

CHOICE

Laundry love

Cold weather
washing tips

CHEMIST DISCOUNTS

Not so special?

243 products TESTED

Slow cookers
Food processors
Electric blankets
Heated throws
Dehumidifiers
Headphones
Leaf blowers
Electric bikes
& more



Warm wishes

Best buys to take the chill out of winter

Plus Bank branch closures and home & contents insurance

Chill seeker

Winter brings out the weirdness in me

don't know if you've been outside recently, but it's – technical term here – bloody freezing out there. I can't handle it.

As a Scottish person living in Australia, this often confuses people. It's become something of a running joke among my friends. Despite being born and raised in a hellscape of sub-zero temperatures and endless rain, I'm the first to get wrapped up at the barest hint of cold weather.

I wrote about this exact same topic in the *CHOICE* winter issue last year, but in 2025 I'm doing something pretty extreme in response. Long story short, I'm eating a spoonful of concrete and trying to harden up.

In order to regain my long lost ability to endure the cold, I've started going into my unheated swimming pool first thing in the morning, as soon as I wake up.

It's been quite the journey.

At first – circa January/February – it was a fun little thing to do, to wake myself up. The water wasn't that cold, it just felt nice.

In April/May things started getting a bit more... real. The pool was still sitting at around 16–17°C; cold, but not completely unbearable. But now that we're firmly in the winter months, my

fun little wake-me-up has become a millstone of epic proportions.

A quick Google search tells me that the optimum ice bath temperature should be somewhere between 10 and 15°C. If that's true, my swimming pool is currently one gigantic ice bath.

Getting in is a psychological battle. My entrance into the pool is very ritualistic. I don't just jump in, although that would probably be easier. I ease myself in gently. I go in one step, then another, then I do a pathetic little "baby bomb" for the final step. Then I frantically pant and make strange noises for a minute or two, before emerging reborn – shrivelled and shivering – ready to face whatever challenges the day brings.

I've done silly little challenges like this before. I sort of enjoy having a weird little task to overcome – that's just a quirk of my personality. I'm not sure this is the most productive thing to do first thing in the morning, but I've never once regretted jumping in. Yet...

But when it comes to getting my body temperature back up to a tolerable level, I have a secret weapon in my arsenal: a heated



throw. Since coming to *CHOICE*, everyone on the editorial team has been bombarding me with tales of their beloved heated throws, so I've succumbed to the pressure and bought in.

After I emerge, shivering from the pool, sitting down to work draped in a heated throw helps me thaw my ice-cold bones. If you're interested in doing the same, read our new review of them on page 51.

Considering my regular dips into my icy swimming pool of pain, this purchase has certainly been a wise investment for me. Wish me luck for the rest of winter!

Mark Serrels

CHOICE Editorial Director

Email: mserrels@choice.com.au

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Wherever possible, we pay full price for the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by membership. Membership includes access to services such as CHOICE Help and the Voice Your Choice research program. Our product ratings are

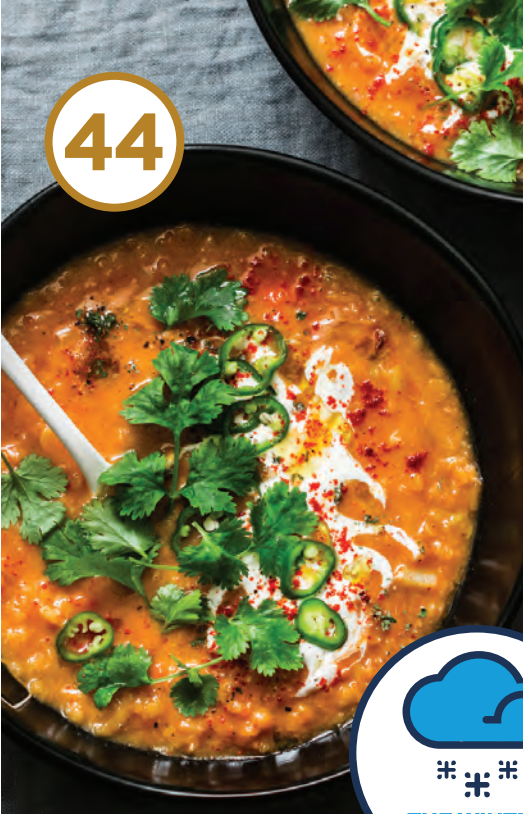
based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. We also research a wide range of consumer services, reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate their quality and claims.

BECOME A MEMBER To review the full range of membership options and benefits go to choice.com.au/signup.

MEMBERSHIPS/RENEWALS Call 1800 069 552 or email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

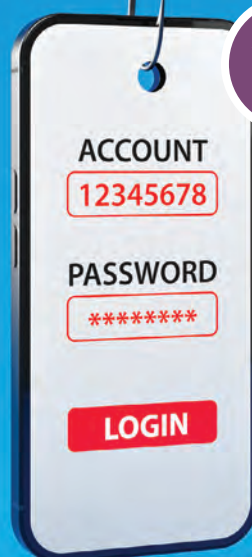


44



THE WINTER
ISSUE

18



CONTENTS



24

4 Checkout

News, views and sneak peeks

14 Ask the Experts

16 Your Say

18 Phoney business

SIM swap and number porting scams explained

21 Not-so-special

Pharmacy price promotions confusing shoppers

24 Winter wash tips

How to tackle your laundry in the cooler months

29 Hot buys

Essential products to get you through winter

32 Cashed out

Bank closures in remote NT

36 Consumer champion

First Nations financial counsellor Lynda Edwards

38 Clumsiness cover

Accidental damage cover in home insurance

72 Index

76 Hard Word

TESTS

44 Slow and steady

Avoid these mistakes for perfect slow cooker meals

48 Unnecessary extras

Which food processor attachments do you really need?

51 Plug and snug

We rate electric blankets and heated throws

55 Dehumidifiers

Keep the mould at bay

58 Headphones

Best on a budget

64 Blow by blow

How we test leaf blowers

67 Petrol to pedals

Can an e-bike replace your car?

INSTANT
COZY
P51

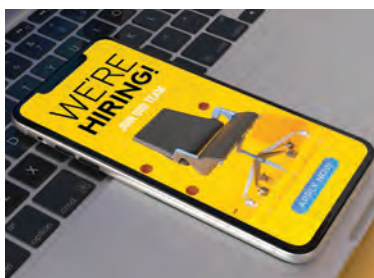


CHOICE magazine provides a selection of our top product reviews. We can't always include all the models we've tested, but you'll always find the products that scored the best. To view complete results for all our tests, go to choice.com.au, or call Customer Service on 1800 069 552 to add full online access to your membership package.

The latest consumer news in brief
IN THIS ISSUE:



p7 The good oil: Progress on plastic recycling



p9 Anti-scam centre cracks down on fake job ads



p10 College cops \$20m VET FEE-HELP penalty



p12 Uber joins the queue at Melbourne Airport



Supermarkets trade barbs in new price war

Australia's major supermarkets have been engaged in something akin to a price war in the last few months. In May, Woolworths dropped prices on almost 400 products, including chicken schnitzels, frozen berries and soft drinks.

The supermarket claimed the items were cheaper by an average of 10% and that the new prices would stay in place until at least 2026. Within days, Coles was trumpeting its own discounts on over 600 items.

Aldi shrugged off any pressure these moves put on its claims of always having lower prices, stating in a press release that it "wouldn't be beaten on the cost of [a] weekly shop". The retailer also hit out at the "flash sales" and "temporary discounts" of its rivals.

CHOICE has consistently found Aldi to be the cheapest supermarket in Australia in our quarterly surveys comparing the cost of a basket of goods at retailers around the country. Our latest survey released in June was conducted before many of the announced price drops came into effect, but we'll see if all the movement and noise about dropping prices has translated into real savings in our September update.

LIAM KENNEDY

Victoria proposes new rules to cut power bills

The Essential Services Commission in Victoria is proposing new rules that would force energy retailers to move customers in financial hardship and those who have been with the same retailer for over four years onto cheaper plans. The rules would save the average consumer around \$225 on electricity and \$182 on gas each year. The proposed changes to the Energy Retail Code of Practice are designed to help combat the so-called 'loyalty tax' and also prohibit retailers from disconnecting customers for debts under \$500 (up from \$300 currently).

Commission chairperson Gerard Brody says there are barriers that stop people shopping around the complex energy market, something these changes hope to reduce. "If an energy retailer is supporting someone in financial hardship, moving them onto the cheapest plan is a simple, considerate step they can take to help the customer. It's contradictory to be helping someone in hardship while also charging them unnecessarily high rates," he says.

JARNI BLAKKARLY



CHOICE magazine: Now with compostable wrap

We're pleased to let you know that starting this issue, your *CHOICE* magazine will be sent in a certified home-compostable wrap. Until now, the magazine was wrapped in plastic made from post-consumer recycled materials – a step in the right direction, but one we've been keen to improve upon since the REDcycle soft plastic recycling scheme ended. This new wrap is part of our ongoing commitment to reducing environmental impact. It means less soft plastic going to landfill, and reflects what many of you have asked for over the years.

HOW TO DISPOSE OF THE WRAP

Shred or cut the plastic wrap into smaller pieces and place in your home compost or FOGO bin (FOGO, which stands for food organics and garden organics, is the free home composting program run by many local councils around Australia). This wrap is not suitable for curbside recycling.



CHOICE 'super complaint' on sneaky energy bill tactics

At a time when we're all looking for ways to save, energy companies are making it harder and harder to know what you're paying and why.

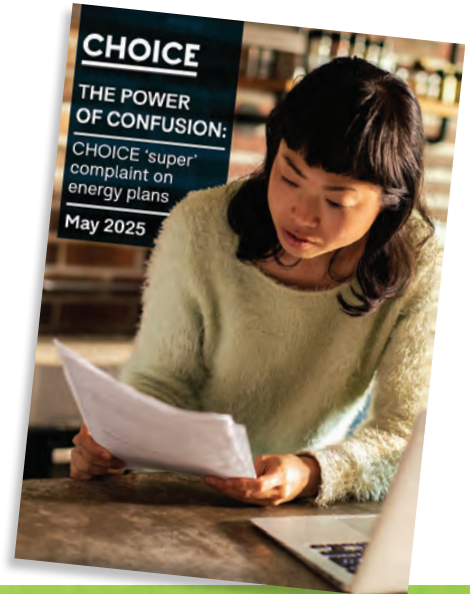
That's why in May, CHOICE used our first designated 'super complaint' to the ACCC to call on the consumer watchdog to investigate whether energy retailers have broken the law by using potentially misleading or deceptive tactics to describe and promote their energy plans.

The complaint was informed by our analysis of almost 400 energy bills, submitted by CHOICE members and supporters, which revealed that many retailers were reusing identical names

for energy plans despite offering them at different prices. Out of all the bills we collected, 64 informed consumers they could save money by switching to a plan with the same name as their existing plan. Many consumers reading this information were led to believe they were already on the best plan because the names were identical, potentially missing out on savings as a result.

To put an end to these dodgy and confusing energy pricing tactics that make it nearly impossible to choose the cheapest energy plan, we're calling on the ACCC to enforce the law with strong court action.

JORDAN CORNELIUS



EnergyAustralia retires its carbon offset program

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) reported in 2023 that 57% of the businesses it surveyed were making environmental claims that were either unclear, inaccurate, or simply not true. It seems fair to say that a repeat of this exercise today would yield similar results.

In May, EnergyAustralia agreed to settle a legal case brought by Parents for Climate, who alleged the company's Go Neutral carbon offset product was a form of greenwashing, since the energy the retailer was selling was still being generated by fossil fuels. EnergyAustralia admitted that it "could have been made clearer to customers" that carbon offsets do not prevent or undo the damage caused by fossil fuels. The company put an end to its Go Neutral program, which had been running since 2016, and says it's now focusing on reducing emissions.

"We welcome the acknowledgement from EnergyAustralia," says Parents for Climate CEO Nic Seton. "Not only does this acknowledgement send a powerful message that the era of unchecked greenwashing is over, but it's incredibly reassuring to see the commitment from one of the largest energy retailers in the country to want to do better for their customers and the climate."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN





Oil trial a ‘major step forward’ in soft plastic recycling

Refining company Viva Energy has announced it has successfully processed more than 9.5 tonnes of oil made from plastic waste in what it says is a “major step forward” in efforts to recycle Australia’s glut of the material. Experts say turning polymers into oil and then refining it for use in new plastic products or as an energy source could be the most effective way to reuse Australia’s stockpiled soft plastics.

Viva has processed smaller amounts of plastic pyrolysis oil at its Geelong refinery in the past, but says this latest exercise was in part designed to inform the best way to design plastics so they can be recycled using this process.

Viva’s trial comes as supermarkets and councils launch their own initiatives to collect soft plastics for recycling following the collapse of REDcycle in 2022. Recyclers are still working through thousands of tonnes of soft plastics left over from REDcycle, in addition to the materials now being collected. Most soft plastics are currently being repurposed as concrete or asphalt additives or in new plastic items. Viva is one of at least two Australian recyclers experimenting with the oil method.

LIAM KENNEDY



IMAGES: GETTY

Why CHOICE has stopped testing gas appliances

For 65 years, CHOICE has tested household products to help Australians make informed decisions and protect people from unsafe products. Throughout this period, we’ve started and stopped testing products for a range of reasons, however, we are always guided by our vision: fair, safe and just markets that meet the needs of Australian consumers.

This vision prompted our decision to stop testing gas appliances, with the exception of barbecues.

Australia is in the midst of an energy transition and many households are making the shift from gas to electric – not only for environmental reasons, but because modern electric appliances are safer, more efficient and cheaper to run over time.

Modelling by Energy Consumers Australia estimates that going all-electric could cut the average household’s energy bills by \$2250. Gas cooktops have also been linked to health risks.

We think this is reason enough for many consumers to choose electric over gas appliances. The fact that gas is a fossil fuel and electric appliances also support a cleaner energy future is an added bonus.

CHOICE will continue to provide trusted advice and information about gas appliances, recognising that for some consumers they may still be the best – or only – choice, but we won’t invest our limited resources to lab-test gas appliances.

ROSIE THOMAS and MATTHEW STEEN





CIRCLES.LIFE

Telco fined again for exposing consumers to scams

Telco Circles.Life has been fined over \$400,000 for not carrying out proper ID checks and allowing scammers to transfer stolen phone numbers to its service. The transfers gave criminals control of the numbers, allowing them to steal at least \$45,000 from victims. It's the second time in three years that Circles has broken rules designed to protect consumers from phone porting scams. In this latest case,

the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) found the telco had failed to comply with customer identity verification rules 26 times between January and February last year.

Since 2020, telcos have been required to verify the identity of anyone asking for their phone number to be moved to a new service. These rules are designed to combat phone porting scams,

where criminals impersonate a victim and request for the victim's number to be moved to the new telco provider. This often results in messages and calls to the victim's phone being diverted to a device the scammer controls, giving them access to the victim's bank accounts and other sensitive services.

LIAM KENNEDY



New rural phone services to fill coverage gaps

Australia's major telcos are working on ways to connect out-of-range mobiles directly with satellites to bring services to more people in rural and remote areas. In May, Telstra became the first to allow customers to send and receive text messages when they're out of reach of its existing tower-based mobile network. Telstra Satellite Messaging (TSM) uses Starlink satellites to beam service down to eligible smartphones being used outside of Telstra's cellular network and provide them with access to SMS, as long as the user has a clear view of the sky. Traditionally, people have needed special phones or equipment to consistently receive services via satellite.

Direct-to-handset (DTH) services like TSM have been championed as a way to fill in coverage gaps in Australia's tower networks, especially after many people reported losing service after the shutdown of 3G last year. Vodafone and TPG have also been experimenting with DTH services for SMS. But the two have also accused Telstra of misleading consumers by claiming its existing cellular network covers three million square kilometres and 99.7% of Australians. Telstra says it stands by these claims.

LIAM KENNEDY



Anti-scam centre cracks down on fake job ads

The National Anti-Scam Centre says they have removed more than 29,000 social media accounts and 1850 fake job advertisements in a crackdown on employment scams targeting vulnerable people. Between September 2024 and March 2025, the effort, which involved government, law enforcement agencies and the private sector, specifically targeted job scams, which had increased by 151% in the previous year. Australians lost \$13.7 million to job scams in 2024.

"Job scams have been one of the fastest growing scam types, as scammers are increasingly preying on

people seeking relief from cost-of-living pressures," says ACCC deputy chair Catriona Lowe. "These scams disproportionately impact people on low incomes, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, international students, non-resident visa holders, people with caring responsibilities, and others with limited employment options." The National Anti-Scam Centre says they worked closely with Meta (which owns Facebook and Instagram), as well as targeting cryptocurrency wallets and exchanges.

JARNI BLAKKARLY

**Australians lost
\$13.7 million to job
scams in 2024**

South Australian consumers warned about dodgy tradespeople

Rogue tradespeople have been running amok in South Australia in recent months, to the extent that the state government has launched a new campaign to warn potential victims of excessive charges for unnecessary work. SA's Consumer and Business Services agency is investigating a significant number of these cases for potential breaches of Australian Consumer Law. Meanwhile, consumers are warned to watch for red flags, especially tradespeople hawking their services door-to-door or offering suspiciously cheap callout fees. There have

been many reports in SA in recent years of door-to-door traders taking their pay upfront, doing shoddy work, then vanishing without a trace.

The government recommends consumers check for independent online reviews about tradespeople and ask for recommendations from people they know and trust. Consumers should also know that every builder and tradesperson in South Australia is required to display their licence number on any advertising materials and their business card.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN





Superannuation fund ads harming new job starters

Did you know that superannuation funds are allowed to serve you advertising when you start a new job? This can result in people signing up for multiple – potentially low-value – super accounts, each with its own set of fees and insurance premiums.

Later this year, the laws around super funds advertising to people starting a new job are set to change. But the government's draft legislation introduced in March stops short of banning advertising altogether.

"Treasury's own modelling showed that allowing super funds to advertise on employee onboarding software will result in about 325,000 more people with multiple super accounts every year, at a cost of \$16 million per year," says Katrina Ellis, deputy CEO of Super Consumers Australia.

"Consumer protections aimed at putting an end to people having multiple super accounts were only introduced four years ago, but this draft legislation will undermine them."

Duplicate accounts could set you back \$50,000 by retirement thanks to multiple fees. We want to see the legislation amended to protect Australians from blatant advertising when they're starting a job.

ANTOINETTE DYCE

Another big penalty in the VET FEE-HELP loan scandal

The \$20 million penalty handed down in May by the Federal Court against Captain Cook College comes at the tail end of the outsized VET FEE-HELP loan scandal. In recent years, several other dodgy operators have also copped big fines for unconscionable conduct, including Unique International College, the Empower Institute, the Australian Institute of Professional Education, Acquire Learning, and the Phoenix Institute of Australia. The program was launched by the federal government in 2009 to help disadvantaged people earn diplomas in higher level vocational education and training, but many of these people became victims of industrial-scale fraud.

Like the other offenders, Captain Cook College received tens of millions of taxpayer dollars through the VET FEE-HELP program. About 5500 would-be students racked up debts totalling over \$60 million. Almost none of them ever completed any part of an online course, and around 86% of them never even logged in. For years, the business menaced these would-be students with threats about owing thousands to the government. Their debts, along with those of other victims of the VET FEE-HELP loan fiasco, eventually had to be waived by the government. In July 2023, the ACCC announced that around \$3.4 billion in VET FEE-HELP debt had been re-credited to over 185,000 students since 2016. Collectively, the wrongdoers copped around \$650 million in penalties.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Little savings in big pharmacies

CHOICE asked over 1000 consumers if they could tell if price tags at Chemist Warehouse, Priceline and Terry White represented a discount on the usual price, and whether they could quickly and easily determine this.

What we discovered was that around 1 in 3 people found it difficult to easily tell if promotional tags often found at pharmacies represented a discount. Many who assumed the tags indicated savings often overestimated the discounts on offer and some thought the reductions were based on prices the product may have never actually been sold for.

Promotional labels that refer to the recommended retail price (RRP) to suggest a discount can leave consumers confused. If the

RRP is not a price the pharmacy has previously charged, consumers may be misled about how much they're really saving. There has been a race to the bottom with these tactics, which makes it hard for businesses using transparent pricing to compete. You can read more about our findings on page 21.

CHOICE supports the government's commitment to regulate confusing supermarket price displays and promotions, but our research shows that confusing price displays are not limited to the supermarket aisle. Major retailers like pharmacies, department stores, pet stores and hardware chains routinely use similar pricing tactics and should be addressed next.

BEA SHERWOOD

ACCC cracks down on phoney NDIS endorsements

In November last year the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) put businesses on notice about advertising an endorsement by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) that didn't really exist. ACCC deputy chair Catriona Lowe said the ACCC was concerned "that many NDIS providers are claiming that certain products or services are 'NDIS approved', 'NDIS funded' or otherwise NDIS endorsed when this is not the case". The concern was well-founded.

In May, the ACCC slapped infringement notices on two businesses for exaggerating their NDIS credentials – the bedding retailer Bedshed and Thermomix Australia. The resulting penalties were \$39,600 and \$79,200, respectively. Bedshed's advertising misleadingly suggested that some of its products had been evaluated or approved by the NDIS, while Thermomix made false or misleading online claims suggesting that two of its household appliances were endorsed by the scheme.

"The NDIS does not provide specific approval for any particular goods or services," says ACCC chair Gina Cass-Gottlieb. "Each NDIS participant has unique needs, and what's funded under their plan is determined individually, not through a list of approved products. There are no categories of goods or services which are automatically NDIS approved or funded for all NDIS participants."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Uber's grip on Melbourne Airport loosens

Readers may remember that we recently wrote about whether Uber's market dominance in Australia was good for consumers or stifling competition (*CHOICE* May 25). In that story, we highlighted cases like Melbourne Airport, where

a secret commercial arrangement between Uber and the airport created Uber-exclusive passenger pick-up ranks outside the major terminals. This left customers wanting to take a taxi, or another rideshare company like Didi,

walking hundreds of metres in search of a pick-up.

But it seems Melbourne Airport has changed its tune. As of May, they've introduced new "split ranks" that allow Ubers, taxis and other rideshares to share access to the main terminal pick-up zones.

"We are making it easier for you to find a taxi or Uber when you arrive at Melbourne Airport. Extra taxi and Uber ranks zones have been created due to feedback from passengers, drivers and staff, and are designed to improve your access to transport," the airport website says.

In a win for Victorian consumers, passengers arriving at Melbourne Airport will now be able to choose what form of taxi or rideshare service they want to take. (Just don't ask when the train to the airport is due to be built.)

JARNI BLAKKARLY



Best travel insurance when you have a baby on board



What could be more important than making sure you're properly insured when you're travelling while pregnant? Pregnancy is covered by all the travel insurance policies we analyse, but the coverage varies. Most policies only provide cover up to 23 to 26 weeks gestation, and only a few cover childbirth – and usually only when labour has been brought about by an accident.

We rate policies for both the cover they provide and value for money. Tick Travel insurance, (both their Standard and Top policies), and InsureandGo Gold are the top-rated policies that cover pregnancies into the third trimester. They cover pregnancy up to the end of the 30th week for single pregnancies and earn a *CHOICE* Expert Rating of 66 or 67%.

The comprehensive policies from Southern Cross Travel Insurance and Qantas are the only two in our review that cover both childbirth and newborn care. But they only offer cover up to 23 weeks and 26 weeks, respectively, so you're only covered for a very premature birth. If you need cover for an IVF-assisted pregnancy your options are more limited. We recommend you look at Southern Cross Travel Insurance (SCTI) Comprehensive (*CHOICE* Expert Rating 69%), World2Cover Top (69%), Allianz Comprehensive (68%), or Worldcare Comprehensive (68%).

JANE BARDELL



RANTS AND RAVES

Telstra switched to upfront billing and I'm upfront annoyed



In March this year, Telstra switched its billing process from post-pay to pre-pay, or “upfront billing”, as they call it.

This means that instead of paying for services you’ve already used, you have to pay in advance for what you plan to take advantage of.

This is fine if you have all-inclusive services that are a fixed fee, such as an NBN connection, but if you rely on extras, such as making phone calls over VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), then it’s no good at all.

But why would anyone still need VoIP and have to pay for phone calls these days? Well, my elderly parents rely on VoIP to make phone calls to Greece from their landline. This was easy when they could pay at the end of the service cycle. The NBN account was set up with a VoIP router with a telephone plugged into it and they could pay for however long they talked overseas. It wasn’t expensive.

But with upfront billing, they can’t pay after the fact and are restricted to

the 30 minutes included in their NBN plan. That’s nowhere near enough when talking to different people multiple times across a week. They can make a one-off purchase of an extra 200 minutes for \$20, but that’s still not going to meet their needs.

Their last Telstra bill before the telco changed to upfront billing shows they talked for 480 minutes across 24 calls, at a cost of only \$28. That means they’ve now lost a lot of value, in addition to the freedom to talk whenever and for however long they want.

Even when making a schedule and keeping a log of how long they’ve talked, it’s hard to stick to it. It’s caused a lot of stress for them and their relatives because they have to chew through the minutes quickly and then wait until Telstra’s billing cycle renews at the end of the month to speak again.

My parents aren’t technologically savvy, so using a smartphone with Wi-Fi calling is just not going to happen; their call recipients are on

regular landlines anyway. Calling cards are another level of frustration. Some claim to give you 200 minutes, but they charge in increments of anything from four minutes to 15-minute blocks. My parents would also have to enter an access number and a PIN each time and deal with complicated menu systems. No thanks.

My solution is to move them to a new internet service provider (ISP), which means getting their beloved phone number ported from Telstra. Seeing this done successfully is my number one priority: their number has been with them for well over 40 years, everyone they know has it and all their medical appointments rely on it to reach them, so it will be a huge pain if it’s lost.

Here’s hoping the move will be a success and I don’t have to come back to this column with another rant about a lost number. Things may even go well, and I can finally rave about a positive telco experience.

ELIAS PLASTIRAS

They’ve now lost a lot of value, in addition to the freedom to talk whenever they want

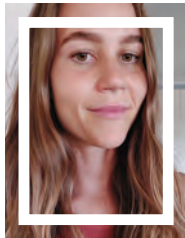


ASK THE EXPERTS

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Q I recently bought a pair of ugg boots from a shop that sold mainly sheepskin products. There were signs all over the shop showing the “Australian made” logo, so I assumed I was browsing Australian-made sheepskin products. After buying my ugg boots and getting them home I checked the label inside the boot. Although it had an Australian flag on it, on closer inspection, the print underneath said “Made in China”. I feel I have been misled – is this legal?

A CHOICE journalist
Grace Smith



You're not alone in falling victim to this misleading practice – there are ongoing issues with ugg retailers trying to pass off imported products as Australian-made. In some cases, retailers have been fined by the ACCC for making false country of origin claims. Unfortunately, shoppers have to be very savvy when buying ugg boots

if they want to buy Australian-made. The only way to know for sure is to check for the “Made in Australia” rectangular swing tag on the boots themselves or check the sewn-in tag on the boots instore before buying. Don't pay any attention to advertising materials around the store, focus only on the product you're considering buying and beware of images or phrases that imply that something is Australian such as “Premium Australian”, “Classic Australian design” or “Australian classic”. If the store where you bought them had “Australian made” signs up, it probably means some of the products they sell are made in Australia. You could try returning the boots, explaining the problem and asking for a refund or to swap them for a pair that are genuinely made in Australia. Once you've got a pair you're happy with, make sure you look after them properly – head to page 28 for our guide on caring for your ugs.



ASK US

Email your question to asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204. You can also tap into the ‘brains trust’ at www.choice.community.

Q I want to replace my 20-year-old convection microwave and I'm looking for a few key features – can you help me? Firstly, I'd like the new model to



rotate a full 360 degrees during the cooking time, so that the cup or bowl ends up in the exact same place as where I placed it originally. Secondly, I've noticed that a lot of modern units are very light, so when you push the open-door button the whole unit moves backwards – I'd like a model that stays put.

A CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair:

If it's important to you that your plate or bowl ends up in the same position as where you placed it, you



might want to consider a flatbed style microwave (rather than one with a turntable). Flatbed models don't rotate at all, so your container will stay in the same position throughout the cooking process. As for your second requirement,

we have noticed that some of the lighter freestanding microwaves do slide on some surfaces. We make a note of this in our reviews. You can also head instore to check out which models feel sturdier.



Q I'm replacing my third Dyson V8 battery in as many years. Dyson sells them for \$139, and Bunnings sells the same battery type for \$69. They are lithium-ion batteries and are left continually on charge when the vacuum cleaner is not being used. My inclination is to buy from Dyson from a safety point of view, but when you can get two from Bunnings for the price of one from Dyson, it's hard not to be tempted. What's your advice?



A **CHOICE**
small appliance expert
Adian Lini: I would personally always buy from Dyson directly even though the

price is significantly higher.

The Bunnings battery is being sold online via a 'Marketplace' seller. By buying a third-party battery, you risk not knowing its quality, and are now introducing a new variable if you ever have an issue with the vacuum when contacting either Dyson or the third-party battery company. It may also be a risk if you're using the original Dyson charger for the third-party battery. While the chances are low, we've seen reports of fires starting from stick vacuum Li-ion batteries malfunctioning while on charge. It could be worth looking elsewhere online to see if you can find official or genuine Dyson batteries sold cheaper.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Consumer case study

Dodging responsibilities

CHOICE staffer Amanda's coffee machine experienced a major failure and stopped working after just two years. The product was outside its warranty period, but Amanda felt that it should still be covered by her rights under Australia Consumer Law (ACL). So, she got in touch with the retailer and explained that she was seeking a remedy under the ACL on the basis that the coffee machine was not of 'acceptable quality' due to its lack of durability, evidenced by its total failure after just two years.

The retailer involved the manufacturer and what followed was about 20 back-and-forth emails over the course of four weeks, with Amanda constantly having to follow up.

During this process, both the manufacturer and the retailer repeatedly referred to the product being "out of warranty", despite Amanda clearly and consistently communicating that she was requesting a remedy under the ACL, not under her warranty.

After many emails and being no closer to a resolution, Amanda asked to escalate the matter to a supervisor or someone in a position of authority at the manufacturer, but these requests were denied. She was told no names or positions could be provided due to "confidentiality", which felt to her like a clear way to avoid accountability.

Finally, exhausting all other options, and with both the manufacturer and the retailer failing to offer to inspect the faulty appliance, suggest alternatives, or propose any solution beyond advising her to go and pay for an assessment and possible repair herself, Amanda lodged a formal complaint with NSW Fair Trading. She says only then did the retailer begin to engage with her more seriously.

The retailer eventually offered her a \$200 voucher as a "goodwill gesture", which she accepted to bring the matter to a close and replace the appliance. They also price-matched the replacement she chose with a lower price she'd seen online and allowed her to apply the voucher to the purchase, even though this went against their usual policy. Even so, she was still out of pocket for the difference between the voucher and the cost of the replacement machine. So, while she did receive something from the retailer, she didn't receive a remedy under the ACL – she feels the solution provided was just a way for the manufacturer and retailer to put the issue to rest without taking accountability.

This case study goes to show that even with all the consumer rights knowledge of a CHOICE staff member, it can still be unreasonably difficult to get a remedy under ACL.