



e-newsletter September 2009

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If you'd like to receive the Communications Consumer Panel 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

Look out for: new Panel research showing large numbers of consumers and small businesses have problems with mobile coverage

The Panel's research into the consumer and small business experience of mobile coverage in the UK will be published on 6 October 2009 – visit our website for a copy of the reports: www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Latest news...

Making it easy to switch mobile provider

The Panel welcomed Ofcom's proposals to improve the system of mobile number portability (MNP), which enables consumers to keep their mobile numbers when switching service provider. Consumer Panel member Lou Bolch pointed out that as Ofcom develops its thinking, "it will be important to consider how this will tie in with plans to develop a more unified switching process for communications services...in response to the fact that nearly half of all UK homes are buying their communications services in bundles, with this trend set to continue."

As a general principle, the Panel thinks that the switching processes for communications services and the process of porting mobile numbers should be consistent and, as far as possible, require the limited involvement of consumers.

Read Lou Bolch's blog on mobile number portability at:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog-post/53>

Read the Panel's response to Ofcom's consultation on the website:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Mobile%20Number%20Portability%20response%2024%20Sept%202009.pdf>

It's time to realise the digital vision

The Government's Digital Britain report set out a significant package of initiatives that include many of the things the Consumer Panel has been arguing for – fast, reliable broadband for everyone, action to stimulate investment in next-generation broadband for people the market will not otherwise reach and a strong commitment to helping people get online. The Panel published its response to the report earlier this month and emphasised the need for Government to focus now on delivering what Digital Britain promised.

Consumer Panel member Leen Petrie says that Digital Britain could be the start of a programme of work that delivers real benefits to consumers: “Many people across the UK do not have the same fast, reliable broadband that others have access to and strong hopes have been raised that this situation will be remedied with suitable investment in infrastructure.” However, she believes that getting people online is about much more than delivering a reliable 2Mb/s internet connection: “There are people who have never been online before, and who would welcome the opportunity to give it a go and learn how to use the internet in a safe environment. Others are reluctant to try accessing the internet out of fear for fraud, viruses and spam. Their needs should be catered for under the Digital Britain umbrella as well.”

You can read the Panel's response to Digital Britain on our website at: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Response%20to%20Digital%20Britain%20final%20report.pdf>

Read Leen Petrie's views on the final Digital Britain report at: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog-post/50>

Panel responds to consultation on Ofcom reporting duty

The Panel has submitted its response to the Government's consultation on whether Ofcom should have a new duty to report regularly on the state of the UK's communications infrastructure. The Panel focused on the proposal not to publish the biennial report on the basis that it, “may contain sensitive and/or confidential information.” Although the Government is planning to publish the “headline details”, the Panel would like to understand what this will mean in practice. Some of the information included in report would be very useful for consumers. For example, consumers would welcome more precise, localised information about mobile coverage. So the Panel would be in favour of publishing as much information that would benefit consumers as possible.

Read the Panel's full response on the website: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Response%20to%20consultation%20on%20Ofcoms%20duties.pdf>

Panel submits evidence to Parliamentary Inquiry into broadband

The Panel submitted evidence to the Business and Enterprise Committee into broadband speeds. The Panel told the Committee that:

- Broadband is an increasingly essential part of the way that people live their lives it is vital that everyone in the UK is able to use the services and carry out the activities that broadband makes available, and to do so in a reliable and consistent way.
- It is essential to view the initiatives flowing from the Digital Britain report as a package of measures that are interlinked.
- The commitment to funding investment in next-generation broadband in parallel with market-led rollout is crucial. If this were to waiver it would make reviewing and upgrading the 2Mb/s become even more important.
- Similarly, efforts to make communications services available must be accompanied by work to encourage digital participation.

You can read the Panel's submission in full on the website:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Broadband%20Speeds%20Inquiry%20Submission.pdf>

Mobile termination rates – getting the consumer view

Panel Chair Anna Bradley chaired roundtable discussion organised by Ofcom to canvass the views of consumer groups. Reporting back from the workshop, Panel member Bob Warner said that there now seems to be universal agreement that mobile termination rates need to be regulated, and that termination rates will continue to fall. He said that consumer groups could see the advantages of lower termination rates as they flow through to generally lower prices for calling mobile phones. But they expressed concern that lower termination rates could cause prices for some groups of consumers, such as pre-pay users, to rise in order to compensate: “No one felt confident to predict where and to what extent this might happen,” he said. “An evolutionary change is preferable to a sudden one.”

Read Bob Warner's blog about the workshop and find out more about mobile termination rates at:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog-post/51>

Developing digital participation from the consumer perspective

The Panel's September meeting devoted a good chunk of its time to developing, what it has been calling a framework for digital participation. Panel Chair Anna Bradley explains that the Panel “want this framework to provide an overview of what different groups of consumers need to get online and make the most of being online - everything from the motivation to take a look, through accessible products and services, to the skills to create content and participate in e-exchanges”.

Also, the Panel spoke to Ofcom about its work to improve the way that communications providers handle complaints, and discussed the Mobile Sector Assessment. This discussion was particularly timely – Anna Bradley explained that: “We had just received the results of our own mobile coverage research among consumers and were able to share early thoughts on this with Ofcom. The research confirms the importance of network coverage issues for consumers and small businesses. It will be published in the next couple of weeks, so watch this space.” Members also reviewed their position on next-generation broadband and did a stock take of the work going on under the Digital Britain banner.

Read Anna Bradley's blog about the work of the Panel at its September meeting at:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog-post/52>

The Panel's research into mobile coverage will be published on 6 October 2009 – visit our website for a copy of the consumer and small business reports:

www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Don't forget the Panel blog

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>