

Phone-y downloads rack up \$9,000 bill

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Seattle businessman Don Etsekson has his life wired. A simple cable allows him to synchronize computers at home, at the office and in his pocket every day like clockwork.

But an onslaught of illegal spam and unrequested downloads to his new "smart phone" racked up a \$9,000 bill -- for being wireless.

And Etsekson said that when he called his carrier, AT&T Wireless, now Cingular, no one was able to help him.

He was routed around the phone system, talked with billing representatives who wouldn't budge and was given a number for tech support that was disconnected.

He ended up figuring out the problem on his own. His new cell phone, an Audiovox SMT5600, had been preprogrammed to remotely download his e-mail every 15 minutes without his authorization. No one, not even the phone, told him it would.

After the Seattle Post-Intelligencer brought the matter to the company's attention this week, Etsekson's problem was resolved.

"The real problem is I've spent so much time on this, time that I desperately do not have," he said. "I shouldn't be forced to walk through a mine field as a consumer."

Cingular representatives say Etsekson's case is unusual.

His feelings toward his wireless carrier are not.

Consumer complaints against wireless carriers increased 37 percent last year, according to Federal Communications Commission statistics.

An analysis of those 2004 FCC complaints by the Consumers Union found that most cell-phone complaints are about billing problems. Topping the list: AT&T Wireless and Cingular, which merged late last year.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/75>

[2] http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/220410_cellphone16.html