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Nationwide Implementation of 711 Access to Telecommunication Relay Services (TRS) Required as of October 1, 2001

Introduction

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is mandating implementation of 711 access to telecommunications relay services (TRS) no later than October 1, 2001 (similar to the way 911 is used for access to emergency services).[1] As a part of this mandate the FCC is encouraging PBX owners to work with carriers and TRS providers to facilitate 711 dialing from their user locations.[2]

Background

On February 18, 1997, the FCC reserved the 711 dialing code for use in accessing TRS services based upon a 1993 request filed jointly by the National Center for Law and Deafness and Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc.[3] On August 9, 2000, the FCC released an order mandating that wireline, wireless, and payphone providers implement access to TRS via the 711 dialing code no later than October 1, 2001.[4] This order was driven by the requirement in section 225 of the Communications Act, which was added by Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, to ensure that interstate and intrastate telecommunications relay services are available, to the extent possible and in the most efficient manner, to hearing-impaired and speech-impaired individuals in the United States.[5] The FCC concluded that 711 dialing would facilitate access to TRS, encourage new TRS competitors, and ease the burden on TRS users need to remember different numbers for different states/services. Carriers in over half the states and the District of Columbia already are offering 711 access.

The FCC has also recently expanded the types of services covered by TRS. On March 6, 2000, the FCC found that speech-to-speech relay service and interstate Spanish language relay service should be provided by March 1, 2001 as required relay offerings, and permitted the recovery of video relay service (VRS) costs through the interstate TRS funding mechanism.[6] The March 6 Order does not directly affect access to TRS using 711, but it does add complexity in that there may be multiple TRS access numbers. However in the TRS Second Report, the FCC encouraged relay centers to support caller profiling to ease the coordination between the different services.[7] With caller profiling, a call is routed to the correct relay type (TTY access, speech to speech, or Spanish language versions of the same) by retaining information about callers from specific numbers and using that information to route the call.

Implementation

The FCC looked at access to 711 from PBX's as essential to ensuring that all Americans have the opportunity to benefit from this abbreviated dialing arrangement.[8] The FCC also recognized that callers from PBX locations may be required to dial 9 or another prefix before entering the 711 code where the prefix would also be needed for all other outside calls.[9]

Centrex Users

Your local exchange carrier should have already implemented 711 access for you, but if you use a custom dial plan you should take the time to ensure that access to 711 is programmed correctly and to request that it be corrected at no cost if it does not work.

Summary

Implementation of the 711 dialing code should be viewed as a benefit to your customers and employees who are hearing and/or sight impaired. If it is not implemented you might be asked to do so as a reasonable accommodation, and it would be best to take care of it now.

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[1] The FCC has a webpage dedicated to TRS services:
<http://www.fcc.gov/cib/dro/trs.html>

[2] The Use of N11 Codes and Other Abbreviated Dialing Arrangements
15 FCC Rcd 15188, CC Docket No.: 92-105 ? 41 (August 9, 2000)(Second Report and
Order)(TRS Second Report). This order can be found at
<http://www.fcc.gov/cib/dro/711.doc>

[3] The Use Of N11 Codes And Other Abbreviated Dialing Arrangements, 12
FCC Rcd 5572 CC Docket No. 92-105 ? 55 (February 19, 1997) (First Report and Order
and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking). The order can be found at
http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Orders/1997/fcc97051.pdf

[4] TRS Second Report, ? 33.

[5] 47 U.S.C. ?225((b)(1).

[6] Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-speech Services for
Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities, CC Docket No. 98-67, 15 FCC Rcd
5140 (March 6, 2000) (Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking).
This Order can be found at <http://www.fcc.gov/cib/dro/trs.html>

[7] TRS Second Report, ? 29.

[8] Id., ? 41.

[9] Id.