

**Speech by Anna Bradley, Chair, Ofcom Consumer Panel, as a panellist at the Telecommunications Executive Network (TEN) discussion event, entitled**

**"The Broadband Customer Expectation Dilemma",**

**held on 15 September 2008 at the Waldorf, London.**

As you know, I am sure, The Panel played a key role in getting broadband speeds up the regulatory and industry agenda, when my predecessor called on Ofcom to develop a code in December 2007.

We obviously hit a hot spot for consumers: 1700 comments on the BBC website in 24 hours. Perhaps it shouldn't have been a surprise though as one consumer put it: "could you sell soap powder in boxes labelled – up to 2kg, but not always that much for technical reasons?"

I know that accurate information is tricky in relation to broadband speeds, and I do understand something of how we got here, but having got here, it needs to be addressed efficiently and effectively to retain trust and confidence in the market place.

So the Panel is delighted that Ofcom's voluntary code of Practice on Broadband speeds was developed and implemented so quickly and that now, over forty ISPs have signed up.

So far so good. But you can't rest on your laurels – the information that is now being provided is better but not good enough. We welcome Ofcom's continued work in the area of broadband speeds – currently it is testing over 2000 users' speeds and throughput and looking at quality of service indicators. This information should be made freely available. We would also like to see companies' traffic shaping policies clearly published in the public domain. All of this could help to provide even more meaningful information for consumers that allows them to choose the right product for themselves and it could make the market more competitive

Why? Because this information will help 'consumer experts' i.e. Which? or broadband comparisons sites, to rate companies' broadband products and what this might mean for the end user. This transparency will enable a consumer to decide whether an 'up to 8meg' product advertised at £4.99 per month will meet their needs (receiving emails, or viewing static web-pages) or whether an £18 product would be more suitable if they are interested in gaming, or video on-line. Not the cheapest, but the best value for money for their needs

The rating of such broadband products may also act as an incentive for ISPs to invest in the backhaul of their network or perhaps find new ways to market their products differently to different sections of UK consumers, if they can see that they are lying fifth or seventh in an broadband product league - that doesn't take into account a more nuanced approach to user needs.

But this is frankly just the beginning There will be more to do:

- more consumers are turning to broadband and consumer expectations are rising as new services like i-player and YouTube emerge.
- consumer dissatisfaction will only increase as broadband speeds increase – losing 4 meg on an 8 meg service, is very different to losing 12 meg on 24 meg.
- mobile is also going to be an issue, operators who provide mobile broadband will need to think about signing up to the agreement.

So, I am pleased to see 3 are on the Panel. The rise in popularity of mobile broadband will, I am sure, bring the same consumer expectations of speed and quality of service as advertised. If these expectations are not met we will hear the same consumer complaints as we have about fixed line service. Let's hope we have learned some lessons over the past year and avoid them.

In short then, this is the beginning not the end and it will be a long hard road if every step has to be negotiated through the regulator. Perhaps it is time for the industry take the moral high-ground and try to get this right first time going forward, seeking to avoid problems, rather than waiting for them to emerge.