

Which Network Is Each Budget Carrier On?

THE QUICK VERSION

- 1 AT&T — historically strong along highways and in a lot of rural stretches. In this area, plenty of farms and back roads lean on AT&T.
- 2 Verizon — long known for wide reach and a reputation for working where others do not. Many longtime customers here have stayed on Verizon for exactly that reason.
- 3 T-Mobile — fastest-growing of the three, usually excellent in and around towns and built-up areas, sometimes thinner on the far rural edges.

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Which Network Is Each Budget Carrier On?

Consumer Cellular, Mint, Visible, Boost, Cricket, Metro and more — sorted by the tower they actually use.

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1691 · BUDGET CARRIERS** —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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1. Why the Network Underneath Is the Whole Game

The brand on your bill is mostly a sticker.

Here is the single most useful thing I can teach you about budget phone plans, and it fits in one sentence: the company name on your bill almost never owns a single cell tower. There are really only three cellular networks in this country — AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile. Everybody else rents space on one of those three. So when you see an ad for Mint, or Cricket, or Visible, what you are actually choosing is which of the three real networks you want, dressed up in a cheaper package.

That matters because coverage does not come from the brand. It comes from the tower. If Verizon's towers reach your house well and T-Mobile's do not, then a T-Mobile-based budget brand will be frustrating no matter how good the price or the ads are. And if AT&T is strong where you live, an AT&T-based budget brand gives you the same bars your neighbor pays twice as much for. The radio waves do not know or care what name is on your account.

So the smart way to shop is backwards from how the ads want you to shop. Do not start with the brand. Start with the network that works at your address, then pick a budget brand that rides on that network. This guide is built to make that easy. The next pages go brand by brand and tell you, in plain words, which of the three towers each one uses — and whether a big carrier secretly owns it.

GOOD TO KNOW

A separate guide of mine covers which specific budget brands I trust most and why. This one is just the lookup table — who rides on which tower. Keep it by the phone.

2. Meet the Three Towers

AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile — and why only these count.

Before the brand-by-brand list, it helps to picture the three real networks. Think of them as three companies that actually own steel towers, buried cable, and the licenses to broadcast. Everyone else is a reseller.

- AT&T — historically strong along highways and in a lot of rural stretches. In this area, plenty of farms and back roads lean on AT&T.
- Verizon — long known for wide reach and a reputation for working where others do not. Many longtime customers here have stayed on Verizon for exactly that reason.

- T-Mobile — fastest-growing of the three, usually excellent in and around towns and built-up areas, sometimes thinner on the far rural edges.

None of the three is best everywhere. Coverage is a local, block-by-block thing. Out here in Portage County, I have seen a house where Verizon is five bars in the kitchen and T-Mobile is one bar in the same room — and a house two miles away where it is the exact opposite. Hills, trees, how far you sit from the nearest tower, and even the metal in your roof all push the signal around.

The budget brands rent capacity from these three. When a tower gets crowded — a fair, a football game, a busy evening — the big carrier's own full-price customers get served first, and the budget renters may slow down for a little while. For most folks who call and text and check the weather, you will never notice. But it is the honest trade, and it is the same trade no matter which budget brand you pick.

TIP

Whenever you read a budget brand's name, mentally translate it to its tower: Visible means Verizon, Cricket means AT&T, Mint means T-Mobile. Do that and the whole market suddenly makes sense.

3. How to Use the Lookup

Two columns do all the work.

The rest of this guide is a brand-by-brand lookup. For each one I tell you two things, and both matter.

- Which network it rides on — AT&T, Verizon, or T-Mobile. This is the coverage answer.
- Whether a big carrier owns it — because a brand owned outright by Verizon or AT&T or T-Mobile tends to be the smoothest fit on that tower, and sometimes gets a little priority nudge over independent renters.

Here is how to actually use it. First, figure out which of the three networks works at your house. The easiest way is to ask: whose phone works well for the neighbors right around you? If three neighbors all say Verizon is rock solid in their kitchens, that is your answer. There are more careful ways to test — the free coverage maps, trial SIM cards — and I cover those in a separate coverage guide. But the neighbor test is fast and surprisingly reliable, because coverage is so local.

Once you know your network, flip to any brand that rides on it and you have a shortlist. If Verizon is your winner, Visible and Straight Talk are both on Verizon — look there. If T-Mobile is your winner, Mint, Metro, and Tello are all on T-Mobile. If AT&T is strongest, Cricket and Consumer Cellular both use AT&T.

WATCH OUT

Do not pick the brand with the lowest price and hope the towers cover you. A great price on a network that is weak at your address is a bad deal. Network first, price second — every time.

4. Consumer Cellular

AT&T and T-Mobile — a mix, and senior-friendly.

Consumer Cellular is a little different from most on this list, in a good way for us. It is independent — no big carrier owns it — and it uses two of the three networks: AT&T and T-Mobile. Behind the scenes it leans on AT&T's towers in a lot of places, with T-Mobile filling in. For you, that means decent odds of coverage across most of the country, including a lot of rural Ohio.

The reason I mention Consumer Cellular so often is not the towers — it is the company. They have aimed at older customers since the 1990s, their phone support answers quickly and speaks plainly, and you can walk into any Target and get help from a person. For somebody who wants a real human on the line, that is worth a few extra dollars a month.

On the coverage question, because it uses an AT&T-and-T-Mobile blend rather than Verizon, there is one caveat worth saying out loud: if your house is a spot where only Verizon works, Consumer Cellular is not your brand. You would want a Verizon-based option instead. But if AT&T or T-Mobile covers you — and for most of the county, one of them does — Consumer Cellular is one of the easiest landings for a senior.

GOOD TO KNOW

Because Consumer Cellular can use either AT&T or T-Mobile, it sometimes picks whichever is stronger where you are. That flexibility is a quiet advantage over brands locked to a single tower.

5. Lively / Jitterbug

Verizon towers — but the phone stays with Lively.

Lively, the company behind the Jitterbug phones, runs on Verizon's network. So the coverage is Verizon coverage — wide and well regarded, including out in the rural parts of the county. If Verizon works at your house, Lively's signal will too.

There are two things about Lively that set it apart from everything else on this list, and you should know them before you buy. First, the Jitterbug phones are locked to Lively. Unlike most phones, you cannot later carry a Jitterbug over to Visible or Consumer Cellular — it only works with Lively's service. That is a trade for the simplicity, but it does tie you down.

Second, the famous safety features — the Urgent Response button, the fall detection, the nurse and care lines — are a separate monthly safety package on top of the phone plan. The phone and plan get you calling and texting on Verizon's towers; the medical-alert style help is an add-on you choose. That is not a knock, it is just something folks are surprised by when the bill shows two charges.

WATCH OUT

Some older Jitterbug models are 4G only, with no 5G. That is fine for calls and texts for years to come, but ask which generation you are getting if you want the phone to last a long while.

6. Mint Mobile

T-Mobile towers — and owned by T-Mobile now.

Mint is one of the names folks have actually heard of, thanks to years of funny ads. It runs on the T-Mobile network, and as of a couple of years ago T-Mobile owns it outright. So Mint is simply a cheaper door into T-Mobile's towers.

That makes the coverage question easy: Mint covers you exactly as well as T-Mobile covers you. In and around towns here, T-Mobile is usually strong. On the far rural edges — the back roads, the far corners of a big property — it can thin out. So the test for Mint is the test for T-Mobile: does a neighbor's T-Mobile phone work in your kitchen and your bedroom?

Mint's pricing works differently from most. You pay several months up front at once, and the per-month price drops the more months you buy. That is great if the network works for

you and a headache if it does not, because you have paid ahead. For that reason I always tell people to test T-Mobile coverage first — a short trial month, or a neighbor's phone — before committing to a long Mint bucket.

TIP

Mint and a sister brand called Ultra Mobile are both T-Mobile underneath. If you see Ultra Mobile advertised, treat it the same way: it is T-Mobile towers.

7. Visible

Verizon towers — owned by Verizon, about as simple as it gets.

Visible is Verizon's own budget brand. Verizon owns it, and it runs on the regular Verizon network. That is the entire story, and it is a good one if Verizon is your network: you get the same towers your full-price Verizon neighbor uses, usually for a fraction of the bill.

Because Verizon owns it, Visible is one of the cleanest fits on the Verizon network — activation is smooth and the coverage is the real Verizon map, not a watered-down slice of it. For a senior whose only complaint about Verizon is the price, Visible is often the shortest path to keeping the coverage and cutting the cost.

The trade with Visible is service style. It is online and app based — there is no store to walk into and, on the basic plan, no phone line to call and talk to a person. If something goes wrong you are using chat or the app. For folks comfortable with that, it is painless. For folks who want to talk to a human, Consumer Cellular may suit better even though it is a different network.

GOOD TO KNOW

Visible offers a short no-commitment trial that runs alongside your current phone using an eSIM, so you can confirm Verizon works at your house before you switch anything over.

8. US Mobile

You pick the network — Verizon or T-Mobile, with an AT&T option.

US Mobile is the most flexible brand on this list, and the reason is unusual: you choose which network you want when you sign up. It offers service on Verizon's towers and on T-Mobile's towers, and it has been marketing an AT&T-based option as well. You pick the one that works at your house. It is independent — no big carrier owns it.

That flexibility is a real advantage for anyone unsure which network is best where they live. If you guess Verizon and find it weak, you can request the T-Mobile version instead rather than being stuck. It is a little bit of hassle to swap, but it is a safety net the single-network brands do not have.

US Mobile is not as much of a household name as Mint or Cricket, so your friends may not have heard of it, and it is mostly app and chat based with phone support available. But the plans are priced clearly and the service is well regarded for a budget brand. If you want one brand that can ride whichever tower turns out to be strongest at your address, this is the one built for that.

TIP

Because the network options change over time, confirm which networks US Mobile currently offers when you sign up — and pick the one your neighbors succeed with.

9. Boost Mobile

Mainly AT&T now — a recent and important change.

Boost is a name that has been around a long time, but what is underneath it changed recently, so old advice about Boost may be out of date. As of late 2025, the company behind Boost shifted its traffic onto AT&T's network. It also runs some of its own newer 5G equipment and keeps a bit of T-Mobile roaming in the mix, but the practical answer for most people today is: treat Boost as mainly AT&T.

So if AT&T covers your house well, Boost is worth a look. If AT&T is weak where you live, Boost will struggle, regardless of what older reviews from a few years ago said about it. This is a good example of why I tell people to confirm the current network before signing up — brands do move between towers, and Boost just did.

The older standalone network Boost used to run on is being wound down, so do not buy based on reviews that describe Boost as its own separate network. The modern version leans on AT&T. Check an AT&T coverage map, or ask a neighbor on AT&T or Cricket, and you will have a good read on whether Boost will work for you.

WATCH OUT

Because Boost's network changed so recently, a phone or a review from a year or two ago may describe it inaccurately. Judge Boost by AT&T coverage at your address, not by old write-ups.

10. Cricket Wireless

AT&T towers — owned by AT&T.

Cricket is simple: it is AT&T's budget brand, owned by AT&T, running on AT&T's towers. If AT&T is strong at your house — and in a lot of rural stretches around here AT&T holds up well — Cricket gives you that coverage at a lower price than a full AT&T plan.

Because AT&T owns Cricket, it is a clean, well-supported fit on the AT&T network, and unlike some online-only brands, Cricket has physical stores you can walk into, which matters to a lot of folks who want a face to talk to. That store presence is one of Cricket's quiet advantages over the online-only budget brands.

The usual budget trade applies: on a crowded tower, AT&T's own full-price customers may be served ahead of Cricket customers for a little while. For everyday calling, texting, maps, and email that is a non-issue. The thing to confirm before you choose Cricket is just the one thing that matters for any AT&T brand — that AT&T reaches your house, your bedroom, and wherever you spend time, with solid bars.

GOOD TO KNOW

A phone that was locked to Cricket will not simply activate on a T-Mobile brand like Metro, even though the hardware may be capable. Locking and network approval are separate hurdles — I cover unlocking in another guide.

11. Metro by T-Mobile

T-Mobile towers — owned by T-Mobile.

Metro by T-Mobile is T-Mobile's budget brand, owned by T-Mobile, running on T-Mobile's towers. It is the T-Mobile mirror image of Cricket. If T-Mobile is your network, Metro is a strong, store-friendly way onto it.

Like Cricket, Metro has physical stores, which sets it apart from the online-only brands and makes it friendlier for anyone who wants help in person. And like every T-Mobile brand, its

coverage is exactly T-Mobile's coverage: usually excellent in and around town, sometimes thinner on the far rural edges of the county.

So the test for Metro is the T-Mobile test. Ask a neighbor with T-Mobile, Mint, or Tello how their phone does inside their house near you. If T-Mobile is solid for them in rooms like the ones where you spend time, Metro will be solid for you. If their T-Mobile phone drops out in the back bedroom, Metro will too, and you would want to look at an AT&T or Verizon brand instead.

GOOD TO KNOW

Metro, Mint, Ultra Mobile, and Tello are all T-Mobile underneath. If you have already learned that T-Mobile is weak at your house, you can skip that whole group at once.

12. Straight Talk

Verizon towers — owned by Verizon.

Straight Talk is widely sold at Walmart and has been around a long time. A few years back Verizon bought the family of brands it belongs to, and today Straight Talk runs on Verizon's network. So for most people, Straight Talk means Verizon coverage.

Historically Straight Talk had a reputation for hopping between networks, which is why you may have heard mixed things about it. The current picture is simpler: it is a Verizon brand now, and its higher plans even reach into Verizon's faster 5G. If Verizon is your network, Straight Talk is one more option alongside Visible.

How do you choose between two Verizon brands like Straight Talk and Visible? Mostly on service style and how you like to pay and get help. Straight Talk is easy to buy in person at Walmart and comes in both prepaid cards and monthly plans. Visible is online and app based and owned directly by Verizon. Both sit on the same towers, so coverage at your house will be the same — the difference is the shopping experience, not the signal.

GOOD TO KNOW

Because a few sources online still carry old, conflicting claims about Straight Talk's network, trust the current answer: Verizon. If in doubt, confirm when you buy.

13. Total Wireless & Tracfone

Verizon towers — the rest of the Verizon-owned family.

Total Wireless and Tracfone belong to the same Verizon-owned family as Straight Talk. Both run on Verizon's network. If you have a parent or a neighbor who has quietly used a Tracfone flip phone for years, that phone has been riding Verizon towers (or did so after Verizon took the brand over).

Total Wireless is Verizon's growing prepaid brand, sold in a lot of the same stores, and it is a straightforward way onto Verizon coverage at a lower price. Tracfone is the long-running pay-as-you-go brand, known for simple phones and for plans measured in buckets of minutes rather than fancy unlimited tiers — which actually suits some light users very well.

The practical takeaway: everything in this Verizon-owned family — Straight Talk, Total Wireless, Tracfone — gives you Verizon coverage. So if Verizon is the network that works at your house, you have several price and style options within one family, plus Visible. Pick based on how much you use the phone and how you like to pay, not on coverage, because the coverage is the same across all of them.

WATCH OUT

Tracfone-style bucket plans, where you buy a set number of minutes, can be the cheapest honest deal of all for someone who truly only makes a few calls a week. Do not overlook them just because they are not flashy.

14. Tello

T-Mobile towers — independent and flexible.

Tello runs on the T-Mobile network and is independent — no big carrier owns it. Its claim to fame is letting you build your own plan, choosing how many minutes and how much data you want separately. For a light user who is on home Wi-Fi most of the day, that can mean a genuinely tiny monthly bill.

Because it is a T-Mobile brand, the coverage story is the T-Mobile story again: good in and around towns, thinner on the deep rural edges. So Tello is a wonderful deal for a light user whose house sits in a spot where T-Mobile is strong — and a frustrating one where T-Mobile is weak, no matter how low the price.

Tello is app and chat based, with no phone line to call and no stores. That keeps it cheap, but it means you need to be comfortable handling things on a screen, or have someone like me or a family member to lean on when something needs changing. For the right person — a light-data senior on solid T-Mobile coverage — it is about as inexpensive as honest cell service gets.

GOOD TO KNOW

Tello lets you change your plan any month with no penalty, so you can bump up data for a road trip and drop back down when you are home. That flexibility pairs nicely with its build-your-own design.

15. Google Fi

T-Mobile plus US Cellular — and best on certain phones.

Google Fi is the most unusual brand on the list. It is run by Google, and it uses more than one network — primarily T-Mobile, with US Cellular towers in the mix — switching between them to find the stronger signal. That multi-network trick can help in spots where one network alone is weak.

There is a catch worth understanding. The smart network-switching works fully only on certain phones — Google's own Pixel phones and a short approved list. On an iPhone, Fi largely behaves like a single T-Mobile connection and loses the clever switching. So Fi is at its best if you own a Pixel; on an iPhone it is less special and often pricier than a plain T-Mobile brand like Mint.

Fi's other standout is travel: it works in a great many countries with no setup, which makes it a favorite for people who go abroad or snowbird south of the border. For a homebody in Portage County who is not traveling internationally, that perk may not earn its higher price, and a plain T-Mobile brand would cover the same towers for less. Match Fi to the person: a traveler with a Pixel loves it; a stay-at-home iPhone user usually has cheaper options on the same T-Mobile network.

WATCH OUT

If you do not own a Pixel and do not travel internationally, there is usually little reason to pay Google Fi's price when Mint, Metro, or Tello give you the same T-Mobile towers for less.

16. Owned-By Versus Rides-On

Two different facts, both worth knowing.

You have seen two phrases repeated through this guide: which network a brand rides on, and whether a big carrier owns it. They are different facts and it is worth being clear on why both matter.

Rides-on is the coverage answer. It tells you whose towers deliver your bars. This is the fact that decides whether the phone works at your house. Owned-by is a softer, secondary fact. A brand owned outright by a big carrier — Visible by Verizon, Cricket by AT&T, Metro and Mint by T-Mobile — tends to be the cleanest, best-supported fit on that network, and on a crowded tower an owned brand sometimes gets served a touch ahead of an independent renter.

That priority difference is the honest trade behind all budget plans: when a tower is busy, the full-price customers go first, and renters may slow down briefly. Owned budget brands can sit a notch above fully independent ones, which can sit a notch above pure discount resellers. For everyday calling, texting, maps, and email, none of this is noticeable. It only shows up in crowds — a fair, a game, a packed event. For most seniors, that moment never comes.

GOOD TO KNOW

Independent is not bad. Consumer Cellular, US Mobile, and Tello are all independent and all solid. Owned-by is a mild plus, not a requirement — coverage at your house still wins.

17. Picking Based On What Works At Your House

Turn the lookup into a decision.

Now let us turn all this into an actual choice. The method has three steps and you can do it at your kitchen table.

- 1 Find your network. Ask the neighbors right around you whose phone works well inside their house. If several agree on one carrier, that is very likely your network too, because coverage is so local.
- 2 List the brands on that network. Verizon: Visible, Straight Talk, Total Wireless, Lively. AT&T: Cricket, Consumer Cellular, Boost. T-Mobile: Mint, Metro, Tello, Ultra Mobile, Consumer Cellular. (Consumer Cellular can use AT&T or T-Mobile.)

- 3 Pick from that list by how you like to be helped and how much you use the phone — a store nearby, a phone line to call, a light-data plan, a simple flip. Price comes last, and only among brands that cover you.

If you cannot get a clear read from the neighbors, there are careful ways to test coverage yourself — the free government coverage map, each carrier's own map, and trial SIM cards that let you test inside your own walls before switching anything. I walk through all of those in a separate coverage guide, and I am glad to bring test SIMs to your house and check room by room.

TIP

When in real doubt which network is best, US Mobile lets you pick Verizon or T-Mobile and switch later, which takes some of the risk out of guessing.

18. Traps People Fall Into

The mix-ups I untangle most often.

Over the years the same handful of mistakes come up again and again with budget brands. None is a disaster, and all are avoidable once you know the network-underneath idea.

- Chasing the lowest price onto a weak network. A rock-bottom plan on towers that barely reach your house is money wasted. Network first, price second.
- Trusting old reviews. Brands move between towers — Boost just shifted to mainly AT&T, Mint and Straight Talk changed owners. A review from a couple of years ago may describe the wrong network.
- Assuming a locked phone can switch freely. A phone locked to Cricket will not just light up on Metro even though both are capable. Locking is a separate hurdle from network type.
- Thinking the brand changes your coverage. Moving from full-price Verizon to Visible does not weaken your signal — it is the same towers. Coverage follows the network, not the bill.
- Forgetting Consumer Cellular can swing between two networks. It is not purely one tower, which is a plus, but it means it is not a Verizon option if Verizon is the only thing that works for you.

WATCH OUT

The single costliest mistake is skipping the at-home coverage check. Your friend's great experience with a network across town tells you nothing certain about your own back bedroom.

19. Questions I Hear A Lot

Short, honest answers.

Q: If Visible uses Verizon towers, is the coverage really identical to Verizon's own plan?

A: For calls, texts, and everyday data, yes — same towers, same bars at your house. The only difference shows up briefly on very crowded towers, where Verizon's full-price customers may be served a hair ahead. You will almost never notice it.

Q: My neighbor loves Mint but it is weak at my house. Did I get a bad one?

A: No — Mint is T-Mobile, and T-Mobile is simply weaker at your address than at your neighbor's. Coverage changes block by block. You would want a Verizon or AT&T brand instead.

Q: Can I keep my phone and my number when I move to a budget brand?

A: Almost always, yes, as long as the phone is unlocked and compatible. You keep your number by porting it — never cancel the old line first. I have separate guides on both of those steps.

Q: Is a brand owned by a big carrier always better than an independent one?

A: Not always. Owned brands fit their network very cleanly, but independents like Consumer Cellular and US Mobile are excellent. Coverage at your house decides it, not who owns the brand.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you are ever unsure which network a brand uses this year, call me before you sign up. These things shift, and a two-minute check saves a bad month.

CABLE BRANDS

20. Xfinity Mobile & Spectrum Mobile

Verizon towers — the brands from your cable company.

Two of the budget brands you hear most about do not come from phone companies at all — they come from cable and internet companies. Xfinity Mobile is run by Comcast, the folks behind Xfinity home internet. Spectrum Mobile is run by Charter, the folks behind Spectrum internet. Different names, different cable companies, but one important thing in common: both of them run on Verizon's network. So the coverage question for either one is simply the Verizon question.

That makes them easy to judge. If Verizon works well at your house — and for a lot of folks in the county it does — then Xfinity Mobile and Spectrum Mobile will give you that same Verizon coverage, usually for a good deal less than a regular Verizon plan. The bars come from Verizon's towers either way, exactly as they do with Visible or Straight Talk, which also ride Verizon.

There is one catch worth knowing before you get excited about the price. These cable-company phone plans are usually meant for people who already pay that same cable company for home internet. The low price is tied to being an internet customer, and the phone charge often lands on the same monthly bill as your internet. If you already have Xfinity or Spectrum internet at home, that bundling can be genuinely convenient and cheap. If you do not, the deal may not be offered to you, or not at the headline price.

GOOD TO KNOW

Because both ride Verizon, a neighbor's regular Verizon phone is a perfect coverage test for them. If Verizon is solid in their kitchen near you, Xfinity Mobile or Spectrum Mobile will be solid in yours.

TIP

If a cable salesperson offers to add phone service to your internet, the first question is not the price — it is whether Verizon covers your house. Settle that first, then the bundle makes sense or it does not.

STORE BRAND

21. Walmart Family Mobile

T-Mobile towers — sold right there at the store.

Walmart Family Mobile is the plan you see on the rack near the electronics counter at Walmart. It is a budget brand sold under Walmart's name, and it has long run on T-Mobile's network. It now belongs to the same big prepaid family that includes Straight Talk and Total Wireless — a family that Verizon bought a few years back — but the towers Walmart Family Mobile actually uses are T-Mobile's. That is the part that decides your coverage.

So judge it the way you judge any T-Mobile brand. In and around the towns here — Ravenna, Kent, Streetsboro — T-Mobile is usually strong, and Walmart Family Mobile rides right along with it. Out on the far rural roads and the back corners of a big property, T-Mobile can thin out, and Walmart Family Mobile thins out with it. Ask a neighbor on T-Mobile, Mint, or Metro how their phone does inside their house near you, and you will have your answer.

The appeal of Walmart Family Mobile is exactly what the name suggests: it is simple and you can buy it in person at a store most folks already visit, pay with a card at the counter, and get a phone and a plan in one trip. For a family that wants a couple of lines without an online rigmarole, that straightforwardness is the draw. Because the brand family has changed hands and names over the years, I always tell people to confirm the current network right at the counter before buying.

WATCH OUT

Do not assume a store brand uses whatever network is strongest near that store. Walmart Family Mobile rides T-Mobile regardless of which Walmart you stand in. Check T-Mobile coverage at your home, not the store's parking lot.

GOOD TO KNOW

Because it shares the Walmart family with Straight Talk and Total Wireless, the plan names and details shift now and then. The tower underneath — T-Mobile — is the dependable part to confirm when you buy.

MULTI-NETWORK

22. Red Pocket

You pick the network — all three are on offer.

Red Pocket is one of the handful of budget brands that does not lock you to a single set of towers. Instead, when you sign up, you choose which of the big three networks you want to ride — Red Pocket offers plans on AT&T, on Verizon, and on T-Mobile. It is independent, meaning no big carrier owns it; it simply rents capacity from all three and lets you pick the one that works at your house.

That flexibility is the whole reason to consider Red Pocket. If you already know which network covers your home — from the neighbor test, a coverage map, or a trial SIM — you pick that one at checkout and you are set. And if you guess wrong, a multi-network brand like this gives you a path to move to a different network without starting over with a brand-new company. For anyone unsure which tower is strongest where they live, having the choice in one brand takes some of the risk out of it.

The trade is that you have to know, or find out, which network to pick — the brand will not decide for you. Red Pocket labels its plans by network, sometimes with its own code names for each one, so the single most important step is to make sure you are choosing the plan on the network that covers your house, not just the cheapest plan on the page. Red Pocket is sold online and in some stores, and it is a solid, long-running budget option for the person who wants to match the tower to their address deliberately.

TIP

Before you buy Red Pocket, settle your network question first — Verizon, AT&T, or T-Mobile. Then choose the Red Pocket plan on that network. The flexibility only helps if you point it at the right tower.

WATCH OUT

Because Red Pocket sells plans on all three networks, it is easy to accidentally pick the wrong one. Read which network each plan uses before you pay, and match it to what works at your house.

23. How to Tell Which Network a Brand Uses

When the ad will not say it plainly.

This whole guide is a lookup table, but new brands pop up and old ones change hands, so it helps to know how to find the answer yourself when a brand is not on my list. The good news is that a budget brand almost always tells you which network it rides on somewhere — it is just rarely in the big print, because the brand would rather you focus on its own name.

There are a few reliable places to look, from easiest to most technical.

- The coverage map. Nearly every budget brand posts a coverage map, and it is almost always the map of the big network it rides on. If a brand's map looks identical to Verizon's map, it is a Verizon brand. This is often the quickest tell.
- The fine print and the help pages. Scroll to the bottom of the brand's website or read its support answers. Phrases like works on the nation's most reliable 5G network or powered by are hints, and the brand often names the true network outright in a frequently-asked-questions page.
- A plain web search. Typing the brand name followed by what network does it use pulls up the answer fast, though check that the article is recent, because brands do move.
- The APN settings. Deep in the phone's settings there is an access-point name that sometimes carries the real network's name. This is the most technical route and rarely necessary — the map usually settles it first.

It is also worth knowing why a brand can switch the network underneath it over time. Budget brands rent from the big three, and those rental deals come up for renewal, companies get bought and sold, and a brand may move to a network that gives it a better wholesale price. Boost did exactly this recently, shifting to mainly AT&T. So a network fact you learned a few years ago may be stale — always confirm the current network before you sign up, not from an old review.

GOOD TO KNOW

The single most trustworthy tell is the coverage map. A budget brand almost never builds its own map — it shows you the map of the network it rides on. Compare it to the AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile maps and the match gives the brand away.

WATCH OUT

If you ever cannot pin down which network a brand uses, read me the brand name over the phone before you sign up. A two-minute check now beats a bad month on towers that do not reach your house.

24. Working With Bill — Your Support Plan

If you would rather I just match you to the right towers.

I have been doing hands-on technology work for more than thirty years, and a good share of my house calls these days end with the two of us looking at a phone bill and a coverage map together. Matching a person to the right network is exactly the kind of thing that is quick for me and nerve-racking to do alone, so if you would rather not sort through all these brands yourself, that is what I am here for.

A visit to your home is a flat 99 dollars. I will test the networks right inside your walls, figure out which towers actually cover the rooms where you spend time, and match you to a budget brand that rides on the one that works — no guessing from an ad. If anything we set up is not working right within thirty days, I come back and make it right at no extra charge. That is my come-back-free guarantee.

- Test which of the three networks truly covers your house, room by room.
- Match you to a budget brand on that network that fits how you use your phone.
- Help you keep your number and your phone if you decide to switch.
- Set it all up and make sure it works before I leave.

The number is (330) 200-8042. If you call after hours and I cannot pick up, you will reach Sophie, my AI helper and receptionist. Sophie is friendly, takes down your name, number, and what you need, and texts it straight to me so I can get back to you. She is not a person, and she will tell you so — she is just there to make sure your message reaches me and nothing falls through the cracks.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a guide like this one saved you money or a headache, a short review means the world to a local one-man shop. You can leave one at g.page/r/CSFv0jbCfFINEAE/review. Thank you.

25. Your Notes

Write down what we figured out — keep it by the phone.

Every house is a little different, so here is a page to capture what works at yours. Fill it in as you learn it, or I will fill it in with you on a visit. Having it written down saves you from re-figuring it next time you shop.

- Network that works best at my house: _____
- How we know (neighbor / map / tested): _____
- Budget brand I chose: _____
- Which tower it rides on: _____
- Rooms where signal is weak: _____
- My account email on the new brand: _____
- Phone number: _____
- Date I switched: _____
- Things to revisit later: _____

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech, Atwater, Ohio, serving all of Portage County. Phone and text (330) 200-8042. If something here stops matching what you see on your phone or your bill, that is on me — call and we will sort it out together.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Who Rides On What

Budget brand to underlying network

Brand	Network	Owned by
Visible	Verizon	Verizon
Cricket	AT&T	AT&T
Metro	T-Mobile	T-Mobile
Mint	T-Mobile	T-Mobile
Pick the network first, then the brand.		
Straight Talk	Verizon	Verizon

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

The Three Real Networks

Everything else is built on these

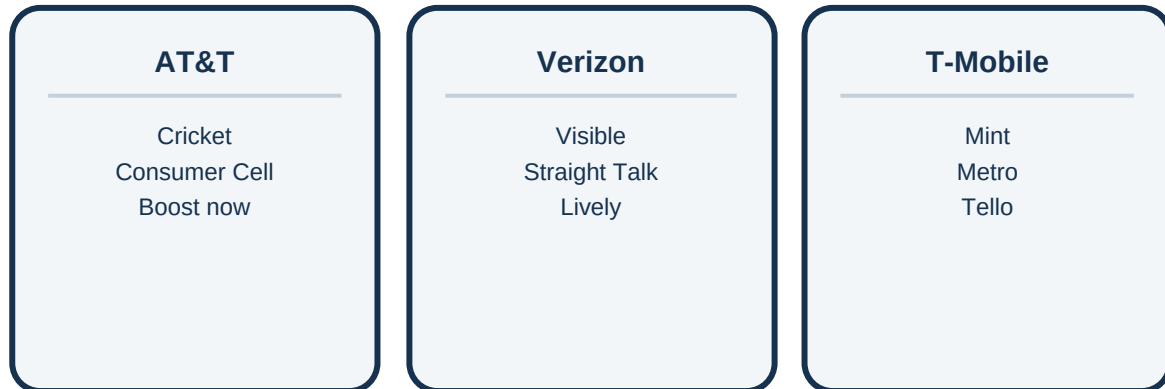
**Your bars come from the tower, not the brand.**

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.