

## 'We're busy with previous calls'

After the number-punching stage comes the waiting period, during which time you have to listen to a loop of taped music. According to research conducted by Prof. Anat Rafaeli and Nira Munichor of the Technion, customers prefer to hear a message saying what place they are in line; the researchers found that background music or recorded messages along the lines of "we apologize for the wait" actually tend to aggravate the customer. Companies admit that, along with the music, they use the time to play marketing or service messages, but add that these messages are short and are not meant to lengthen the waiting time.

Another study by Prof. Rafaeli in 2004 indicates that, according to managers' reports, the typical wait is 50-60 seconds long. The study also found that operators answer between 100-150 calls per shift, even though some customer service lines may get as many as 250 calls.

Two years after Rafaeli's study, companies report slightly better figures: HOT says the goal is to answer 95 percent of calls within 45 seconds; Bezeq says its goal is to answer 80 percent of calls within 30 seconds; Clalit notes that callers should not wait more than 30 seconds on average, and Cellcom says the goal is to answer 80 percent of calls within 45 seconds.

Here are a few suggestions for those who want to reduce the wait:

- All the managers we spoke with

agree that Sunday is the busiest day for customer service lines. So if the matter is not urgent, try to push the call to another day of the week.

- The pressure at each customer service line depends on the service area. At Bezeq, for example, a sharp drop in calls occurs during broadcasts of major sports events, whereas HOT reports a rise in calls ahead of special sports broadcasts, from those who want to order the option to watch the event. Therefore, it is advisable to order service ahead of time and not to wait until the last minute, when caller overload is likely.