



MAY 2014

Panel bulletin

Ofcom publishes new advice for consumers on preventing nuisance calls

Ofcom has published [new guides](#) as part of its work to help ensure consumer information about nuisance calls and messages is accessible to a wide audience.

The first guide is a [short online educational video](#) that offers tips and advice on nuisance calls. It is available with subtitles to help people with hearing impairments. The second guide provides [advice on preventing nuisance calls in an 'Easy Read' format](#), designed to be easily understood by people with learning disabilities. Easy Read presents information clearly and simply, using pictures to support the meaning of the text. It can also be helpful for those with a limited knowledge of the English language.

The launch of the guides comes as Ofcom publishes [findings from its second annual study into the problem of nuisance calls](#). It found the proportion of nuisance calls relating to payment protection insurance (PPI) has reduced significantly over the past year. PPI now accounts for 13% of all nuisance calls where the product or service could be identified - down from 22% in 2013 - although it remains the most common type of unwanted call.

There have, however, been increases in calls about home or loft insulation (2% to 8%), solar panels (2% to 6%) and other products related to home improvements (3% to 7%).

The study also found that the number of research participants experiencing unwanted calls, and the average number received, remained broadly unchanged year on year. Four in five participants (84%) received at least one unwanted call during the four-week research period, while the average total number of unwanted calls received was 8.7 per person (or around two per week). Other key findings included:

- The most prevalent types of nuisance calls were live marketing calls (38% of all nuisance calls received), followed by silent calls (37%) and recorded sales calls (12%).
- There has been a decline in the proportion of recorded sales calls (14% to 12%) and abandoned calls (4% to 3%) year on year. The proportion of live marketing calls was consistent with last year, while the proportion of silent calls increased (34% to 37%).
- Participants were able to identify the name of the company calling in around one in five nuisance calls (19%) and the telephone number in 36%.

- The majority of unwanted calls were considered ‘annoying’ (81%), which was down on 2013 (86%). There has also been a decline in the proportion of calls considered ‘distressing’ (9% to 6%), and an increase in those not seen as a problem (7% to 12%).

Ofcom has a [joint action plan](#) with the Information Commissioner’s Office, setting out priority areas of work for both organisations. As well as improving consumer information, Ofcom is also making progress in the key areas of enforcement and tracking down companies behind nuisance calls.

Tracing companies responsible for nuisance calls can be challenging, especially when they hide their identity by causing a false phone number to display - a practice called ‘number spoofing’.

Ofcom has therefore been working with an industry standards setting body (NICC) on a new call tracing standard that will make it easier to track down companies behind nuisance calls. Following successful testing, the standard will now be put into practice by industry and Ofcom.

Ofcom announces the appointment of three new non-executive members

Ofcom has announced the appointment of three new non-executive members to its Board. Sheila Noakes (Baroness) will join as Ofcom’s Deputy Chairman, together with Stephen Hill and Graham Mather, who will each join as non-executive directors.

Graham Mather was a member of Ofcom’s Consumer Panel from 2004 to 2008. Baroness Noakes is a qualified chartered accountant and previously headed KPMG’s European and International Government practices. Stephen Hill is currently Chairman of the UK charity Action on Hearing Loss. A full news release on the appointments can be found on the Ofcom website [here](#).

Policy Exchange calls for older people to be taught basic digital skills

Policy Exchange, has called for older people in the UK to be taught basic digital skills such as how to send emails, use search engines and go on to social networking sites in a new initiative to prevent loneliness

The think tank says that the entire British population should be online by 2020. It estimates that spending £875 million on educating the 6.2 million people who do not have basic digital skills - the equivalent of £141 per person - would lead to huge economic and societal benefits for the UK.

With the number of people aged 85 or above set to double over the next 20 years along with families increasingly living hundreds of miles from each other, they argue that the risk of loneliness is a major challenge for policymakers. It has been estimated that one in ten people visit their GP because they are lonely, and research suggests that lonely adults are more likely to undergo emergency hospitalisation and early admission into residential

or nursing care. Addressing this isolation could prove to be one of the most cost-effective strategies for countering the rising costs of caring for an ageing population.

Policy Exchange says that the initial investment channelled through organisations such as Go ON UK and the Tinder Foundation would be offset by savings of around £1.7 billion a year as people moved to digital rather than paper-based or telephone transactions.

Further details can be found on the Policy Exchange website [here](#).

Second National Survey for Wales Published

The Welsh Government has published its second [National Survey for Wales](#). 14,500 people aged 16 and over were asked for their opinions on a wide range of issues affecting them and their local area, including health, education, local authority services and internet access.

In relation to internet use and access, the aim of the report was to identify the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ of digital inclusion and exclusion across Wales. In doing so, the intention of the report is to support the Welsh Government to better understand the reasons for digital exclusion and to more effectively design, tailor and target policy interventions to boost digital engagement further.

Key findings around [internet access and use](#) (pdf) included;

- 75% of households had access to the internet. This equates to approximately 82% of people aged 18 or over having access to the internet at home. This has increased since 2012-13, when 73% of households had access to the internet.
- The proportions of privately rented and owner occupied households who had access to the internet at home had risen since 2012-13 (from 76% in each type of household to 81% and 79% respectively). In contrast, there was no significant increase in household internet access for people in social housing.
- 79% of people said they currently used the internet at home, work or elsewhere; this varied by age, with a far greater proportion of people under 45 using the internet than those aged 45 and over.

There was also a significant change between 2012-13 and 2013-14 in the devices that people use to access the internet: 71% used a laptop (a reduction from 75% in 2012-13), 41% used a desktop computer (a reduction from 52% in 2012-13), and a greater proportion used their mobile phones (increasing from 41% to 52%) or some other handheld device such as a tablet or iPad (increasing from 17% to 33%).

18% of people aged 18 and over reported that they had never used the internet.

Ofcom Consults on use of 700MHz

Countries across the world are now looking at whether to use the 700 MHz spectrum band for mobile broadband.

Ofcom is now consulting on proposals to change some of the frequencies that digital terrestrial TV services (such as Freeview) and wireless microphones use and make the 700 MHz band available for mobile broadband. Ofcom has also set out its longer term strategy for enabling more spectrum to be freed up to meet the growing demand for mobile data. This builds on proposals announced earlier this year to release spectrum currently used by the Ministry of Defence.

Ofcom's plans for the [potential release of the 700 MHz band](#), [the Future of free to view TV](#) and its [Mobile data strategy statement](#) are available on its website.

PhonePay Plus launches App Store Pilot Scheme

PhonpayPlus, the premium rate services (PRS) regulator, has announced a 12 month pilot scheme to facilitate effective regulation of app store purchases that are charged to consumers' phone bills.

Google's Play Store will be the first participant in the pilot, which exempts developers in participating app stores from the requirement to register with PhonpayPlus before operating PRS.

App stores that meet a number of criteria, including providing an escalation path for consumer complaints and operating a registration scheme for their app developers, can apply to join the scheme and provide carrier billing to their customers.

Over the past year, Google and a number of other major app stores have been rolling out phone billing to their users. This means that consumers on participating phone networks have the option of paying for digital content like apps, games, music and videos on their phone bills rather than using credit, debit or pre-paid gift cards.

People who buy digital content on their phone bill will receive additional protections under the PhonpayPlus Code of Practice alongside app stores' existing processes. These protections mean that providers and services:

- Must comply with the law
- Must ensure that consumers are fully and clearly informed of key information, such as the price, before purchase
- Must treat customers fairly and equitably
- Must not cause the unreasonable invasion of customers' privacy
- Must not cause harm or unreasonable offence to consumers or to the general public
- Must ensure that consumers are able to have complaints resolved and any refunds paid quickly and easily

PhonpayPlus is particularly concerned about the problem of children running up high bills when making repeat purchases, such as through in-app payments. PhonpayPlus is working closely with Google, other app stores, consumer bodies and other regulators like the Competition and Markets Authority to address this problem.

PhonepayPlus would welcome feedback from consumers on the pilot scheme and on their or their children's experience of purchasing content on app stores and has set up a dedicated email address, consumerfeedback@phonepayplus.org.uk for responses.

More information on the pilot scheme can be found on PhonepayPlus' website [here](#) (pdf).

Ofcom publishes plans to ensure quality of service in repairs and installations

Ofcom has notified the European Commission of new draft decisions that are expected to improve line repairs and installations for telephone and broadband customers.

Under the changes, the vast majority of phone and broadband faults would have to be repaired within two working days, while most customers wanting a new line must receive an appointment within 12 working days. These targets are expected to apply from this summer and are set out in new minimum performance standards for Openreach, the company that installs and maintains connections to BT's network on behalf of competing providers. Should Openreach fail to meet the new targets, it would face sanctions from Ofcom, which could include fines.

The new targets are designed to ensure better service for telephone and broadband customers in future. Ofcom will monitor Openreach's performance closely and intervene further if required. Under the draft measures, Openreach must in future:

- complete around 80% of fault repairs within one to two working days of being notified;
- provide an appointment for around 80% of new line installations within 12 working days of being notified;
- report publicly on its performance, which will allow Ofcom to monitor and intervene further if required; and
- make clear the timeframe in which it is currently completing any remaining jobs, to provide reassurance to consumers about how long the work is likely to take.

The targets escalate over three years, reaching their full level in April 2016.

Separately, Ofcom will also review the standards of redress, which could include compensation, that landline and broadband providers offer to consumers when things go wrong. All of the [draft decisions](#) are subject to review by the European Commission, following which Ofcom expects to publish final statements in June. Further details can be found on Ofcom's website [here](#).

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