



e-newsletter July 2009

Welcome

Welcome to the July 2009 issue of the Communications Consumer Panel e-newsletter highlighting some of what the Panel has been doing and saying. 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

You can access any of the stories below from our website at:
www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Latest news...

This month the big story has been research from Ofcom on the broadband speeds that consumers can expect to get. This has rekindled the debate about what internet service providers (ISPs) tell customers about connection speeds – and the rural/urban divide. The Panel is urging ISPs to consider using average rather than up-to-speeds when advertising broadband services. Read our response below.

Consumer Panel says broadband providers must do more to give consumers accurate information

The Panel responded positively to Ofcom's report into consumer experience of broadband performance because it highlights the differences between suppliers, and illustrates the scale of the problem. But Panel Chair Anna Bradley believes that consumers will still find it difficult to make an informed choice about which provider to choose because advertised speeds were way out of line with what people get in practice. Providers should consider using average rather than up-to-speeds when advertising broadband services. The Panel cautions that effective implementation of the Government's universal service commitment could be hampered if consumers can't get minimum speeds of 2mb.

Promoting digital participation is central to maximising social and economic benefits for consumers

Making the keynote address at the Westminster eForum Panel Chair Anna Bradley said that the plan laid out in the Digital Britain report to increase

availability of digital services had the potential to be a significant step forward for consumers and citizens. She said this should start with identifying the full range of consumers' and citizens' needs. She called for a focus on the six million people at risk of both social and digital exclusion, and asked for clear and well-defined objectives to make sure that we achieve them.

Going beyond the traditional approaches to media literacy

Panel member for Scotland Fiona Ballantyne recently attended the recent Westminster Media Forum seminar on Children, the Commercial World and the Media. She reported that the digital participation discussion is “going beyond traditional approaches to media literacy. This is partly because the line between content and advertising is becoming increasingly blurred, which affects the way children learn to understand when and how they are being advertised to”. She said that this reinforced the importance of the change in emphasis in Digital Britain from media literacy to digital participation, and the range of different skills that people need to fully participate in a digital society.

Consumer Panel annual report highlights how it is helping to shape the Government's digital policy

Policy and regulation designed with consumers and citizens in mind is at the core of Communications Consumer Panel's work, Panel Chair Anna Bradley said on the publication of the (2008/2009) annual report. This approach over the past year has meant the Panel had advised on a wide variety of issues. This ranged from helping to shape the Government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan to ensuring that the Government was alive to consumers' aspirations and interests' in developing its plans for Digital Britain. Throughout the year the Panel's activities have also been made more visible with a new website, monthly newsletter and a blog for Panel members to share ideas and information. And, for the first time, the Panel consulted stakeholders on its Work Plan for the coming year, holding an event so that people could feed in their views.

Panel pushes mobile coverage up the Ofcom agenda

The Communications Consumer Panel has welcomed Ofcom's positive response to the Panel's calls to give mobile coverage increased priority with the launch of the *Mostly mobile* consultation. Ofcom has acknowledged that commercial provision of mobile phone coverage (often called 2G coverage) has probably reached its limits, particularly in rural areas. However, the Panel is still concerned that there are still plenty of people who have difficulty getting a signal at home, never mind when they are on the move, and that the official data does not reflect the reality experienced by consumers. The Panel will be working with Ofcom to shape its forthcoming research into coverage problems and potential solutions. At the same time the Panel will be launching its own research to gauge the true extent of these problems for both consumers and small businesses. “We will be feeding the findings into Ofcom's consultation,” said Anna Bradley.

**Also see the blog by Panel member Bob Warner*

Not-spots an issue for small businesses too

When we published our response to Ofcom's consultation on access and inclusion, we welcomed their intention to bring together all the issues that have a bearing on access and inclusion under a single overarching project. The importance of making broadband available throughout the UK has been consistently stressed by the Panel, but, as Panel member Colin Browne points out in his blog, it's not just consumers that could be adversely affected. Not-spots is an issue for small and rural businesses too, whose ability to compete could be undermined. He says that despite claims of virtually universal mobile coverage, there are still plenty of people "including me, who have difficulty getting a signal at home, never mind when they are on the move".

Take a look at the latest Panel blogs

Our latest blogs give an insight into the recent Driving Digital Value conference, which looked at consumer confusion in the market place and the need for simplicity in products. Read about the Reboot Britain event where Digital Champion Martha Lane Fox talked about the benefits of digital participation, and Royal Society of the Arts Chief Executive Matthew Taylor gave his view on why the internet has so far failed to transform civic society.

Check out what Panel members are saying and doing by going to our home page and click on the Blog link.