



e-newsletter June 2009

Welcome

Welcome to the June 2009 issue of the Communications Consumer Panel e-newsletter. If you'd like to receive our monthly newsletter and you're not on our mailing list, it's easy to join – just go onto our website at: www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Latest news... a digital Britain moves closer

Broadband will soon be essential for everyone

The Communications Consumer Panel launched its report *Not online, not included: consumers say broadband essential for all*. Our research found that nearly three-quarters of people with broadband at home say that they couldn't live without it and soon it will be essential for everyone. The report was also a key piece of research that informed the final Digital Britain report also published this month (see story below).

The survey of over 2,000 adults showed that 84 per cent of people agreed that it should be possible for everyone in the UK to have broadband at home, regardless of where they live. Communications Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley said: "Many people already see broadband as essential and even more believe that soon it will be essential for everyone. The tipping point will be when broadband does not just provide an advantage to people who have it, but disadvantages people who do not."

In her blog on the report publication, Panel member Leen Petré commented: "I think the writing is on the wall. We are moving to a society where you have to have access to the internet to get the best deals, the best information or the best educational support – and as the panel's research indicates, this should not happen without a parallel effort to get everyone online with a decent speed connection, and with the support they need to reap the benefits."

Not online, not included: consumers say broadband essential for all can be found at:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/not-online-not-included/not-online-not-included>

Read Leen's blog here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog>

Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley joins Digital Inclusion Taskforce

Anna Bradley joins the Digital Inclusion Taskforce as the consumer expert in the group advising the new Digital Inclusion Champion Martha Lane Fox. She explained that her role as Chair of the Communications Consumer Panel will contribute significantly to her work with the Taskforce.

"I hope that the Digital Inclusion Champion will play a central role in promoting a joined-up, strategic approach to enhancing consumer and citizen participation in the digital age, working across Government and industry. It will be important to challenge government and industry not only to help people to get online, but to deliver more attractive content – particularly better online public services that will encourage people to try out the internet," Anna Bradley said.

Other Taskforce members are:

Kevin Carey	HumanITy, RNIB
Phil Coppard	Barnsley Council
Jon Drori	Changing Media Ltd
Emma Gilthorpe	BT
Seetha Kumar	BBC
Catherine Marshall	The Lighthouse Project
Helen Milner	UK online centres
Tristan Wilkinson	Intel
Tom Wright	Age Concern and Help the Aged

Read the Panel's full news release here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-releases/anna-bradley-joins-digital-inclusion-taskforce-as-consumer-expert-adviser-to-new-digital-champion>

Lord Carter launches Digital Britain – the final report

The Communications Consumer Panel welcomed Lord Carter's final Digital Britain report with its commitment to a three-year national plan to improve digital participation, and universal access to 2Mb/s broadband by 2012.

The Panel's research (see story above) highlights the importance of making broadband available throughout the UK and so it welcomes the Government's universal broadband commitment. It will now be necessary to implement the commitment effectively. In the Panel's view, the key test of success will be whether in practice people everywhere in the UK will be able to use the online services and carry out the activities that they value in a reliable and consistent

way. It will also be important to make sure that the commitment to deliver a 2Mb/s universal service does not become outmoded.

Making services available is only part of the challenge of enabling everyone in the UK to use digital devices and services to participate fully in the society. We agree that there needs to be a stronger focus on promoting digital participation, which should take into account the full range of consumers' and citizens' needs.

The Panel welcomes the Government's decision to set up a consortium to promote digital participation, and support it with funding for the next three years. The Panel will be contributing to discussions about the priorities that the Consortium should adopt, how its success will be measured, and how its activities will be co-ordinated with those of others involved in promoting digital participation, including the Digital Inclusion Champion and Taskforce, and the grass roots and community organisations who are often best placed to deliver targeted interventions for vulnerable groups.

and in brief.....

Working with the Nations

Communications Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley and Panel member for Scotland Fiona Ballantyne recently attended a meeting of Ofcom's Advisory Committee for Scotland in Glasgow to discuss the issues that the Panel is focusing on at the moment and its broadband research. They went on to discuss and agree ways of working more closely together and using each others' skills and expertise.

A meeting with Consumer Focus Scotland led to an agreement to identify a topic for a joint event. This will enable the Panel members to engage more closely with issues affecting Scottish consumers.

Accessing the internet at home – new research from Ofcom

The Communications Consumer Panel has said that Ofcom's latest research into why people don't have broadband at home paves the way for action to help people get online that is better tailored to their needs.

Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley said that this should include financial support, training to boost skills and confidence, more easy-to-use equipment and better online public services. In particular, "new interactive public services could play an important role in bringing the 'self-excluded' round to the value of being on-line."

For more information about *Accessing the internet at home* go to:
http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2009/06/nr_20090610

Panel meeting

A lively and wide ranging set of discussions took place at June's Panel meeting. Some areas of interest include:

Mobile coverage

The Panel is increasingly focused on the issue of mobile coverage. The problem is that while the statistics say that almost the whole of the country is covered, consumer and small business experience says otherwise. The fact is that we don't really know how big a problem coverage is, and the Panel will be commissioning research on this topic shortly.

Alternative Dispute Resolution and complaints-handling

The Consumer Panel has had discussions with the Ofcom team working on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and complaints handling. The Panel supports proposals to reduce the time companies have to resolve complaints before consumers can go to ADR (from 12 to 8 weeks). ADR remains a last resort, so getting complaints-handling right is a big prize that the Panel is going to be discussing further with Ofcom over the coming months. It is important for even the most vulnerable consumers to have their complaints taken seriously and resolved.

Ofcom Chairman

Colette Bowe came to her first Panel meeting as Ofcom Chairman. There was a good discussion about the things on her personal agenda such as broadband, disability and digital switchover. The Panel also talked about some of the issues that it has been advising Ofcom on recently. Colette Bowe will return to the Panel in six months' time, and in the meantime Panel Chair Anna Bradley will meet her every six weeks or so. The opportunity to speak direct to the Ofcom Chairman is a very important part of the working relationship that the Panel has with the regulator.

Read Anna Bradley's blog posting about the last Panel meeting here:
<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog-post/39>

Don't forget the Panel blog

Our latest blogs talk about increasing digital participation in Northern Ireland, the June Panel meeting and feedback from a series of conferences organised by the Community Broadband Network to discuss the prospects for super-fast broadband.

Check out what Panel members are saying and doing by going to our home page and click on the Blog link at:
<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog>