. The big improvement is that your caller ID now appears in your friend's phone. Also, the app can automatically access your phone contacts so you can also initiate the call from your contact list.

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**ROAMING OVERSEAS (INCOMING CALLS)**

Your friend calls your Singapore cellphone number and this call is forwarded to your VOP number.

This is equivalent to making a local call which costs about 18.05 cents per minute if you have free minutes!

The call is now forwarded again by your service provider's servers to your overseas cellphone number.

**Note:** You are paying the usual Hollo/Bounce IDD rates plus the local airtime charges, which are still cheaper than the usual roaming fees. As your pre-paid SIM card offers free incoming calls, you do not use up the credits there.

**(a)** Before you fly off, set your phone to forward all calls to the VOP number provided by the call-back providers. It is imperative you do this before you leave Singapore or you will end up paying roaming charges.

**(b)** When you are overseas, buy the cheapest pre-paid SIM card with free incoming calls and switch SIM cards.

**(c)** Go into the settings of the app and forward your calls to your new overseas number. Change your 'local' from number to the new one too.

Click on the thumbnail above for a full size view

## Cost of calls FROM SINGAPORE (PER MINUTE)

	Hollo	Pingo Talk	Pingo Bounce	Skype	StarHub 018	SingTel 019	M1 021*
LOCAL	2c	2c	5c	4c	-	-	-
AUSTRALIA	8.4c	7.4c	9.9c	4c	8c	19c	31.5
CHINA	4.9c	2c	4.5c	4c	8c	22c	57.5
MALAYSIA	10.3c	6c	8.5c	4c	8c	13c	22.5
UK	4.9c	3.2c	5.7c	4c	8c	13c	32
USA	4.5c	4c	6.5c	4c	10c	15c	28

Extra fees: 3G fees to activate call back; 3G charges as you talk; 3G charges to activate call-back; 3G charges as you talk, plus 0.4 cents connection fees.

Additional 16.05 cents per minute mobile airtime charge applies.

Caller ID: Australia (yes), Australia (yes), Australia (yes), Australia (yes), Australia (yes), Australia (yes), Australia (yes).

\* Average peak and non-peak calls

### While roaming

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Service calls

SHERWIN LOH and OO GIN LEE look at some smart ways to keep in touch on the cheap with your cellphone

## Hoiio

■ [hoio.com](http://hoio.com)

**For:** iPhone, Android, BlackBerry, Symbian Series 60 and Windows Mobile phones

**Pros:** Works across all smartphone platforms; offers competitive call rates, cheap roaming rates and caller ID even when you are overseas. Also offers the closest experience to making normal mobile calls and lets you make calls from the contact list on the phone.

**Cons:** Does not work on regular phones.

**How it works:** Hoiio is a call-back service that takes advantage of free incoming calls to cut costs.

First, install the app. For Android, download it from the Market; iPhone users get it from the App Store. Other users can download it from the Hoiio website.

To call a friend, just launch the application and key in the number you want to call. The software then sends a small data packet via 3G to Hoiio to activate the call-back service - that is, Hoiio first calls you back, then the person you are trying to call. It then connects the two of you.

What sets Hoiio apart from its rivals is its 'hijacking' capability: it configures the software to automatically route your calls through Hoiio when you dial a number or call from the same contact list on your phone. So the experience is closest to the real thing.

Hoiio also automatically sets the +65 Singapore country code prefix of your cellphone number in the background. So when your friend receives your call, his phone shows 91234567 instead of +6591234567. This is important because in his contact list, your number probably appears without the +65 prefix, so his phone automatically lists your name and not just your number, as the caller.

You can also send SMS messages via Hoiio to any country in the world at 8.8 cents each.



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Saturday Special Report



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