

So you want to buy a mobile phone in Gunning? 1999

When I came to Gunning in 1995 I had an old analogue mobile phone, large and lumpy but useful, but going outside to get a weak and dubious analogue service - it didn't work at all inside - was uneconomic. But I kept the phone.

In May 1999 the phone company told me the analogue system was to close down. They suggested I replace my analogue phone with a CDMA machine. If for any reason I wasn't satisfied with the service I could return the phone and void the contract.

I rang the mail order number. The sales person took me through a rigmarole that included insisting on spelling my name with an invented phonetic alphabet; "M for Mary, I for Inverell...". I wondered why they didn't teach them the internationally accepted phonetic alphabet, in this case Mike, India, Charlie, etc. I wondered whether they would get my name right through this process; they didn't. Then we got to delivery details. The exchange went: "Where did I want the phone sent?" As I had already given my address in Gunning a few times I said "Gunning, of course!"

Pause....."Where's Gunning?" I replied, "Between Yass and Goulburn on the Hume Highway." Pause....."What postcode is that?" "2581." Pause....."We have only four places in postcode 2581 that our contractor delivers to." "Oh, where are they?" "Sorry sir, we only deliver to Gurrundah, Cullerin, Breadalbane (how did you say that again?) and Collector. Perhaps you could buy a phone over the counter at your nearest phone shop?"

So I went to the phone company's franchise shop but if I bought it there I would be stuck with it. Back to Gunning; back to the mail order number. "Sir, perhaps you need to visit family or friends somewhere where we can arrange delivery in the next few days?" "How about delivery to friends in Collector?" "Can you be there personally to sign for the phone - you will need to be there for four hours to ensure delivery." "What! No! This is crazy!"

"Sir, is there anywhere else you are going to be for four hours where we could deliver the phone to you?" "Yes! Yass!" Pause....."Where's Yass?" "What postcode?" "2582." "We don't deliver to Yass. Please leave it with me, sir. I'll call you back tomorrow." At 6.45 the next day the phone rang. "Sir, I can arrange delivery to Yass." This time we were getting somewhere.

So to Yass, where I told the meeting of my phone adventures. At 10.00 it arrived! The courier had managed to find the shire council offices, the meeting, and me. Amazing! I signed for it and unpacked it between the two meetings. I put the machine on charge, concentrated on the meeting, and at 12.30 rang the phone company to get the phone activated. So far so good.

Back to Gunning. Upstairs to my study. The weakest possible signal, no better than analogue. Walk around a bit in hope but bad luck, reception is extremely poor.

Next morning, back to the phone company in line with their instructions for return if it didn't work. "I want to return the phone." More rigmarole, designed to dissuade me from this decision. "Don't be stupid! The damn thing doesn't work here." "And where are you?" And so on and so on for about half an hour, after which they were persuaded I was serious and the phone had to be returned.

Right at the end I said, “What about digital phones? Do you sell them on the same basis, satisfaction or return?” Now he was on sure footing. “We can offer you a free phone, Ericsson GA628, \$15 a month with a contract for two years, hands free kit, \$200 free calls in the first month.”

All this was rapid fire and I got about half of it but I said it sounded like a good deal if I could return the phone and void the contract if the phone didn’t work well enough. “Yes, that would be fine, you have ten days cooling off period after delivery.”

“Where would you like the phone sent?” “Gunning.”

Pause....“Where’s Gunning?” Oh no, not this again! “Let me tell you, you deliver to only Gurrundah, Cullerin, Breadalbane and Collector in postcode 2581.”

“How did you know?” “I’ve been through this before. It applies to all your company’s mail order products.” “Is there anywhere where you’ll be for four hours where we could send it to?”

This time I was ready. “Yes!” and I gave a friend’s address in Canberra. He had been overseas recently and I was going to see him in the next week anyway. “What about Monday?” “The earliest we could do is Tuesday.”

“All right, all right. But only a two hour wait.” “I’ll check...ok.”

I was telling this story to my mate in Canberra on Tuesday morning when just on cue at the end of the story the doorbell rang. “There’s your phone,” he said. Sure enough the courier had arrived on time with the right phone at the right place.

I was now the proud possessor of a relatively small Ericsson GA628 digital mobile phone. Reception in Gunning was dubious but not impossible. It was now my business phone to allow my wife to use the home phone and not have to deal with business.

A few days after I received the phone I received a letter welcoming me to the network. Predictably, despite their ludicrous efforts with the phonetic alphabet they insisted on spelling my middle name incorrectly, I got Dennis instead of Denis, which I had insisted upon spelling – D-E-*single* N-I-S.

Fortunately, with the phone there was a “feedback form”. What a chance!

Question: are you satisfied with the company’s service? Answer: certainly not!

Question: are you satisfied with the delivery arrangement? Answer: are you joking!

Question: would you recommend the company to someone else? Answer: not in Gunning.

As I was writing this the phone sat in front of me, all black and green with the phone company’s name staring at me and a little green light saying it was trying to work.

It was very precious because of the extraordinary lengths I had to employ to get it.