



More than just ‘the demand-side’: consumers, citizens and Digital Britain

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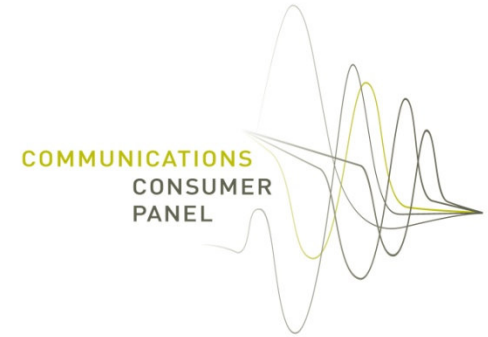
Overview

COMMUNICATIONS
CONSUMER
PANEL



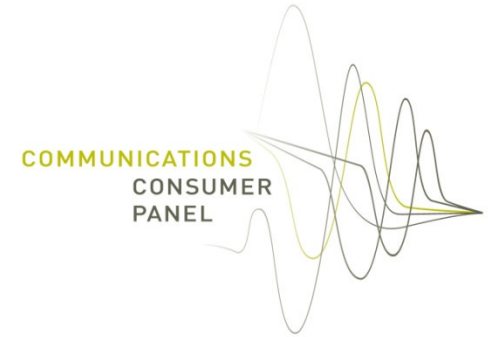
- Welcome Government's necessarily ambitious proposals for Digital Britain.
- Would like to see all initiatives linked clearly to consumer and citizen needs:
 1. A universal broadband commitment that delivers the services and applications that everyone should have access to.
 2. Action on skills and confidence that reflects the full spectrum of consumer and citizen needs and is targeted at the groups that most need help.
 3. New content, especially, more (and better) public services online, to help drive take-up and take advantage of digital potential.
- Don't just think of people as 'the demand-side' – it's not all about markets.
- Think about how consumer and citizen interests sit in the new context of 'industrial activism'.

Universal broadband commitment



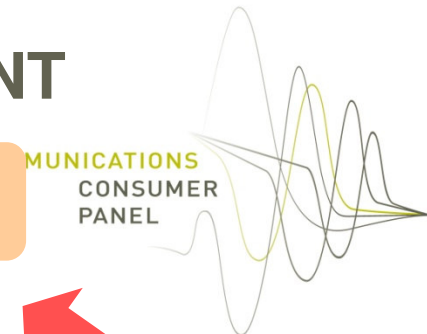
- Support commitment to universal 2Mb/s broadband by 2012.
- Speed should be justified on the basis that it will deliver the services and applications that everyone will need – now and in the near future.
- Should be open about the services and applications that will and will not be available with 2Mb/s.
- Need clear future proofing process so level of commitment does not become outmoded.
- In rural areas, leapfrogging to next-generation broadband could be best solution.

Consumer and citizen empowerment

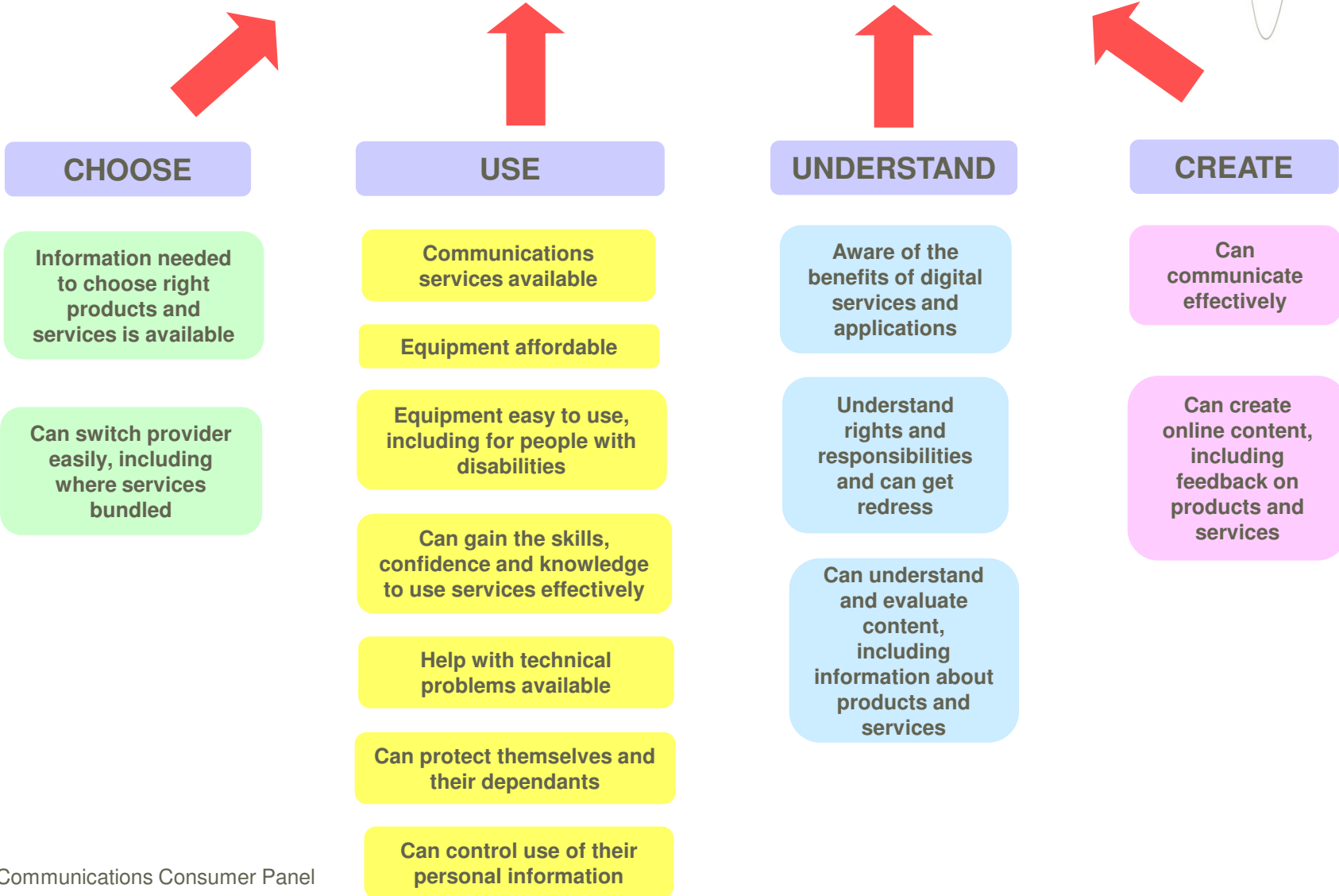


- Need to take account of the full spectrum of consumer and citizen needs – look at it from their perspective.
- Includes ability to choose the right products and service, switch provider and get redress.
- Linked to media literacy – consumers need to critically evaluate feedback from others and provide feedback of their own.
- Linked to promoting take-up – saving money is an incentive to go online and people who aren't online will increasingly lose out.
- Should focus on needs of specific groups – need targeted action rather than general efforts to promote media literacy, digital inclusion or even consumer activism.

THE ELEMENTS OF EMPOWERMENT



CONSUMERS AND CITIZENS EMPOWERED TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN DIGITAL BRITAIN



Media literacy



- Support Government's intention to deliver a step-change in media literacy.
- Media Literacy Working Group has produced some ambitious proposals.
- Consortium will need effective governance to set strategic priorities and measure progress.
- Propose a small steering group – including the Ministers who hold the purse-strings.
- Should be particular focus on the groups who most need support and the initiatives that would benefit them.
- Need More and better public services online, which would also drive take-up and make cost savings possible, although need to be careful about 'switching off' services relied on by vulnerable groups.

Encouraging investment



- Government focus on 'industrial activism' is causing a bit of concern.
- Support objective of encouraging investment in networks and content, and recognise that new business models are needed
- Need not be conflict between more market intervention and consumer and citizen interests – often necessary and welcome.
- Need to recognise and address the impact on consumers and citizens, for example:
 - Cross-subsidy of next-generation investment might lead to price increases.
 - Managing internet traffic could affect the consumer experience and the long-term development of the internet.
 - Online behavioural advertising raises significant concerns about privacy.
 - Protecting rights holders through action on illegal downloading affects individual users and might deter take-up if ISP costs are passed onto consumers.
- Need to consider how the interests of consumers and citizens will be addressed in this new context and involve them in debating these issues and designing solutions.

Going forward



- Need for continued leadership within Government.
- Need Co-ordinated implementation, including with the Devolved Nations – recent events a good platform for further engagement.
- Strong co-ordination between Digital Britain and Digital Inclusion Action Plan is essential – to ensure those who are most vulnerable are not forgotten.
- Not helpful to think of people as ‘the demand-side’:
 - Suggests just consumers – wider interests of citizens can be overlooked.
 - Suggests can trade-off consumers’ interests against producers’ interests.
- Consumer and citizen interests should be central and they should be more involved in policy debates, alongside Government and industry.