



MAY 2017 BULLETIN

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

The Panel was delighted to learn that Sharon White, CEO of Ofcom, was presented with the Positive Change award by Which? for her efforts to put consumers at the heart of Ofcom's work. We have been heartened by Ofcom's attempts to make the telecoms industry focus on the needs and expectations of the consumer and congratulate Sharon on her well-deserved award.

This month a representative for the Panel attended the Digital Policy Alliance's Age Verification Group presentation, aimed at showing the different means to securely check the age of individuals trying to access age-restricted content. Age verification requirements are set to be in force by May 2018, under the Digital Economy Act, but there is currently no regulator or enforcer.

[Click here to see details of the age verification methods.](#)

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to the call for evidence by the Scottish Government on the creation of a Consumer and Competition Taskforce

We fully support the creation of a Scottish Consumer and Competition Taskforce, with the aim of creating and maintaining a fair and inclusive market that serves consumers well and provides good consumer outcomes, and we look forward to working closely with them in helping to provide a voice to consumers and citizens in Scotland. While fully supporting the collaborative approach outlined in the document, we urged the Taskforce to think carefully about data sharing and intelligence exchange, to safeguard personal data - especially the data of more vulnerable consumers and citizens.

In our response we encouraged the Taskforce to consider the needs of micro businesses part of its remit, as these businesses face many of the same challenges faced by individual consumers and are equally unable to draw on the resources held by larger businesses. We also suggested reconsidering the establishment of an

advisory panel or forum, which could be empowered to commission its own research and to hold the Taskforce to account.

Our response is [here](#).

Response to Ofcom's review of the market for standalone landline telephone services

The Panel believes that action needs to be taken to remedy proven market failures that have impacted on the approximate 2.9 million households that take standalone landline telephone services.

We strongly support Ofcom's proposed price control on BT, covering both line rental and calls as well as ancillary services for standalone landline telephone services, and the block on any further increase in charges for line rental and calls beyond the rate of inflation.

We urge all communication providers to go beyond the level of reduction proposed in Ofcom's consultation and to compensate those who have been identified as having overpaid.

The inclusion of SMEs within the scope of the standalone fixed services market is welcomed by the Panel, but we believe they should receive the same reduction in costs - and furthermore we suggest they are included in consumer engagement trials.

We also welcome, in principle, Ofcom and BT's consumer engagement trials and have requested more detail on these.

Our response is [here](#).

Response to Ofcom's Review of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) schemes

The Panel welcome this review of the two ADR schemes - Ombudsman Services: Communications and the Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme - particularly since the last review of this area was in 2012.

Our research; [Going Round in Circles](#); [Inclusive Communications - 'We're Not All the Same](#); [Realising the Potential - micro businesses' experiences of communications services](#); and Ofcom's [Quality of Service in Telecoms](#) and [Comparing Service Quality](#) all provide evidence of the impairment suffered by consumers who had cause to complain. The importance of easy and free access to an independent, effective and fair ADR scheme cannot be underestimated, as this provides a safety net for consumers who feel they have been let down by their communication provider.

We believe there is a strong case for further independent research to establish the consumer journey through a CPs' complaints process and, though we support Ofcom's focus on the listed areas of performance for this review, as we stated in our response, we would encourage a review of methods by which consumers' awareness of the ADR schemes can be improved.

We also reiterated our keenness to see the publication of the ADR schemes' statistics - we believe that these will help to highlight trends in consumer harm that need to be tackled by the industry overall and by individual communication providers.

Our response is [here](#).

Other news

Review of directory enquiries numbers

The Panel is extremely pleased to see that Ofcom are launching a Call Cost Review, looking at the cost of calling some telephone services, including directory enquiries numbers (which begin with 118). The press has highlighted the dramatic increase in calling charges since deregulation. Today there are more than 400 directory enquiry services offering a variety of options and prices, with call costs ranging from 35p per call to £9 and higher.

In our opinion, this is an example of an unfair practice within the industry. Our concern also stems from the fact that people who are not regular internet users are more likely to use directory enquiries numbers as they are less able to search online for a number. We are fully supportive of Ofcom's review, and specifically we are calling for a cap on charges.

The review will also look at 'personal' or 'follow-me' numbers, which begin with 070 and allow users to be contacted on any phone at any location. Ofcom will look at whether consumer harm is arising out of deliberate misconduct or market failure, and what action may be required.

[Read more about Ofcom's review.](#)

Proposals to reform switching of mobile communications services

Ofcom is proposing to reform the process for switching mobile provider, and to remove requirements on consumers to pay for their old service during a notice period once they have switched provider.

The proposals aim to address unnecessary difficulties that many consumers experience when they switch or consider switching mobile provider.

Under the plans, people and businesses would simply send a free text message to the provider they wish to leave. Customers would then receive a text back, which includes a unique code to pass on to their new provider who will arrange the switch within one working day.

Customers would be able to follow this process whether they are taking their mobile number with them or not. They would also be able to request their unique switching code via their online account, should they prefer.

Read more about [Ofcom's proposals](#) and how to [respond to the consultation here](#).

Subtitle hack highlights need for standardisation

Security researchers have revealed that subtitles can leave users of computers, and probably mobile devices and smart TVs, vulnerable to cyberattacks.

Perpetrators use various methods, also referred to as 'attack vectors', to deliver cyberattacks. [An investigation](#) by a security firm reveals a new possible attack vector in which the cyberattack is delivered when movie subtitles are loaded by the user's media player from an online repository. These subtitle repositories are, in practice, treated as a trusted source by the user or media player. Since anyone can upload files to those repositories, malicious files can be uploaded for popular streaming titles, and then even have certain subtitle tracks artificially inflated in popularity so that users pick the infected file over the safe subtitle tracks.

Vulnerabilities were found in four of the most prominent media players: VLC, Kodi, Popcorn Time and Stremio, but vulnerabilities may exist in other media players as well. Patches and updates have been issued and users are advised to ensure they are running the most up-to-date version. However, it does highlight the need for standardisation - 25 different formats are in use for subtitling, all with unique features. If a standardised programme for managing subtitles was used across each media player, there is a strong likelihood that bugs would be reduced.

New BSI standard highlights need for digital accessibility in recruitment

The new BSI standard on diversity and inclusion was officially launched on May 4. [BS 76005:2017 Valuing people through diversity and inclusion - Code of practice](#) highlights the need to make sure that technology isn't a barrier for recruiting and employing a diverse range of people.

It recommends employers follow clear guidelines on diversity in the candidate search and shortlisting process, and make sure the recruitment agencies they work with have a clear and demonstrable commitment to diversity and inclusion.

[Ability Net](#) has produced a free online tool, [Clear Talents On Demand](#), for employers that identifies the reasonable adjustments they can make for disabled people.

A guide to CAPTCHA

CAPTCHA, 'Completely Automated Public Turing Tests to Tell Computers and Humans Apart', is a tool used on websites, featuring a challenge/response test that humans can pass but bots fail, to ensure that user input has not been generated by a computer.

The problem with CAPTCHA is that it causes difficulties when users of assistive technology try to use it, and in the most inaccessible versions, can prevent users from completing the verification process. This [blog post](#) explores the barriers faced by users of assistive technology when they encounter a CAPTCHA, and some alternatives to consider when implementing security on a website.

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