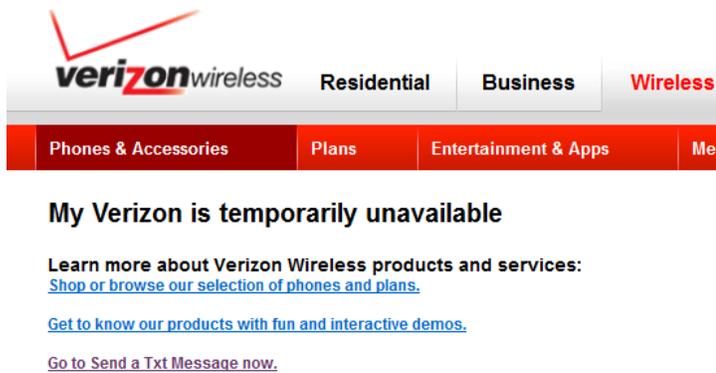


# Verizon Wireless: 900 Redux

Opening this month's paper bill I was surprised to see a charge for \$9.99 for "Premium Messaging". There was no explanation but checking online I found it's a charge that a third party billed to my account. The forum writer noted that Verizon refused to do refunds saying that the charges could only originate from a user-action! What arrogance, especially when this kind of fraud is well known!



I called customer service and was told that the detailed information is available only online or, for \$5 they would send me a paper bill.

Going online I find that "My Verizon is temporarily unavailable". That doesn't seem very professional – Verizon can't manage to keep its website online? I tried again a day later and it was still offline! What's going on? Is Verizon going out of business or, at minimum, winding down as it stops building out FiOS.

So I asked the representative for the information and was told it was something like CELLSFLIRT. This is definitely not something that I would call. If Verizon can't keep their website working why should I expect them to be able to manage fraud? And it is definitely fraud yet Verizon says I have to call the company that placed the charge. My dispute is with Verizon for billing me.

I am not lawyer but if Verizon insists I pay them they are taking responsibility and acting as an agent for the company posting the charge. It is even worse, when they tell me I must convince the company that committed the fraud in the first place to give me a credit.

Real credit card companies, annoying as they are, will handle bogus charges as a matter of course but Verizon has no such capabilities and, more to the point, no willingness.

After being adamant and demanding to talk to a supervisor I was put on hold. The first representative finally came back and told me that I could solve the problem by simply Verizon Wireless: 900 Redux/[Bob Frankston](#)

blocking premium messages and they would credit the charges.

Why didn't the representative just tell me that in the first place? And what if I in fact did want some of the services? Why can't Verizon even handle the simplest of billing tasks and, for that matter, operate a web site? And why didn't they just print the details of a \$9.99 charge on my bill?

Sure, they don't need to send me 50 pages of a detailed call list for a bucket-of-minutes plan but they should at least detail premium charges.

This is another [reality check](#) for Verizon. \$9.99 may not be much compared with [\\$18,000](#) mentioned in a recent Boston Globe story but the base problem is the same – a company that is too far beyond its design point in a business that exists only in the imagination of regulators.

This is a repeat of the experience of 900 numbers. The idea was that you could make purchases and they would be billed to your phone number. The problem was that the system was too inflexible and in the end was primarily used for porn calls since the customers didn't expect to be able to resolve billing problems anyway.

ATT tried doing a credit card in the 1980's but failed. In France, Minitel was more successful. The price you paid for a service was based on the number you dialed. It was successful enough to slow Internet adoption in France but it only meant France was stuck with an inflexible system until the Internet was more widely adopted.

We need to let go of the past, and the carriers, so we can move on to an abundant future.

I used to think that "cable" companies and "telephone" companies were converging. But the old line carriers are finding it difficult to achieve escape velocity while the cable content will soon be independent of the pipes. These kinds of problems are a symptom of the carriers' woes in trying to transcend their shrinking niche.