NOVEMBER BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

The Communications Consumer Panel has continued to meet with both communications providers and key stakeholders to discuss a range of consumer issues, in particular complaints handling and ADR, nuisance calls and caps for lost and stolen mobiles, particularly with contracts provided by MVNO providers.

➢ We submitted evidence to the **CMS Committee Inquiry: Establishing World Class Connectivity Throughout the UK**. We highlighted that in our view, all consumers, citizens and microbusinesses should have access to the services that they need when they need them; the quality of those services should be high, with reliability paramount. We noted that we would like to see:

  ➢ Telecommunications fully recognised as a fourth essential utility and for there to be a serious ambition for mobile voice and data and broadband to be truly ubiquitous.
  ➢ A review of the EU Telecoms Framework which enables Ofcom to act in the best interests of consumers and citizens and not hamper their ability to intervene where justified and proportionate.
  ➢ The needs of **all** citizens, micro businesses and consumers to be considered, particularly those who are more vulnerable to detriment.
  ➢ Work to establish an agreed definition of what constitutes an acceptable threshold level to determine 2G voice call coverage.
  ➢ Allocated spectrum being used to best and most efficient effect, rather than allow some allocated frequencies to sit unused but yet unavailable to others – a 'use it or lose it' approach.

  The full response can be found here

➢ The Panel and ACOD responded to Ofcom's consultation **What's on the telly? Proposed improvements to EPG accessibility for people with visual impairments**. In our response we highlighted that we strongly support Ofcom's proposals for amendments to the EPG Code. We believe the proposals will make a significantly positive difference to visually-impaired consumers, with little significant financial impact on EPG providers or TV receiver manufacturers. We agreed that:

- the EPG Code should be amended to require EPG providers to use their best endeavours to secure that TTS-enabled EPGs are incorporated in multi-functional TV receivers.
- the EPG Code should be amended to require EPG providers to use their best endeavours to secure that EPGs in multi-functional TV receivers enable users to highlight or list separately programmes with audio description, and with signing.
- the EPG Code should be amended to require EPG providers to use their best endeavours to secure that EPGs in multi-functional TV receivers enable users to adjust the display of EPG information so that it can be magnified or the text enlarged.
- the EPG Code should be amended to require EPG providers to use their best endeavours to secure that EPGs in multi-functional TV receivers include the option of high contrast displays with a minimum contrast ratio of 7:1.

We recommended clearly defining 'best endeavours', adding timescales for monitoring purposes and encouraging progress towards greater inclusion of accessibility features in more basic TV receivers and the retrofitting of accessibility features in TV receivers that have already been supplied to consumers. We supported retaining the explanation of the abbreviations of accessibility features [AD], [S] and [SL] within the EPG.

The full response can be found here.

- Panel member Craig Tillotson spoke at the Broadband Stakeholder Group's *"Competition in a Converged World"* conference where he shared a number of perspectives on the opportunities and risks that converged or bundled communications services offered to consumers. He highlighted that while the bundling of services could simplify purchasing for consumers, it could also hinder price comparison and switching of services as well as disadvantaging those consumers who wished to buy 'best of breed' services from different suppliers.

- We attended the UK Council on Deafness (UKCoD) conference *'Fair Exchange: developments in telecommunications for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss'*, which looked at the technological developments in telecoms for people with sight and hearing issues.

- Advising on PhonePayPlus' work on vulnerability, the Panel participated in a workshop to look at what a changing market means for vulnerable consumers and what can be done collectively to protect them in a healthy and innovative market.

Panel welcomes UK Government proposed 10 Mbps broadband Universal Service Obligation

We have consistently called for a commitment to a Universal Service Obligation for broadband of 10 Mbps, so we welcome the UK government's announcement and look forward to seeing more detail about the policy intention in the forthcoming consultation.

Consumers' use of fixed Internet and mobile voice/data has changed significantly in recent years and these services are now essential components of many people's everyday lives. Ofcom's 2015 Communications Market Report noted that 'technology has changed the way we communicate, and for the most part is making life easier. Seven in ten (69%) internet users agree that '*technology has changed the way I communicate*' and six in ten (59%) agree that '*new communication methods have made my life easier*' .

Data connectivity is required that is always on, secure, high quality, seamless and ubiquitous. This is needed to support consumers' and businesses' needs now – and, if it is not already, will be an essential requirement in the near future. Ninety-seven per cent of premises are able to access a basic broadband service, with download speeds of more than 2Mbps; 85% can access a standard service, with speeds of 10Mbps or more; and 75% can access superfast speeds of 30Mbps or more[1]. There are 3% of households that are in postcodes where next generation access networks are not available and can only receive a service of less than 2Mbps. Other households are limited to less than 10Mbps. Whilst the percentage seems small, the absolute number is significant and those who are affected deserve a high level of assistance and support.

Broadband Stakeholder Group publish review of the UK's Open Internet Codes

The Panel has contributed to an independent review of the UK's Open Internet Codes commissioned by the Broadband Stakeholder Group. The report, produced by consultancy WIK, found that the UK Open Internet and Traffic Management Codes of Practice have been effective when measured against the principles of an Open Internet. The review was commissioned both as a form of good practice and to ensure that the UK's approach could continue to remain compliant under the new EU Connected Continent Regulation (10788/15) which will be officially published in the autumn this year.

WIK was asked to analyse each objective of the Open Internet individually:

➢ that all users should be able to access all legal content;
➢ that there should be no discrimination against content providers on the basis of commercial rivalry;
➢ and traffic management policies should be clear and transparent.

---

[1] http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/consumer-experience/tce-14/2_Change_Availability.pdf

In addition, WIK also conducted in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from across industry, including Panel member Chris Holland who highlighted the need to keep consumers at the heart of the thinking and that unfettered equality of internet access is important. He also stressed the importance of consumer awareness of traffic management, with information in understandable terms that help inform choice.

The BSG will be working with signatories to the Code, and the Open Internet Forum to enact the recommendations contained within the report by the middle of next year.

New report into economic impact of digital skills launched

The Panel has long highlighted that digital engagement is a key component of modern society. The lack of engagement amongst some groups – because of poor access, affordability, a lack of skills, confidence or motivation - impacts not only on them directly, but also on the overall strength of the economy, impacting the broader population. The Tinder Foundation, alongside Go ON UK, has published a new report that sets out the huge financial and social benefits of everyone in the UK having the digital skills they need to survive in our digital world.

The report estimates that over the ten year period between 2016 and 2025, 4.9 million of those who do not possess Basic Digital Skills will get online without additional help, but the remaining 7.9 million (15% of the adult population) will need support to gain Basic Digital Skills at an estimated cost of between £45 and £334 per person.

The report sets out the six main benefits to individuals and to the Government of equipping 100% of the population with Basic Digital Skills:

➢ Earnings benefits – people in work who gain digital skills can increase their earnings by between 3% and 10%. If everyone in work gained these skills, it will lead to net earnings benefits of £358 million per year for individuals, and £243 million per year for Government from higher income tax and national insurance receipts.

➢ Employment benefits - digital skills help unemployed people find work and prepare people for work-readiness. It can also encourage those who are economically inactive to start looking for work. It is estimated these benefits will lead to £204 million per year for individuals' earnings, and £79 million for government.

➢ Communication benefits – digital skills improve the ability to communicate and connect with family and friends, leading to increased spend on recreation and cultural activities. The report estimates the aggregate additional expenditure on recreational and cultural activities to amount to £415 million per year by 2025.

➢ Transaction benefits – shopping online saves people on average 13% compared to shopping in-store, equivalent to £143 per person per year. The estimated transaction benefits of giving Basic Digital Skills to those currently without them are £796 million per year by 2025.

➢ Time savings – By accessing services online, individuals save 30 minutes of their leisure time on average per transaction, saving 30 hours annually. In monetary terms, this time saving is estimated to be worth £1.5 billion per year by 2025.

➤ NHS cost savings – Tinder Foundations' NHS Widening Digital Participation programme found that after having learnt about health resources through training, a third of learners made fewer visits to a doctor. Based on a cost to the NHS of £45 per GP visit, ensuring everyone had the Basic Digital Skills to access health information online would provide savings of £121 million a year by 2025.

The full report can be found here.

New Ofcom research reveals children too trusting of online content

The Panel has highlighted the increasing importance of people being digitally connected – and being online now plays a central role in children's lives. Ofcom's recent 'Children and Parents: Media and Attitudes' report highlights that children aged 8-15 are now spending more than twice as much time online as they did a decade ago, reaching over 15 hours each week in 2015 but are becoming more trusting of what they see online.

The report examines children's media literacy, providing detailed evidence on media use, attitudes and understanding among children and young people aged 5-15, as well as detailed information about the media access and use of young children aged 3-4.

Other key highlights of the research include:

➤ Around one in ten online children aged 8-15 (9%) say they dislike spending too much time online, and nearly one in three 12-15s (31%) admit they can sometimes spend too much time on social media in particular.

➤ One in five online 12-15s (19%) believes information returned by a search engine such as Google or Bing must be true.

➤ More than nine in ten parents of 8-15s (92%) manage their children's internet use in some way - either through technical tools, talking to or supervising their child, or setting rules about access to the internet and online behaviour.

Further details can be found on Ofcom's website.

ICO writes to companies trading names and numbers in nuisance call crackdown

The Panel has stressed the importance of coordinated efforts to tackle nuisance calls, so we welcome the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) decision to write to more than 1,000 companies involved in buying and selling people's names and numbers, as part of its ongoing crackdown on nuisance calls.

The companies are all believed to play some role in the compiling and trading of lists of names and numbers used by cold callers. The ICO expects the companies to set out exactly how they comply with the law, including what data they share, how they get people's consent to share their data, as well as a list of all the companies they've worked with in the last six months.

Details such as how organisations are ensuring they have the proper consent in place to share personal data will inform the regulator's data protection compliance and enforcement work. The information will also help to better inform the ICO's work in providing guidance and education, both to the list broking sector and the companies who buy from it.

Where companies do not respond to the letter, the ICO will look to take action to require the information to be provided. The ICO has the power to issue Information Notices, which legally oblige an organisation to provide the ICO with information, with the threat of court action if they do not.

Further information can be found on the [ICO website.](#)

Follow us on Twitter

Follow the Panel's news on Twitter @NewsCCP