

**Creighton E. Mershon, Sr.**  
***Attorney At Law***

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June 12, 2006

Ms. Beth O'Donnell  
Executive Director  
Public Service Commission  
211 Sower Boulevard  
P. O. Box 615  
Frankfort, KY 40602

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JUN 13 2006

PUBLIC SERVICE  
COMMISSION

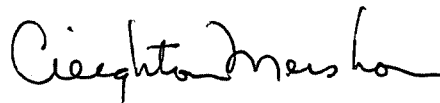
Re: dPi Teleconnect, L.L.C. v. BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc.  
KPSC 2005-00455

Dear Ms. O'Donnell:

The Commission's March 2, 2006, Order held this matter in abeyance pending the outcome of a similar proceeding before the North Carolina Utilities Commission. The Commission's Order also required dPi and BellSouth to notify the Kentucky Commission today and every 30 days thereafter of the status of the proceeding in North Carolina until the matter is resolved.

BellSouth hereby advises this Commission that the North Carolina Utilities Commission ("NCUC") issued its Order Dismissing Complaint in Docket No. P-55, Sub 1577, on June 7, 2006. The NCUC found that dPi was not entitled to any of the promotional credits it sought. A copy of the Order is attached.

Sincerely,



Creighton E. Mershon, Sr.

cc: Parties of Record

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STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
UTILITIES COMMISSION  
RALEIGH

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JUN 13 2006

PUBLIC SERVICE  
COMMISSION

DOCKET NO. P-55, SUB 1577

BEFORE THE NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of  
Complaint of dPi Teleconnect, L.L.C. Against )  
BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. Regarding ) ORDER DISMISSING  
Credit for Resale of Services Subject to ) COMPLAINT  
Promotional Discounts )

HEARD IN: Commission Hearing Room 2115, Dobbs Building, 430 North Salisbury Street, Raleigh, North Carolina on Wednesday, March 1, 2006, at 9:22 a.m.

BEFORE: Commissioner James Y. Kerr, II, Presiding, and Chair Jo Anne Sanford and Commissioner Sam J. Ervin, IV

APPEARANCES:

For dPi Teleconnect, L.L.C.:

Ralph McDonald, Bailey & Dixon, L.L.P., Post Office Box 1351, Raleigh, North Carolina 27602-1351

Christopher Malish, Foster, Malish, Blair & Cowan, L.L.P., 1403 West Sixth Street, Austin, Texas 78703

For BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc.:

Edward L. Rankin, III, BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc., Post Office Box 30188, Charlotte, North Carolina 28230

Andrew D. Shore, BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc., 675 W. Peachtree Street NE, Suite 4300, Atlanta, Georgia 30375

For the Using and Consuming Public:

Robert S. Gillam and Ralph J. Daigneault, Staff Attorneys, Public Staff - North Carolina Utilities Commission, 4326 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-4326

BY THE COMMISSION: On August 25, 2005, dPi Teleconnect, L.L.C. (dPi) filed a complaint against BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. (BellSouth) seeking credit for resale of services subject to promotional discounts resulting from their interconnection agreement and a hearing. Among other things, dPi resells BellSouth's retail residential telephone services, some of which are subject to BellSouth promotional discounts. On September 19, 2005, BellSouth filed an answer denying dPi's claims and requesting that the Commission dismiss the complaint.

On November 1, 2005, the Commission issued an Order Scheduling Docket for Hearing and Prefiling of Testimony. The hearing was scheduled for Tuesday, February 21, 2006. The Commission requested that the Public Staff participate as an intervenor. On January 4, 2006 the Commission issued an Order Canceling Hearing because of a scheduling conflict. On January 5, 2006, the Commission issued another Order Scheduling Docket for Hearing. The hearing was rescheduled for Wednesday, March 1, 2006. On January 20, 2006, the Commission issued an Order Granting Motion to Change Filing Dates.

As required by the Commission's November 1, 2005 and January 20, 2006 orders, BellSouth filed the testimony of Pam Tipton, a Director in BellSouth's regulatory organization on January 27, 2006. On that same day, dPi filed the testimony of Brian Bolinger, dPi's Vice President of legal and regulatory affairs, and Steve Watson of Lost Key Telecom, Inc., a consultant and billing agent for competing local providers of telecommunications service (CLPs). BellSouth and dPi filed the rebuttal testimony of their respective witnesses on February 10, 2006.

The Public Staff filed a Notice of Intervention on February 27, 2006, but did not file testimony or present witnesses.

An evidentiary hearing was held on March 1, 2006 in Raleigh, North Carolina with each of the above witnesses presenting direct and rebuttal testimony as well as exhibits.

Based on the foregoing, the evidence presented at the hearing, and the entire record in this matter, the Commission now makes the following

### **FINDINGS OF FACT**

1. BellSouth is duly certified as an incumbent local exchange carrier (ILEC) providing retail and wholesale telecommunications service in its North Carolina service area. BellSouth has a duty to offer any telecommunications service that BellSouth offers to its retail customers to competing local providers (CLPs) at wholesale rates for resale. 47 USC 251(c)(4). Pursuant to this obligation, BellSouth permits CLPs to resell discount promotional plans that BellSouth offers to its retail customers.

2. dPi is duly certified as a CLP and purchases telephone service from BellSouth for resale to its end user customers in North Carolina on a prepaid basis.

3. Among the vertical features that BellSouth makes available to end users are call return, repeat dialing and call tracing. These features are available on a per-use basis, as well as a flat-rate monthly basis. The customer has the option to block the utilization of these features on a per-use basis.

4. As a prepaid service provider, dPi, when it purchases service from BellSouth, routinely directs BellSouth to block the per-use utilization of call return, repeat dialing and call tracing.

5. From January 2004 through November 2005, which is the period in issue in this proceeding, BellSouth had in effect a promotion known as the Line Connection Charge Waiver (LCCW). Under this promotion, when a residential customer established new local service with BellSouth and purchased basic service and at least two custom calling features, BellSouth would waive the Line Connection Charge.

6. Under BellSouth's customary procedure, end user customers who qualify for the LCCW promotion are identified at the time they purchase service and are not billed for the Line Connection Charge. However, resellers are required to pay the full wholesale price for any service they purchase, even if the service qualifies for a promotion, and then submit documentation of the promotional credits to which they are entitled. If BellSouth agrees that a reseller is entitled to benefit from a promotion, it will credit the reseller for the appropriate amount. The form that resellers are required to submit to BellSouth when they request promotional credits has been designated by BellSouth as the "BellSouth Interconnection Billing Adjustment Request Form (BAR)."

7. In reviewing dPi's BAR forms, BellSouth took the position that a customer is entitled to benefit from the LCCW only if the customer purchases basic service and two custom calling features for which a charge is made. BellSouth's position is that acquiring the free blocking services BCD, BRD and HBG does not qualify a customer for the LCCW. Accordingly, BellSouth determined that dPi should be given credit for the LCCW only for those of its end users who had purchased two or more paying features in addition to the free blocking services.

8. The BellSouth/dPi interconnection agreement provides that, "Where available for resale, promotions will be made available only to End Users who would have qualified for the promotion had it been provided by BellSouth directly."

9. BellSouth has applied its LCCW promotion as being applicable only to its own customers who purchase basic service and two or more "TouchStar features" for which a charge is made. As a result, given the provisions of the parties' interconnection agreement, dPi is not entitled to credit for customers who purchase only basic service and free blocking features.

## **EVIDENCE AND CONCLUSIONS FOR FINDINGS OF FACT 1-2**

These findings of fact are essentially informational, procedural, and jurisdictional in nature, and the matters which they involve are uncontroversial. They are supported by information contained in the parties' pleadings and testimony and the Commission's files and records regarding this proceeding.

## **EVIDENCE AND CONCLUSIONS FOR FINDINGS OF FACT 3-9**

These findings of fact are supported by the testimony and exhibits of dPi witnesses Bolinger and Watson and BellSouth witness Tipton. In general, the witnesses did not contradict each other, but rather offered opposing perspectives on the transactions between the parties. The issues before the Commission involve the proper conclusions to be drawn from largely undisputed facts.

BellSouth is an ILEC. As an ILEC, BellSouth has a duty to offer any telecommunications service that BellSouth offers to its retail customers to dPi at wholesale rates for resale. The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has determined that BellSouth's resale obligations extend to promotional discounts offered on retail communication services which extend for periods in excess of ninety days. dPi witness Bolinger testified that dPi is a CLP, operating in 28 states including North Carolina. (Tr. pp. 28, 34) dPi purchases BellSouth's service and resells that service to its own end-user customers on a prepaid basis. BellSouth makes certain promotions available to its retail customers, and dPi, as a reseller, is entitled to the benefit of these promotions (Tr. p. 34).

BellSouth's service includes a variety of vertical features; the ones at issue in this proceeding are also referred to as TouchStar features. Many of these features are listed on BellSouth Cross-Examination Exhibit 2, and they include call return, repeat dialing and call tracing. A customer may pay BellSouth a monthly fee for the right to use call return, repeat dialing or call tracing on an unlimited basis; alternatively, a customer may pay for any of these features on a per-use basis (Tr. p. 73). A customer may also block the utilization of call return, repeat dialing or call tracing on a per-use basis (Tr. p. 74). As shown on BellSouth Cross-Examination Exhibit 2, the blocking of per-use call return, repeat dialing and call tracing is referred to in BellSouth's system by the codes BCD, BRD and HBG, respectively, and BellSouth furnishes BCD, BRD and HBG to customers upon request, without charge.

Witness Bolinger further testified that, whenever dPi purchases telephone service for resale, it blocks all telephone functionalities that can be billed on a per-use basis (Tr. p. 81). This is common practice among prepaid resellers (Tr. p. 84). Accordingly, in purchasing service from BellSouth, dPi routinely blocks per-use call return, repeat dialing and call tracing.

Witness Bolinger stated that one of the promotions offered by BellSouth during the period at issue in this case was the LCCW (Tr. pp. 35-36). Under the terms of this promotion, which are shown in BellSouth Cross-Examination Exhibit 1, when a new customer establishes local service with BellSouth and purchases basic service with two or more custom calling features, BellSouth's Line Connection Charge is waived.

dPi witness Watson testified that he operates Lost Key Telecom Inc., a firm that provides billing services to CLPs (Tr. p. 101). dPi employed Lost Key to prepare and submit promotional credit claims to BellSouth (Tr. p. 101). Witness Watson stated that, when a retail customer is eligible for a promotion, BellSouth automatically reduces the customer's bill by the appropriate amount (Tr. p. 102). However, BellSouth requires resellers to follow a different procedure. Resellers must initially pay the full charges for the service they purchase; they may then submit a form to BellSouth documenting their eligibility for a particular promotion and requesting a credit for the amount associated with the promotion. BellSouth reviews the refund claim forms and determines whether or not it will provide the requested credit (Tr. p. 102). BellSouth Cross-Examination Exhibit 4 is an example of the form that a CLP must submit in order to obtain a promotional credit.

Witness Watson testified that he submitted BAR forms asserting that dPi was entitled to the LCCW, because it had established local service with three custom calling features – the three blocking features, BCD, BRD and HBG (Tr. pp. 102-04). BellSouth refused to credit dPi for the amount of the Line Connection Charge, contending that, because there was no charge for the blocking features, they were not the type of features that qualified for the LCCW (Tr. p. 104). According to witness Watson, if BellSouth had given dPi credit for the LCCW as it should have done, dPi would have received credits in the amount of at least \$185,719.49 (Tr. p. 105).

BellSouth witness Tipton testified that BellSouth properly refused to credit dPi for the Line Connection Charge for lines where dPi's customers received only basic service and blocking of per-use call return, repeat dialing and call tracing. According to witness Tipton, the only features that qualify for the LCCW are features for which a charge is made. Unless dPi purchases local service and two or more paying features for a given line, it is not entitled to the benefit of the LCCW (Tr. pp. 215-19). Witness Tipton stated that, in many instances dPi had submitted invalid promotional credit claims to which it was not entitled, such as claims for CREX charges, which are not the subject of any promotion (Tr. pp. 209-10).<sup>1</sup>

None of the witnesses disputed the testimony of opposing witnesses relating to specific factual occurrences. As noted above, this case does not require the Commission to resolve conflicting accounts of the facts, but rather to determine the proper conclusions to be drawn from the facts. The Commission therefore finds the facts to be as set out above, based on the witnesses' un-contradicted testimony.

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<sup>1</sup> dPi originally alleged that BellSouth improperly denied its requests for discount offered as a result of multiple BellSouth promotions. dPi has since limited its claims to the LCCW promotion. Both parties agree that 99 per cent of the disputes center on this promotion.

Beginning in December, 2003, BellSouth requested permission to offer the LCCW promotion. The letter states:

“During the promotional period, new residence customers who purchase a BellSouth Complete Choice Plan, BellSouth PreferredPack or Community Caller Plus with two custom calling or TouchStar features will receive a waiver of the Line Connection Charge (as found in Section A4 of the GSST).” dPi Exhibit 2, letter to Robert Bennink, General Counsel of the North Carolina Utilities Commission dated December 15, 2003.

Similarly, by letter dated January 12, 2004, BellSouth provided further clarification of the promotion by stating:

“During the promotional period, new residence customers who purchase a BellSouth Complete Choice Plan, BellSouth PreferredPack or Community Caller Plus with two custom calling or TouchStar features will receive a waiver of the Line Connection Charge (as found in Section A4 of the GSST). This letter is to advise that this promotion will be available only to customers who are returning their local service to BellSouth.” dPi Exhibit 2, Letter of January 12, 2004 to Robert Bennink.

Finally, in a letter dated December 17, 2004, which extends the promotion until December, 2005, BellSouth stated:

“During the promotional period, eligible customers who purchase a BellSouth Complete Choice Plan, BellSouth PreferredPack or Community Caller Plus with two custom calling or TouchStar features will receive a waiver of the Line Connection Charge. This letter is to advise that BellSouth would like to extend this promotion through December 26, 2005. In order to participate in the extension of the promotion, all orders must be placed on or before December 26, 2005.” dPi Exhibit 2, Letter of December 17, 2004 to Robert Bennink.

The executive summary for Line Connection Charge Waiver Extension states that, to be eligible for the LCCW, “the customer must switch their local service to BellSouth and purchase any one of the following: ... BellSouth Basic Service and two (2) custom calling (or TouchStar service) local features.” BellSouth Cr. Ex. 1. “TouchStar is a group of central office call management features offered in addition to basic telephone service.” BellSouth GSST A13.19.1., BellSouth Cr. Ex. 2. TouchStar service features include call return, repeat dialing, call tracing...<sup>2</sup> GSST A13.19.2., BellSouth Cr. Ex. 2. Call return, repeat dialing and call tracing are available on a monthly or subscription basis. GSST A13.19.2(A)(B) and (C), BellSouth Cr. Ex. 2. “Access to the usage option [i.e., call return, repeat dialing, or call tracing] can be

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<sup>2</sup> Although there are more defined TouchStar service features defined in the tariff, only the three listed herein are applicable to this proceeding.

restricted at the customer's request at no charge." GSST A13.19.2(A)(B) and (C), BellSouth Cr. Ex. 2.

dPi restricts access to call return, repeat dialing, or call tracing as permitted by the tariff by including BCR, BCF and HBG (Blocking) features in every new order for basic telephone service. These blocks are not defined features in the TouchStar tariffs. Each block, however, is identified as a feature in the rates and charges section of the TouchStar tariff. GSST A13.19.4, BellSouth Cr. Ex. 2.

The parties to this proceeding have diametrically opposing positions on the interpretation of BellSouth's promotion. dPi argues that "all that is required to qualify for these promotions is the purchase of basic services with two TouchStar features." (Tr. p. 37). Further, dPi argues that it has done all that is necessary to qualify for the promotion discount by ordering at least two of the aforementioned blocks. BellSouth counters that blocks are not purchased features and do not qualify under the promotion. Further, BellSouth contends that dPi customers are ineligible for credits because dPi end users do not meet the same criteria that BellSouth retail customers must meet to benefit from the promotion as required by the interconnection agreement.

dPi urges the Commission to intervene in this dispute to divine the "proper" meaning of the promotion and require BellSouth to pay the appropriate credits. Were it to do so, the Commission would resort to various judicially acknowledged rules to assist it in interpreting the promotion. However, after careful consideration, the Commission concludes that we are not required to analyze and decide this case based on the language of the promotion. The fact is that BellSouth and dPi jointly agreed to methodology for determining the limits of any promotion in their voluntarily negotiated interconnection agreement. The following language governs this Commission's interpretation of this promotion:

"Where available for resale, promotions will be made available only to End Users who would have qualified for the promotion had it been provided by BellSouth directly." (Exhibit PAT-1).

Under the clear language of this provision, promotions are only available to the extent that end users would have qualified for the promotion if the promotion had been provided by BellSouth directly. In Witness Tipton's testimony, she stated emphatically that BellSouth does not authorize promotional discounts to its End Users who only order basic services and the blocks provided by dPi. (Tr. pp. 245-247). This fact was uncontested by dPi at the hearing and unrebutted in its post hearing brief. The Commission assumes that, if dPi had any contradictory evidence, it would have brought that evidence to our attention. This fact is dispositive. Under the clear terms of the interconnection agreement and the facts of this case, dPi end users who only order blocking features are not eligible for the credits because similarly situated BellSouth End Users are not entitled to such credits. dPi's complaint should therefore be denied.

In making this decision, the Commission acknowledges that dPi is at a disadvantage in the promotional process. Ultimately, however, the exact design and



contour of any promotion is completely within the vendor's discretion. BellSouth, like any other vendor, can choose to offer a promotion or not. BellSouth, like any other vendor, can establish terms that permit the consumer to benefit from the promotion or not. There is very little that dPi or this Commission can do to compel BellSouth to change or restructure any promotion unless the terms of the promotion are unconscionable, unconstitutional or violative of the laws or public policy of this State. In this case, there is no evidence that the LCCW promotion offered by BellSouth is unconscionable, unconstitutional or violative of the laws or public policy of this State.

One could argue that it is unconscionable to permit BellSouth to escape its financial responsibility in this case since BellSouth drafted an inherently ambiguous tariff which was reasonably subject to the interpretation adopted by dPi. Ordinarily, an ambiguity is construed against the drafter in situations such as the one at bar. However, dPi has waived its right to rely upon this rule through the bargaining process by agreeing to the aforementioned clause in the interconnection agreement. Thus, in order for us to reach the result that dPi desires, this Commission would be required to disregard the voluntarily negotiated interpretive aid found in the interconnection agreement and, in its place, substitute a judicially created interpretative aid. We decline to do so under these circumstances.

In issuing this Order today, we base our ruling on the unique facts of this case. We expressly decline to determine whether BellSouth's interpretation of the promotion, which prohibits credits being awarded when an end user purchases only basic service and no cost blocking features is correct as such a determination is unnecessary to finally and completely dispose of this case.

Finally, the Commission notes that the Public Staff discussed at length the shortcomings of BellSouth's process for determining which promotional credits dPi was entitled to receive. dPi witness Watson testified that BellSouth does not automatically calculate the promotional credits available to its resale customers at the time an order is submitted, as it does for its retail customers; instead, BellSouth requires resellers to audit their bills and apply for credits after the fact (Tr. p. 102). Moreover, witness Watson testified that BellSouth's system makes it extremely difficult for the reseller to apply for promotional credits. (Tr. p. 108). The credit request must be documented on forms created by BellSouth, listing details of every order for which credit is requested. The data supplied to BellSouth must come from BellSouth's own billing and ordering data, which are traditionally supplied to resellers in paper form or in a "DAB" file that is difficult to work with. Figuring out how to apply for the credits takes a significant amount of resources and time, and, as a result, many CLPs are not able to utilize the promotional credits and discounts.

The Public Staff viewed this process as cumbersome, difficult, and time-consuming to such an extent that the cost of qualifying for a promotion may be higher than the promotional benefit offered by the ILEC. Neither dPi nor BellSouth raised this issue as one to be decided in this proceeding. Nevertheless, the Public Staff invites this

Commission to modify the process to make it less burdensome. We decline the invitation in the context of this complaint proceeding.

If any party in this proceeding desires a more thorough inquiry into this issue, the issue would more appropriately be addressed in a generic proceeding. A generic proceeding would allow these parties and *any other parties with an interest* in the process an opportunity to fully explore BellSouth's process with an eye toward developing a global, universally applicable, solution to any problems identified. This approach is preferable to any limited solution which we could fashion in this proceeding. Thus, if any party, including the Public Staff, desires to resolve this issue, we would consider opening a generic docket upon an appropriate, factually supported petition being filed.

For the reasons set forth herein, dPi's complaint is dismissed.

IT IS, THEREFORE, SO ORDERED.

ISSUED BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION.

This the 7th day of June, 2006.

NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Swenson".

Patricia Swenson, Deputy Clerk

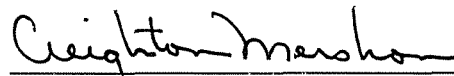
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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE – 2005-00455**

It is hereby certified that a true and correct copy of the foregoing was served on the following individual by mailing a copy thereof, this 12th day of June, 2006.

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