



Make Forbes.com My Home Page Bookmark This Page +  
Become a member Portfolio | Register



Search: **Forbes.com** Quotes Video Web Blogs Advanced

Bringing the wisdom of crowds to business intelligence

U.S. EUROPE ASIA HOME PAGE FOR THE WORLD'S BUSINESS LEADERS Free Trial Issue  
HOME BUSINESS TECH MARKETS ENTREPRENEURS LEADERSHIP PERSONAL FINANCE FORBESLIFE LISTS OPINIONS  
CIO Network Enterprise Imaging Internet Internet Infrastructure Personal Tech Sciences Security Wireless

E-Mail | Print | Request Reprints | E-Mail Newsletters | RSS

ADVERTISEMENT

## Calling Out How To Call Home From Outside The U.S.

Elizabeth Woyke 01.23.08, 6:00 AM ET



In Pictures: How To Call Home From Outside The U.S.

Neil Kozarsky thought he had found the perfect phone in the BlackBerry 8830. As head of a New Jersey packaging company, he travels to Japan at least once a month. So when a phone clerk said the "World Edition" BlackBerry could keep him connected--even in Japan, a notorious dead zone for Western phones and personal digital assistants--Kozarsky was sold.

Too bad. On his next trip to Tokyo in mid-July, Kozarsky found his BlackBerry wouldn't get a signal. He blamed the airport, then the train, then the overcast weather. After a sleepless night spent rebooting the phone and talking to his support staff in the U.S., he contacted **Verizon** (nyse: [VZ](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) Wireless customer service, which immediately pinpointed the problem:

The phone was functional in more than 160 countries, but not Japan.

Calling home is one of the great frustrations of traveling abroad. Horror stories abound of travelers stranded with malfunctioning phone cards or racking up thousand-dollar cellphone bills for international roaming charges. Some frequent travelers carry multiple phones to navigate incompatible cellular standards country to country.

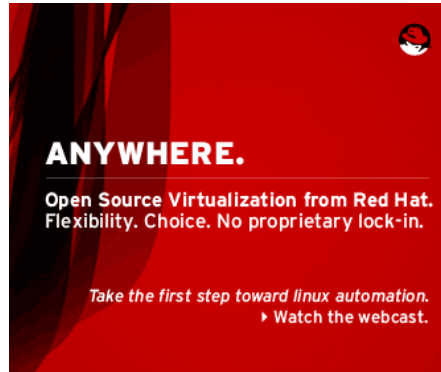
### In Pictures: How To Call Home From Outside The U.S.

The introduction of "world phones," which can toggle between the two most popular cellular technologies, and the growing popularity of VoIP services like Skype, which route calls over the Internet, have expanded options, but also complicated the process.

The best way to phone home depends on several factors: your current phone and carrier, your destination, your budget, and the amount of effort you're willing to invest. Business travelers that have generous corporate budgets and diverse destinations will probably want to rent a phone at the airport, or perhaps buy a world phone and ask their IT departments to ensure seamless use abroad. Budget-minded travelers with more free time would be better off using a local phone card or VoIP services.

In terms of cellular access technology, U.S. carriers can be divided into two basic camps: CDMA and GSM. In general, **AT&T** (nyse: [T](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) and T-Mobile phones use GSM, while Verizon and **Sprint Nextel** (nyse: [S](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) phones--as well as those from smaller carriers, like **Alltel** (nyse: [AT](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) and **United States Cellular** (amex: [USM](#) - [news](#) - [people](#))--use CDMA. The distinction matters, because GSM is a more widely used technology globally--about 85% of wireless phone users across Europe, Australia and much of Asia and Africa, while CDMA is predominantly found in the U.S. and South Korea.

A GSM phone has a good chance of working abroad, as long as it's a multi-band (tri-band or quad-band) phone. That functionality is necessary because GSM works on a different radio spectrum in the U.S. than in the rest of the world. Most new GSM phones are capable of accessing these other spectrum bands--but check the user manual or ask your carrier to be sure. AT&T, which says it has coverage in more than 195 countries, recently added a Web site features that



Make Forbes.com My Home Page Bookmark This Page

News by E-mail Get stories by E-Mail on this topic FREE

#### Companies

- Apple  Verizon
- United States Cellular  AT&T

#### Topics

- mobile phones  international calls
- GSM  CDMA

Become a member FREE  Already a Member? [Log In](#)

Enter Username  Enter E-Mail Address

Select Your Title  Receive Special Offers?

[FAQ](#) | [Terms, Conditions and Notices](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Also available: [E-Mail Newsletters](#) | [Software Finder](#)



Personalize Now!

PRESENTED BY



Personalize Now!

Weather	<a href="#">Select Your City</a>	
Sports	<a href="#">Select Your Team</a>	
Watch List	<a href="#">Select Companies</a>	XYZ +5.87
Industry News	<a href="#">Choose Industry</a>	
Authors	<a href="#">Choose Favorites</a>	

#### CEO Edition

Are you a C-Suite Executive?  
Activate your attaché in one click.

pinpoints access based on your phone type: Just plug in your cell number.

"There are devices that work just about anywhere, particularly if you're on a GSM network and have a quad-band phone," says Michael Gartenberg, an analyst with Jupiter Research. "But you do have to look at the feature sets and ask the right questions."

Verizon and Sprint customers have the option of buying a "world phone" that uses CDMA in the U.S. and GSM abroad. The BlackBerry 8830 and Motorola's (nyse: [MOT](#) - news - people ) Z6c are two examples. Again, the prepared traveler should check the company's Web site for details on exactly where the phones work, as coverage can vary city to city, based on the carrier's global roaming agreements.

Taking your cell phone abroad is convenient, but pricy, as dialing from another country activates international roaming rates. If you have a GSM phone, you can get cheaper service by swapping out a small card located in the back of your phone and replacing it with a local version. (This won't work on CDMA phones, as they don't have these cards.) Called "SIM" cards, they're sold in phone shops and can be purchased prepaid. Snapping in a new card will make your phone act as if it's a local phone, complete with a local phone number and local rates. Switching cards is particularly popular in Europe, where people "walk in, buy a SIM, and keep on adding minutes to it," notes Current Analysis analyst Bill Ho. Calls to your existing phone number go to voice mail.

One caveat: This kind of swap only works on "unlocked" phones. Most phones purchased in the U.S. as part of a subscriber plan are "locked" to a particular network to try to build in loyalty in exchange for cheaper handsets. Before you leave, ask your carrier to unlock your phone—a quick, software-based process. Due to an exclusive agreement between **Apple** (nasdaq: [AAPL](#) - news - people ) and AT&T, the iPhone cannot be unlocked here in the U.S.

Of course, many people don't want to take their phones abroad. They can rent a phone at the airport or online, then arrange delivery to their hotels—or buy a local phone. Buying is a good choice for extended stays and in countries that have cheap handsets. Gadget geeks often pick up cool phones that haven't yet debuted in the U.S. and bring them back, intending to switch the SIM cards and use them at home. This will work as long as the frequencies match, which is a good bet for quad-band phones.

If you're traveling with a laptop and will have ready access to a broadband connection, you can bypass these technical issues and simply make calls over the Internet. Robin Kawakami, a 31-year-old New Yorker currently studying in Europe, uses Skype to keep in touch. Calls to other Skype users on computers are free; those to U.S. cell phones or landlines cost about 25 cents per minute from her current base in Denmark.

Of course, making calls online isn't limited to Skype or PCs. New York City startup Raketu offers VoIP calls on certain BlackBerrys, as well as the iPhone and iPod touch. The service utilizes Wi-Fi hot spots, and is limited to designated zones in about 40 countries. Later this month, **Sony** (nyse: [SNE](#) - news - people ) will introduce a software update for its PlayStation Portable that will support Skype.

For those who prefer to travel light—no phone, no laptop, no major purchases abroad—there's always the tried-and-true phone card. Major telcos, including AT&T and Verizon, offer calling cards for calls both to and from the U.S. So, of course, do a number of independent and local companies. Local phone cards offer cheaper rates, but the potential for more headaches as well, including technical glitches and assistance or directions limited to the local language.

Japan and Korea are special cases: The proprietary cellular technologies used in those countries means travelers need phones that operate on third-generation technology at 2100 MHz. Samsung's Blackjack II and **Palm's** (nasdaq: [PALM](#) - news - people ) Treo 750 are two handsets that fit the bill.

These proliferating options means it's easier than ever to make regular phone calls. But it's increasingly complicated to access mobile data networks abroad, something more people are interested in as phones get more sophisticated. Switching SIM cards won't guarantee text messaging or Web browsing will be functional.

Carriers are working toward a more universal standard for cell phones. Verizon has said it will upgrade its network to a fourth-generation mobile broadband technology, called Long Term Evolution, that is likely to be adopted by other operators around the world.

For now, "what it comes down to is caveat emptor," says Jupiter's Gartenberg. If you're buying a phone or a SIM card, "assume that the salespeople in the store aren't necessarily international travelers. Do your homework."

ADVERTISEMENTS

**ITT Technical Institute**

Over 85 Locations & Online Programs Available. Request A Free Brochure  
www.itt-tech.edu

**T1 Low Monthly Pricing**

Free Professional Installation and Router. Call Covad for More Info.  
www.Covad.com

**Pitney Bowes Mailstation2**

New Improved Internet Connectivity, 60-Day Trial. \$50 Postage Coupons  
http://www.pitneyworks.com

**Your Free Credit Score**

See your updated 2008 credit report and score instantly and online.  
www.FreeCreditReport.com

**Millions are Snagging.**

Are you? Snag It - Capture, edit & share anything on your PC screen.  
www.techsmith.com

[Buy a link here](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

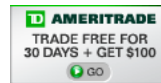
**Related Business Topics**

[Computer Software](#)

[Business Dsl](#)

**Trading Center**

Brought to you by the sponsors below



ForbesAutos.com

ForbesTraveler.com



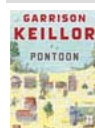
Investopedia.com



**CEO Book Club**

BOOK REVIEW

**Garrison Keillor**



BOOK REVIEW **Garrison Keillor: Misanthrope**

David A. Andelman  
Back home in Lake Wobegon, where the mood has turned somber.