

May 2013

COMMUNICATIONS  
CONSUMER  
PANEL



## Panel newsletter

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### This month...

#### Panel calls for a robust coordinated approach to deal with nuisance calls

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Responding to Ofcom's nuisance calls research this month, the Communications Consumer Panel has called for greater collaboration by the relevant authorities; swifter and robust action against offenders; and increased support for consumers, including better use of technology such as Caller Line Identifier (CLI), which should be offered free. Jo Connell, the Panel's Chair, noted that, "Ofcom's research confirms our concerns that nuisance calls are a widespread problem for the majority of consumers, with older people more likely to be targeted. The study highlights that four in five (82%) of adults have experienced a nuisance call. The research also shows that significantly higher levels of nuisance calls were experienced by older consumers, some of who may struggle to answer the phone, only to find an uninvited and unwelcome call."

The Panel has welcomed BT's agreement to display full incoming international numbers as routine. The Panel also believes that communications providers should provide all CLI data to consumers free of charge and by default. Jo said "CLI technology is a key feature in helping protect consumers and one of the few defences available directly to the consumer. As the service provided by telephone companies, and paid for by consumers, is being abused, it seems logical for CLI to be freely available."

"The progress on tackling nuisance calls reported by Ofcom is welcome and we appreciate that Ofcom is working collaboratively with other authorities and industry to address this issue. Currently, there are a number of public authorities with a key role to play - however no single authority has ultimate responsibility for dealing with the problem. We urge these authorities to think strategically about long term solutions so that the problem can be better resolved. Together, they need to assess which actions could bring about the most benefit; who the lead organisation will be and outline the timescales in which short, medium and long term actions will be undertaken."

#### Accessible Apps seminar

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This month Jo Connell, Chair of the Panel, chaired a successful seminar held by Ofcom at BT Tower on the subject of usable and accessible apps (applications) for smartphones and TVs. The event was attended by app developers, TV equipment manufacturers, usability and accessibility specialists and organisations representing older and disabled people. Discussions with stakeholders made it clear that apps are an increasingly important aspect of how consumers use equipment such as smartphones, tablets and Internet Protocol Televisions.

Speakers at the event included Robin Christopherson, who demonstrated using a smartphone app to identify various objects including a picture of the Eiffel Tower and Michael Day who gave a presentation about the app that BT has commissioned to allow Text Relay to be used on smartphones and tablets. Also discussed were the need for open interfaces which allow different programmes to talk to each other, and the Mobile Manufacturers' Forum's expansion of their Global Accessibility Reporting Initiative website to cover apps as well as handsets.

Bob Twitchin, Panel Member, who attended the event said; “Mainstream apps, if well designed, can offer great advantages for disabled people and those designed initially for disabled people may deliver functionality useful for mainstream users.”

## Federation of Small Business in Scotland

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Panel Member Mairi Macleod reports that earlier this month the Federation of Small Business in Scotland released new statistics which look at how small businesses in Scotland are investing in new technology, what benefits they reap by modernising and what they believe would encourage them to invest more.

Four fifths of small businesses in Scotland believe that investment in technology will be important to grow their firm but a quarter of businesses believe they have fallen behind their competitors. Almost half of firms asked said that better local digital infrastructure, such as improved mobile coverage or broadband speeds, would encourage them to invest more. Better digital business support from agencies and government, and better IT skills within their businesses would also be drivers for investment in technology for over a quarter.

Further details can be found at:

[http://www.fsb.org.uk/policy/rpu/scotland/images/infograph techno\\_may2013.pdf](http://www.fsb.org.uk/policy/rpu/scotland/images/infograph techno_may2013.pdf)

## Extent of Nuisance Calls Revealed

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A new Ofcom study has found that four in five (82%) adults have experienced a nuisance call. Ofcom’s study asked consumers to keep a diary to record all unwanted calls received on their home landline over a four-week period. This measured the number, type and frequency of nuisance calls and gathered information about each call, where available; including the type of organisation making the call and whether the caller’s telephone number was identifiable.

Consumers who experienced unwanted calls received around two per week on average, with four in five participants receiving at least one nuisance call during the four-week research period. The most prevalent types of nuisance calls were live marketing calls (38%), followed by silent calls (34%) and recorded sales calls (14%). Calls about Payment Protection Insurance (PPI) made up the largest proportion of unwanted calls that could be identified.

Ofcom announced it is investigating suspected abandoned and silent calls made by companies within the claims management sector, and called on other authorities to help address the problem. It is also considering options for action against those companies that fail to provide consumers with a valid number enabling them to stop further calls.

Ofcom also updated on progress made against the four other parts of its [five-point action plan](#) to tackle nuisance calls and reported that it:

- is working with other bodies and agencies that have legal powers to address unwanted calls;
- believes that the current regulatory framework should be reviewed to establish whether an alternative model would be more effective in reducing consumer harm;
- is developing proposals to look at possible ways of tackling the root causes of nuisance calls, which it intends to share with Government; and
- has written to the Ministry of Justice to draw attention to the extent to which PPI claims appear to be driving nuisance calls.

The research can be found on the Ofcom website: <http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2013/05/17/ofcom-research-reveals-extent-of-nuisance-calls/>.

## All UK MNOs to provide services from MIP infrastructure

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DCMS have announced this month that all four mobile network operators will provide their services from the Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) infrastructure, maximising the benefits to consumers. The Department also said that Arqiva has been appointed to deliver MIP, which will bring mobile coverage to up to 60,000 homes and 10 major UK roads for the first time.

DCMS noted that MIP is a key component of the Government's package of measures to reinforce the UK's position as a leading digital economy. By improving mobile phone coverage through building additional mobile phone masts in uncovered areas, whilst ensuring technical solutions are compatible with future technological developments, it will help connect rural communities create local jobs and contribute to economic growth.

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey said "Arqiva's appointment today is great news for rural communities throughout the UK, who stand to benefit enormously from this £150m project to improve mobile phone coverage. Good mobile connectivity is becoming increasingly important and it is crucial that businesses and individuals are not left struggling with poor and intermittent coverage."

Further details on MIP can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/making-it-easier-for-the-communications-and-telecoms-industries-to-grow-while-protecting-the-interests-of-citizens/supporting-pages/improving-mobile-coverage>

## Availability of Communications Services across the UK

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Earlier this month, Ofcom published a report outlining the availability of different communications services across the UK, examining how coverage varies between areas and might be improved. The report notes that communications services provide consumers with access to vital political, educational, cultural and economic resources. They provide businesses with the opportunity to increase efficiency, develop new services, and to reach new markets. And they make possible new and more effective means of providing public services to citizens. The report looks at access to seven services: fixed voice telephony, fixed broadband, mobile voice telephony, mobile broadband, digital television, radio and post.

The report finds that:

- Several services have almost universal availability in the UK. Fixed telephony and postal services are subject to universal service obligations, and digital terrestrial television is also available across almost all the UK, now that digital switchover is complete;
- There are however significant variations in the availability of other communications services. For example, the availability and speed of fixed broadband internet access is subject to much greater variation - partially because of variability in the speed provided by current generation broadband, and partially because the deployment of superfast broadband is still underway, especially in more rural areas;
- For mobile voice and data services, even where outdoor coverage delivered to households is good, there can be particular challenges associated with providing coverage inside buildings, on roads and on rail;
- While analogue radio coverage is nearly ubiquitous, DAB digital radio is not.

A copy of the report can be found on the Ofcom website: <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/economic-geography/>

## Big Lottery Fund unveils £15m for digital skills

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The Big Lottery Fund (BIG), as part of its commitment to help charity Go ON UK eliminate the digital divide, has announced an investment of up to £15 million to help build the skills that people and organisations across the UK will need in order to take full advantage of support and services available online.

BIG aims to build on the huge success of the Go ON Liverpool cross-sector partnership, which included £100,000 of funding from BIG and helped reduce the numbers offline in the city by 55 per cent in just 18 months.

BIG's programme, which is still under development, will be open for applications in the autumn and BIG expects to fund a very small number of UK-wide projects focusing on communities most in need. BIG is announcing the programme now to give potential applicants the time to consider the sort of partnerships that they will need to be put in place to meet the challenge of raising digital skills across the UK. For further details on the programme, visit: <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/uk-wide/digital-skills>

## Labour commits to £75m investment to improve digital skills

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Helen Goodman MP has announced that Labour would invest £75 million in a new programme that would focus on getting more people online and improving people's digital skills. The new programme would be funded by halving the size of the government's current super-connected cities programme. Details of the announcement can be found at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130509/debtext/130509-0003.htm>

## BBC Media Literacy Strategy

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This month saw the publication of a new BBC Media Literacy strategy which outlines the BBC's approach to helping people develop a wide range of media literacy skills.

The strategy acknowledges that helping people develop the skills to better use, understand and create media is critical if people are to fully engage with, and enjoy the benefits of, emerging media and communications technologies. This includes being able to use new technology, find and navigate information, engage critically with content, understand the context, manage any risks and create new content.

Four overarching objectives are outlined in the strategy which will be achieved through a combination of:

- long-term editorial work-streams;
- an online media literacy content strategy; and
- working in partnership with key internal and external partners

The strategy can be read at:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/overview/about/assets/bbc\\_media\\_literacy\\_strategy\\_may2013.pdf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/overview/about/assets/bbc_media_literacy_strategy_may2013.pdf)

## Consultation on speeding up rollout of mobile broadband

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Moves to boost the roll-out of mobile broadband have been published this month for [consultation](#) by the government. Currently, 92% of individuals in the UK have a mobile phone and 39% of individuals own a smart phone with internet access. Demand for mobile broadband among consumers and business is high and growing and it is estimated the demand for mobile capacity will increase 80 fold by 2030. The proposed changes are intended to speed up the regulatory process for mobile broadband infrastructure. The plans aim to ensure the use and sharing of existing infrastructure is maximised, and installing new masts is avoided wherever possible.

The consultation states that the key proposals will:

- clarify existing permitted development rights to remove ambiguity;
- ensure that the appropriate safeguards remain firmly in place for protected areas;
- amend the rules on masts on buildings to enable mobile operators to install antenna further back from the edge of a building, which will improve the visual appearance from the ground;
- make it easier to allow the wall mounting of antenna, maximising the use of existing buildings/structures and minimising the number of new ground-based masts;
- facilitate the use of small wall-mounted “microcell” antenna, which offer a fast way to add network capacity with minimal visual impact; and
- encourage the sharing of masts, to avoid the need for every network operator to erect their own mast.

The consultation ends on 14 June 2013.

## Review of Accreditation Scheme for Price Comparison Websites

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Ofcom has announced a consultation on proposed changes to the scope and operation of its Price Comparison Website Accreditation Scheme. Price Comparison Websites (PCWs) can apply to Ofcom for accreditation, which involves undergoing an assessment by an independent auditor against a series of approval criteria set by Ofcom. The criteria require PCWs to be accessible, accurate, transparent and comprehensive.

The proposed changes include requiring accredited PCWs offering broadband comparisons to provide information about any limits on data usage, to explain that traffic management policies may apply and to explain how consumers can test the speed of their line.

Ofcom’s proposals for the scheme include the introduction of quarterly spot-checks to ensure PCWs maintain compliance between audits and a requirement to ensure accredited sites have a fair and timely process for complaints handling.

[Ofcom’s consultation](#) closes on 15 July 2013.

## DCMS Publishes Update on Broadband Transformation

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DCMS announced this month that half of the programmes aimed at delivering superfast broadband to rural areas are now underway.

22 out of 44 schemes around the UK have moved into the delivery phase. Further information can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/progress-on-broadband-transformation-roll-out-passes-halfway-mark>

## 20,000 spring online

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Around 20,000 older people and other less confident users were given their first taste of computers, the internet and other digital technology last month as part of Digital Unite's award-winning Spring Online campaign.

Over 1,000 free digital taster events were held across the UK in libraries, schools, housing schemes, community centres and village halls as well as a cinema, pub, street market and candle factory. You can read more about how Spring Online encourages people to make digital technology a part of their everyday lives at: <http://digitalunite.com/blog/thousands-helped-spring-online>

## Citizens Online Publish "Get IT Together" Update Report

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Citizens Online is a national digital inclusion charity with 15 projects across the UK who are running a two-year longitudinal research study, "Get IT Together".

Their report in January this year analysed reasons why course participants want to learn IT skills, the use of government services online and some of the barriers to using the internet. Latest research results look at the benefits of using the internet, and the confidence of learners after receiving four sessions of training. To date, their results indicate that 70% of Get IT Together learners became regular internet users within six months of training and 80% have used the internet in the last three months.

The latest update can be found at: <http://www.citizenonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Get-IT-Together-April-2013-Research.pdf>

## Quality of live subtitling: Improving the consumer experience

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Ofcom has published a report on the quality of live subtitling from viewers' perspectives. The report identifies four main dimensions of quality - how fast the subtitling is, how much it is delayed, how accurate it is (including whether inaccuracies are minor or important), and how the subtitling is presented (scrolling vs subtitling). The report notes that technical failures can lead to subtitling failing altogether, or being displayed in a sub-optimal manner. Ofcom has also drawn on available research to explain how the speed and presentation of subtitling in particular can have a marked effect on the ability of people to use the subtitles effectively, and on the amount of time they have to look at content other than the subtitles.

The report explains how live subtitling is produced, and then transmitted to end-users, and the problems with subtitling that can occur at various points in the chain, including in the viewer's receiver. Ofcom also proposes to require broadcasters:

- to submit six monthly reports on speed, synchronisation and accuracy, based on short samples of programming that Ofcom will select. These reports would be published alongside Ofcom's six monthly reports on the extent to which broadcasters are fulfilling their access service quotas. By making transparent those areas where some broadcasters have done better than others, the hope is to incentivise them to make progressive improvements across the key dimensions of quality.
- to report (for publication) on how many late-delivered programmes have resulted in live rather than pre-prepared subtitling; it is anticipated this will encourage broadcasters to take a more robust approach towards producers who fail to deliver their programmes on time;
- to report on the technical failures (many small and short-lived) that are known to occur. Broadcasters will be expected to use the logs they already keep for this purpose and to include

failures attributed to the many third parties involved in the transmission chain. For this reason, Ofcom proposes to anonymise any of the information they may report on technical failures.

Ofcom is also asking consultees (broadcasters in particular) to comment on the issues that would be raised by inserting short delays in the transmission of some live programmes in order to facilitate better quality subtitling. The consultation closes on 25 July. For further details, visit the Ofcom website: <http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2013/05/17/improving-the-quality-of-live-tv-subtitles/>

## Consumer Focus Changes to Consumer Futures

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Consumer Focus transformed into Consumer Futures at the beginning of May. The change comes in advance of Consumer Futures becoming part of Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland in April 2014.

The establishment of Consumer Futures is part of the UK Government's wider consumer and competition landscape reforms to make markets work better for consumers; improve consumer protection; and give greater clarity about where consumers need to turn to for help and advice.

The new name reflects its mission to prevent consumer harm by tackling issues before they become problems, and emerging trends before they become endemic market failures. Consumer Futures continues as the statutory consumer representative for energy and postal services and for water in Scotland. A copy of Consumer Futures work plan can be found at:

<http://www.consumerfutures.org.uk/reports/consumer-futures-work-plan-201314>

## Update from the Consumer Forum for Communications

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The 24 June CFC meeting will hear from Ofcom's spectrum department about the challenges of long-term spectrum planning, and in particular the cost-benefit analysis that Ofcom is working on in relation to changing use of the 700MHz band. International agreements are likely to mean that sometime after 2018 this band will move from being predominantly television to predominantly mobile broadband. On 23 May, Ofcom held a stakeholder workshop on the topic, both live and webcast.

The changing consumer landscape, and in particular the transition of Consumer Focus to Consumer Futures, losing its "general economy" functions (including digital consumer advocacy), strengthens the need for co-operation among consumer organisations. On 12 June, some CFC members and others will meet at the LSE to discuss future needs for research to support consumer advocacy in digital communications. Please contact Claire Milne, [cbm@antelope.org.uk](mailto:cbm@antelope.org.uk), for further information.

Further information on the work of the CFC can be found here:

<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/about/organisations-we-work-with/consumer-forum-for-communications/>

## Welsh Government Sets Up New Cross-Party Group on Digital Communications

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The new Cross-Party Group on Digital Communications held their inaugural meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> April.

Kim Brook, the Panel's Member for Wales, attended the meeting where Ofcom provided an overview of the communications landscape in Wales and the founding Assembly Members (AMs), Russell George (Chair), Ken Skates, Alun Ffred Jones and Aled Roberts - called on all AMs and stakeholders who have an interest in digital communications to take part in the Group's activities.

Russell George, the Welsh AM who will Chair the Group said; "The media and communications sector in Wales has become increasingly dynamic and creative in recent years."

“With the imminent arrival of competitive 4G mobile services; the roll out of the Next Generation of Broadband for Wales project and a new Communications Bill around the corner, we want to ensure that Wales is well placed to benefit from the technological developments which will give Wales’ citizens a competitive advantage and prosperity in the years to come.”

“I would like to encourage all those who have an interest in this key policy area to play a full and active part in the new Cross-Party Group.”

<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgOutsideBodyDetails.aspx?ID=320>

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