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Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of)
The Use of N11 Codes and)
other Abbreviated)
Dialing Arrangements)

CC Docket No. 92/-105
IAD File No. 94-101

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REPLY COMMENTS
of
Francis Dummer Fisher¹

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Summary

N11 dialing codes (three digit telephone numbers) should not be assigned to private information providers. The greater the advantage of having such a number, the greater is the discrimination against those providers who do not have such a number.

Because of the established use of 411 for directory assistance and 911 for emergency services, N11 numbers are associated in the public mind with a public purpose. That association serves a valuable function. Other uses of the N11 numbers should continue to be for public purposes, and for public purposes only.

Those points have been argued sufficiently in this case and in the many state proceedings, as in Texas, where the assignment of N11 codes for individual companies has been sought and denied.

This reply addresses only the proposal of the General Services Administration of the U.S. government to use one N11 number for providing a "vocally targeted menu" of government services and agencies of the federal government

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Providing a gateway to information fulfills an important public purpose and would be an appropriate use of an N11 number. But the GSA proposal should not be granted, however, until a more comprehensive review by the FCC of gateways has taken place, for only then can the proper role of the use of N11 numbers as gateways be determined.

More specifically the GSA proposal is faulty or premature for the following reasons:

1. Gateways to information should respond to information needs expressed by subject rather than by the agency responsible for information.
2. Public information should be accessible through one gateway regardless of whether the information is the responsibility of the federal, state or local government.
3. It is in the public interest, moreover, to establish a common general gateway to information provided by government, commercial and not-for-profit agencies.
4. The assignment of numbers for gateways should be made with consideration of information in the form of data and video as well as voice information.

The GSA proposal should be tabled while the FCC undertakes a comprehensive proceeding aimed at defining how the new information technology could best be used to provide the most effective gateways to information. After the general solution to the gateway problem has been worked out, it could be appropriate to assign an N11 number or numbers to implement the scheme. Any assignment of an N11 number before then should only be for experimentation with a comprehensive gateway which would provide initial access to all information and which reflects a consideration of information in the form of data and video.

1. and 2. Gateways to information should respond to information needs expressed by subject rather than by agency responsible for information. Different gateways should not be established based on a separation of information provided by federal, state and local governments.

The strength of 911 as an access to emergency help is that one number is a gateway to find help for all different kinds of crises, no matter whether that help is to be rendered by local, regional, state or federal agencies, and perhaps even by not-for-profit or commercial organizations. If your child has swallowed toilet cleaner, you can call 911 and get the best help.

Access to non-emergency government information should be similarly consolidated, relieving the citizen of the necessity of making an initial decision of whether the problem is one likely to be addressed by federal, regional, state or local government.

Consider these questions:

- what environmental regulations apply to a certain parcel of land?
- where to go for an HIV test?
- what is the weather predicted for a certain airplane route?
- how big is this year's soy bean crop going to be?
- how many people live in a certain county?
- how to postpone service on a grand jury?
- what is the address to which to write in order to bid on
a construction job in widening an interstate highway?
- can one rent the national guard Armory for a social event?

If gateways to government information were divided between federal, state and local jurisdictions could you guess which one to call to get answers to these questions? It is all too likely that you would receive the answer given in Tom Lehrer's song to the question addressed to those shooting off atomic missiles:

". . . 'but where they come down,
That's not my department' said Werner von Braun."

The organization of information according to subject rather than sponsoring agency, or governmental level marks the 911 gateway to emergency information and services. The same comprehensiveness should mark a gateway to non-emergency information.

And because the local information varies from place to place, it is probable that the consolidation of information sources should be a state or local responsibility. As with 911 the federal government would contribute directory information on its sources to the gateway manager. GSA might help see to it that the federal contribution was comprehensive.

3. It is in the public interest to establish a general gateway to all information whether provided by a government, commercial or not-for-profit agency.

A gateway to information should not only help a user find government information, it should help a user find any information sought. It is in the public interest to find wanted information whether it is supplied by the government or by private commercial firms, or by not-for profit organizations. What is needed is a gateway which can lead to all sources.

If the problem is finding a number for a known name, the White Pages perform fairly well, although the division between sections for residential numbers and business numbers is unfortunate. But finding phone numbers by subject is not so easy. In part, this is because the seeker does not know the name of the person, agency or company with whom connection is sought. In part, it is because the classification of businesses in the Yellow Pages hangs on the one label by which a commercial firm wants to be known. This works well for "taxi" or "florist" but not so well for someone who suspects she is pregnant and seeks advice. In part the difficulty results from the commercial incentives of the gateway operator. And in part it is because of the artificial separation of government information and commercial information.

While a comprehensive gateway should steer users to both public and commercial sources, it should make clear which is which. At present that distinction is not always made clear. In the Austin Yellow Pages, for instance, there is a section made to look like public information on health questions, which turns out to be a listing of physicians, clinics or others who are seeking business.²

We can contemplate that many gateways to information will appropriately be operated by commercial enterprises, supported by payments from either seekers or suppliers of information. Yet to permit the construction of commercial gateways, and to facilitate competition among them, there must be an initial and publicly available listing of names, numbers, and subjects.

² A page of this section of the Austin directory illustrating this intended confusion was submitted to the FCC in the video dial tone proceeding, along with an expanded discussion of the need for a gateway to help users distinguish between public and commercial sources. In the Matter of Telephone Company-Cable Television Cross Ownership Rules, Sections 63.54 -63.58, CC Docket No 87-266, *The Austin Yellow Pages; Lessons for the Video Dial Tone* by F.D.Fisher.

In addition to providing the raw material for commercial gateways, a universal gateway would assure that anyone who wanted to offer an information service could be listed somewhere, even if no commercial gateway wanted to list that service.

Such a system with two levels of gateway was developed by the FCC in its video dial tone proceeding. One gateway consists of the universal gateway on which all can be listed; any of the second level gateways could be accessed easily through the initial gateway.

The state of Texas, in the Texas N11 proceeding, offered to develop such a comprehensive gateway to "the entire universe of available public or commercial information sources"³ While the petitions of the private companies for N11 numbers have been denied, the Texas Public Utility Commission has set the broader question of the use of N11 as a public gateway to all information to be considered as an on-going project.

The FCC should consider how gateways to information, both public and private should be arranged, as between universal gateways and second level gateways, before determining whether a N11 number should be assigned to the GSA for information exclusively from federal agencies.

If an experiment is to be conducted with an N11 number as a universal gateway, it should be undertaken, as proposed by Texas, in a way which seeks to help a user find information of any sort, private or public, independent of the level of government which is the ultimate source of the information.

4. The assignment of numbers for gateways should be made with consideration of information in the form of data or video as well as voice information.

The GSA proposed use of an N11 number is limited to access by voice and response by voice or recorded voice. No mention is made as to how access by computer would be afforded, nor whether the gateway will even be equipped with technology to

³ Public Utility Commission of Texas, Docket 11441, *Petitions of Infodial, Inc. and Others for Assignment of Abbreviated N11 Dialing Codes*. The testimony of Ann Baker of the Texas Department of Information, GSC Exhibit-21, in that proceeding has been submitted by DIR together with its Reply Comment in this matter. The quoted language appears on page 9 of Baker's testimony.

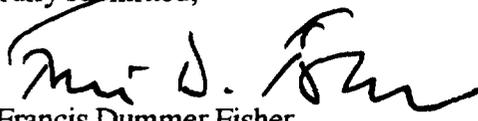
distinguish access by computer from access by voice. Nor is the proposal linked to video dial tone. No consideration is suggested how the GSA gateway would relate to the Internet.

The proposal of Texas contemplates a universal gateway that would be accessible by either computer-text or voice connection. That proposal would be strengthened by addressing how video information would be incorporated at an appropriate time. Considering integration with computer access is particularly important in view of the increased power of search it provides, holding promise of simplified user interfaces.

Recommendations

- 1) The FCC should not grant the GSA an N11 number for federal voice information at this time.
- 2) The FCC could accede to any state request for an N11 number by which to provide a gateway to all information, including that of all levels of government as well as access to commercial information and second-level gateways, on the understanding that such use must be regarded as experimental and the used number be subject to recall if seen necessary to implement an overall gateway arrangement ultimately ordered by the FCC.
- 3) Most importantly, the FCC should expand this proceeding, or commence another, to address, in a more general way, gateways to information, including the issues suggested by these comments.

Respectfully submitted,


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All parties of record have been served with a copy of these Reply Comments as of this date.