

What is Wireless and How Can I Use it Effectively? (Part2 Pagers)

The paging business has come a long way since the days when the only information a user could get from a pager was a beep tone signaling the user to call a switchboard or a limited and scratchy voice message.

Today's pagers use digital displays to convey everything from the simple telephone call advisories of yesteryear to stock quotes, news of the day, e-mail and even Internet access. Some services even facilitate limited two-way communication between pagers. Costs for some pagers have fallen to a level that make them a fashion statement for teenagers. What kind of service do you need and what are the costs. As with most telecommunications services, the answers are many and varied.

Pagers today fall into three basic categories, Numeric, Alphanumeric, and Two-way.

Numeric pagers are the simplest and least expensive. From a Touch Tone phone a caller dials the pager number, uses the keypad to enter the call back telephone number or numeric message and hangs up. The numeric information is then displayed to the pager user. Rates for a standard Numeric pager typically range from \$5 to \$10 per month. Most companies will also charge a one time fee of \$20 to \$70 for the pager. These plans generally include up to 200 pages per month, adequate for most business purposes. Pages beyond 200 are generally billed at \$0.20 to \$0.50 a piece, depending on the plan selected.

Alphanumeric pagers, as the name implies, are capable of receiving text messages in addition to the traditional numeric messages. Text messages may be sent by personal computer using software provided by the paging vendor, through the Internet by using an e-mail address (e.g. pager number @ pager vendor.com). This additional functionality provides an opportunity to give detailed instructions without the need for a reply. Messages are usually limited, depending on the service selected, to between 80 and 200 characters. In addition to the e-mail option, some vendors also offer an operator assistance option whereby an employee of the paging company will transcribe a verbal message to text and send it to the pager. Most Alphanumeric pagers are also capable of receiving news bulletins, stock quotes, and other enhanced information either from the paging vendor's own services or from a third party with internet access. These pagers are most suitable for employees who need to receive detailed information but don't frequently need to send replies or acknowledgements. Depending on the services selected, Alphanumeric pagers carry a monthly rate of \$20 to \$60 for up to 200 pages. The purchase cost of the equipment is usually in the range of \$100 to \$300.

The newest and most sophisticated paging service is Two-way Paging. With Two Way Paging, the pager user can receive an alphanumeric message and using a limited or in some cases a full alphanumeric key pad, send a return message. The most simplistic Two-way Pagers only send an acknowledgement. More sophisticated pagers can send full text messages or even short e-mail messages over the Internet. These pagers are ideal for employees who spend most of their time on the road and require frequent and detailed two-way communication with their home base. As might be expected, this state of the art technology is still somewhat pricey. Monthly rates for two way service start at around \$60 per month, and with Operator Assistance and other options can easily exceed \$100. Equipment is usually available in the \$300 range.

The face of paging has changed forever. No longer are pagers merely "electronic tethers" to keep employees and executives tied to the home base. Now they are business and Internet productivity tools that improve customer service and increase productivity.