

JANUARY BULLETIN

Jo Connell presents at launch of Consumer Experience Report

This month, Panel Chair, Jo Connell, spoke at the launch of Ofcom's latest Consumer Experience Report (CER). She shared highlights of the findings from the Panel's own research into micro businesses and communications.

The Panel's report and recommendations [*'Realising the potential: micro businesses' experiences of communications services'*](#), highlights that, for micro businesses to gain greater benefit from their communications services, action needs to be taken in three key areas:

- Government, in association with the regulator (Ofcom), industry and communications providers, should focus on supplying improved speeds and coverage for both fast broadband and mobile voice and data.
- Communications providers should consider offering tailored communications service packages for micro businesses, facilitating access to robust services and business grade support levels.
- Government, Ofcom, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, chambers of commerce, trade associations and communications providers should review the information and advice they offer about the benefits of investing in communications, tailored to the needs and time restraints of micro businesses.

New Year's Honours

The Panel is delighted that Panel Member, Bob Twitchin, has been awarded an MBE for his services to consumers and telecommunications in the New Year's Honours list.

Bob has been a lifelong advocate for disabled people, particularly in the field of telecommunications. He was Chair of Oftel's Advisory Committee for Elderly and Disabled People (DIEL) from 2000 to 2004, and has worked in a variety of capacities, including being a member of the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People and the Communications Consumer Panel, from 2005 up to the present. He is an Associate of the Business Forum on Disability and a fellow of BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT. Until recently Bob was Chair of IT Can Help, a network of volunteers providing free help with computing problems to disabled people at home, in day centres or residential care.

We were also extremely pleased to see that Claire Milne, former Chairman of the Consumer Forum for Communications, has also been honoured by the Queen for her services to consumers and communications.

Consumer Experience Report

Ofcom's Consumer Experience of 2014 report finds that consumers are largely satisfied with their communications services but the quality of these services can still be improved. The report noted that people in the UK increasingly depend on telephone, broadband, broadcasting and postal services in their personal and professional lives. It highlighted that nine per cent of broadband users remain dissatisfied with their service, compared to 6% of mobile users, 4% of landline callers and 4% of TV viewers.

The report also highlights Ofcom's work to ensure good communications services for consumers wherever they live, and whatever their circumstances. This includes:

- Improving telecoms installations and repairs.
- Improving mobile calls.
- Monitoring postal targets.
- Better subtitling on TV.
- Information to help consumers and incentivise providers.

Supporting small businesses

Ofcom wants all small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to be able to take advantage of competition and innovation in the communications market, and receive regulatory protection where necessary. The Consumer Experience Report outlines Ofcom's work to support SMEs, including:

- **New specialist research.** In 2015 Ofcom will study the phone and broadband needs of SMEs. This will help Ofcom identify policies to deliver improved services. Ofcom will also assess how easily SMEs can choose and switch providers, and resolve complaints.
- **Working regionally** with Ofcom's Advisory Committees in the Nations to understand the experiences of small businesses throughout the UK. This will help shape future Ofcom's policies to support small businesses at local and regional levels across the UK.
- A [business web portal](#) has launched offering advice and support from Ofcom, specifically for businesses, about switching to a new provider, handling contracts and resolving complaints.

Research by Ofcom last year found that 85% of SMEs felt well-served by the communications market, but some had concerns around obtaining new services and their reliability. Following this research and a request for industry feedback, Ofcom is considering what policies might address these concerns, and expects to outline next steps in spring 2015.

A copy of the [Consumer Experience Report](#) and accompanying [Policy Evaluation](#) are available online.

12th Safer Internet Day - 10 February

The 12th Safer Internet Day will be celebrated worldwide on Tuesday 10 February 2015. This year's theme is: "Let's create a better internet together".

Children and young people, along with parents and carers, teachers and industry are invited to mark the day and work together to build a better internet for all, particularly children and young people.

For further information on how to get involved, visit the [Safer Internet Day](#) website.

Mobile customers losing out by being on wrong contract

New Which? research has revealed that mobile phone customers are collectively overpaying by billions of pounds per year by being on the wrong contract for their usage.

The study estimates that mobile customers are losing out on £5.42bn per year, either by paying for texts, minutes and data they don't use or paying extra charges because their phone package is too small. Seven in 10 (72%) mobile customers could save £159 each year on average by switching to a contract that better suits their needs, with three-quarters (77%) able to save at least £50 a year.

Nearly half (42%) of people with a mobile phone contract think that there is a better value tariff out there for them - however Ofcom research shows switching levels are low with half (48%) of people never having switched supplier.

Further details can be found at the [Which? Website](#)

Ofcom launches consultation on 5G

Ofcom is [asking industry](#) to help plan for the future spectrum requirements of 5G.

So-called '5G' mobile communications are expected to be able to use very high frequency spectrum - the raw material that underpins wireless services.

This spectrum could support a variety of uses, ranging from financial trading and entertainment to gaming and holographic projections, with the potential to support very high demand users in busy areas, like city centres.

5G mobile is expected to be capable of delivering extremely fast data speeds - perhaps 10 to 50 Gbit/s - compared with today's average 4G download speed of 15 Mbit/s.

The timeframe for the launch of 5G services is uncertain, although commercial applications could emerge by 2020, subject to research and development and international agreements for aligning frequency bands. It is therefore important that Ofcom does the groundwork now to understand how these frequencies might be used to serve citizens and consumers in future.

The consultation closes on 27 February 2015.

30% of broadband customers still with their first broadband provider

New research published by [Uswitch](#) found that almost a third (30%) of UK customers are still with their very first broadband provider, while 13% haven't switched in more than five years.

Nearly a third (30%) thinks it is too complicated to switch providers, whilst a quarter (23%) believes the process takes too long.

Nearly one in 10 broadband customers (9%) have been put off moving providers after a difficult experience and 15% have found their current providers too pushy when they try to cancel contracts. Almost three quarters (73%) think the process should change so that the new (recipient) provider handles the switch, rather than the provider the customer is leaving.

However, savvy Brits are gradually becoming more aware of the value of changing to a new provider. Two years ago, almost half (46%) of broadband customers had never switched, compared to just 30% now.

Public Meetings to discuss Ofcom's Annual Plan

Ofcom is in the process of holding a series of public meetings across the UK to hear people's views on its draft Annual Plan for 2015/16.

Meetings have been held during January in England, Wales and Scotland and, together with the forthcoming meeting in Northern Ireland, provide an opportunity for anyone with an interest in the regulation of the communications industries to discuss Ofcom's approach to television, radio, telecoms, post and wireless communications services.

If you would like to attend the remaining event, please click on the link below for details.

- [Northern Ireland Draft Annual Plan Event - 10 February 2015](#)

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