

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

| | | |
|---|---|-------------------|
| In the Matter of |) | |
| |) | |
| Network Plus |) | IC Nos. 02-S73382 |
| |) | 02-S73404 |
| Complaints Regarding |) | |
| Unauthorized Change of |) | |
| Subscriber's Telecommunications Carrier |) | |

ORDER

Adopted: November 7, 2002

Released: November 15, 2002

By the Deputy Chief, Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau:

1. In this Order, we consider the complaint filed¹ alleging that Network Plus (Network) changed Complainants' telecommunications service provider without obtaining authorization and verification from Complainants in violation of the Commission's rules.² We conclude that Network's actions did result in an unauthorized change in Complainants' telecommunications service providers and we grant Complainants' complaints.

2. In December 1998, the Commission released the *Section 258 Order* in which it adopted rules to implement Section 258 of the Communications Act of 1934 (Act), as amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act).³ Section 258 prohibits the practice of

¹ See Appendix A.

² See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1100 – 64.1190.

³ 47 U.S.C. § 258(a); Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996); *Implementation of the Subscriber Carrier Selection Changes Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996; Policies and Rules Concerning Unauthorized Changes of Consumers' Long Distance Carriers*, CC Docket No. 94-129, Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making, 14 FCC Rcd 1508 (1998) (*Section 258 Order*), *stayed in part*, *MCI WorldCom v. FCC*, No. 99-1125 (D.C. Cir. May 18, 1999); First Order on Reconsideration, 15 FCC Rcd 8158 (2000); *stay lifted*, *MCI WorldCom v. FCC*, No. 99-1125 (D.C. Cir. June 27, 2000); Third Report and Order and Second Order on Reconsideration, 15 FCC Rcd 15996 (2000), Errata, DA No. 00-2163 (rel. Sept. 25, 2000), Erratum, DA No. 00-2192 (rel. Oct. 4, 2000), Order, FCC 01-67 (rel. Feb. 22, 2001); *reconsideration pending*. Prior to the adoption of Section 258, the Commission had taken various steps to address the slamming problem. See, e.g., *Policies and Rules Concerning Unauthorized Changes of Consumers' Long Distance Carriers*, CC Docket No. 94-129, Report and Order, 10 FCC Rcd 9560 (1995), *stayed in part*, 11 FCC Rcd 856 (1995); *Policies and Rules Concerning Changing Long Distance Carriers*, CC Docket No. 91-64, 7 FCC Rcd 1038 (1992), *reconsideration denied*, 8 FCC Rcd 3215 (1993); Investigation of Access and Divestiture Related Tariffs, CC Docket No. 83-1145, Phase I, 101 F.C.C.2d 911, 101 F.C.C.2d 935, *reconsideration denied*, 102 F.C.C.2d 503 (1985).

“slamming,” the submission or execution of an unauthorized change in a subscriber’s selection of a provider of telephone exchange service or telephone toll service.⁴ In the *Section 258 Order*, the Commission adopted aggressive new rules designed to take the profit out of slamming, broadened the scope of the slamming rules to encompass all carriers, and modified its existing requirements for the authorization and verification of preferred carrier changes. The rules require, among other things, that a carrier receive individual subscriber consent before a carrier change may occur.⁵ Pursuant to Section 258, carriers are absolutely barred from changing a customer's preferred local or long distance carrier without first complying with one of the Commission's verification procedures.⁶ Specifically, a carrier must: (1) obtain the subscriber's written or electronically signed authorization in a format that meets the requirements of Section 64.1130 authorization; (2) obtain confirmation from the subscriber via a toll-free number provided exclusively for the purpose of confirming orders electronically; or (3) utilize an independent third party to verify the subscriber's order.⁷

3. The Commission also has adopted liability rules. These rules require the carrier to absolve the subscriber where the subscriber has not paid his or her bill. In that context, if the subscriber has not already paid charges to the unauthorized carrier, the subscriber is absolved of liability for charges imposed by the unauthorized carrier for service provided during the first 30 days after the unauthorized change.⁸ Where the subscriber has paid charges to the unauthorized carrier, the Commission’s rules require that the unauthorized carrier pay 150% of those charges to the authorized carrier, and the authorized carrier shall refund or credit to the subscriber 50% of all charges paid by the subscriber to the unauthorized carrier.⁹ Carriers should note that our actions in this order do not preclude the Commission from taking additional action, if warranted, pursuant to Section 503 of the Act.¹⁰

4. We received Complainants’ complaints alleging that Complainants’ telecommunications service providers had been changed from their authorized carriers to Network without Complainants’ authorization. Pursuant to Sections 1.719 and 64.1150 of our rules,¹¹ we notified Network of the complaints and Network responded.¹² Network submitted a

⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 258(a).

⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120.

⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 258(a).

⁷ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120(c). Section 64.1130 details the requirements for letter of agency form and content for written or electronically signed authorizations. 47 C.F.R. § 64.1130.

⁸ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1140, 64.1160. Any charges imposed by the unauthorized carrier on the subscriber for service provided after this 30-day period shall be paid by the subscriber to the authorized carrier at the rates the subscriber was paying to the authorized carrier at the time of the unauthorized change. *Id.*

⁹ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1140, 64.1170.

¹⁰ See 47 U.S.C. § 503.

¹¹ 47 C.F.R. § 1.719 (Commission procedure for informal complaints filed pursuant to Section 258 of the Act); 47 C.F.R. § 64.1150 (procedures for resolution of unauthorized changes in preferred carrier).

third party verification tape for each Complainant. According to the tapes, the verifier has failed to obtain separate authorizations from the subscriber for each service as required by our rules.¹³ We find that Network has failed to produce clear and convincing evidence that Complainants authorized a carrier change.¹⁴ Therefore, we find that Network's actions resulted in an unauthorized change in Complainants' telecommunications service providers and we discuss Network's liability below.¹⁵

5. Pursuant to Section 64.1170(b) our rules, Network must forward to authorized carriers an amount equal to 150% of all charges paid by the subscriber to Network.¹⁶ Therefore, Network must forward to authorized carriers the amount, along with copies of any telephone bills issued from the company to the Complainants.¹⁷ Within ten days of receipt of this amount, the authorized carriers shall provide a refund or credit to Complainants in the amount of 50% of all charges paid by Complainants to Network. Complainants have the option of asking authorized carriers to re-rate Network's charges based on the authorized carrier's rates and, on behalf of Complainants, seek from Network, any re-rated amount exceeding 50% of all charges paid by Complainants to Network. The authorized carriers must also send a notice to the Commission, referencing this Order, stating that it has given a refund or credit to Complainants.¹⁸ If authorized carriers have not received the reimbursement required from Network within 45 days of the release of this Order, the authorized carriers must notify the Commission and Complainants accordingly. The authorized carriers also must notify the Complainants of his or her right to pursue a claim against Network for a refund of all charges paid to Network.¹⁹

6. Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED that, pursuant to Section 258 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. § 258, and Sections 0.141, 0.361 and 1.719 of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. §§ 0.141, 0.361, 1.719, the complaints filed against Network Plus ARE GRANTED.

(Continued from previous page) _____

¹² See Appendix A.

¹³ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120(b).

¹⁴ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1150(d).

¹⁵ If Complainant is unsatisfied with the resolution of this complaint, Complainant may file a formal complaint with the Commission pursuant to Section 1.721 of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. § 1.721. Such filing will be deemed to relate back to the filing date of Complainant's informal complaint so long as the formal complaint is filed within 45 days from the date this order is mailed or delivered electronically to Complainant. See 47 C.F.R. § 1.719.

¹⁶ 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(b).

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(c).

¹⁹ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(e).

7. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, pursuant to Section 64.1170(b) of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(b), that Network Plus must forward to the authorized carriers an amount equal to 150% of all charges paid by the subscriber along with copies of any telephone bills issued from the company to the Complainants within ten (10) days of the release of this order.

8 IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Order is effective upon release.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Margaret M. Egler, Deputy Chief
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau

APPENDIX A

| INFORMAL COMPLAINT NUMBER | DATE OF COMPLAINT | DATE OF CARRIER RESPONSE | AUTHORIZED CARRIER(S) |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 02-S73382 | April 5, 2002 | June 14, 2002 | BellSouth |
| 02-S73404 | April 9, 2002 | June 14, 2002 | BellSouth AT&T |