



e-newsletter January 2010

Latest news...

Raising the stakes on silent calls

The Communications Consumer Panel is calling on Government to raise the maximum level of fines on companies that make persistent silent calls to £2 million. In its response to a BIS (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) consultation, the Consumer Panel said that consumers will only be protected from the harm caused by silent calls once companies no longer have a financial incentive to make them. Writing to BIS, the Panel says that it supports Government proposals to give Ofcom the ability to fine companies up to £2 million.

“Silent calls cause a huge amount of anxiety and inconvenience, particularly for consumers who are more vulnerable, such as older people living alone,” says the Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley. “We need action against companies that break the rules to show that silent calls will not be tolerated”.

Read the full response on the Communications Consumer Panel website at:
www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/25.01.10%20Letter_CCP%20response_silent%20calls.pdf

Will everyone get a 2Mbps connection by 2012?

The question posed by Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley at the Oxford Media Convention in January was a challenge to the audience to contemplate how a digital UK will look by 2012. On the one hand the Digital Britain commitment to 2Mb/s throughout the UK by 2012 is a significant benefit, but consumers will need to know what 2Mb/s means in practice, and what kind of redress is available if they don't get the service they are promised. “Consumers need to know which services and activities they will be able to use...(and) people who can't access these services should have a simple way of getting redress”, she said. She also pointed out that the infrastructure is only one part of getting people online: we need to think about demand as well as supply. Good quality online public services could play a part in getting people online, but they need to be built around users, she explained. “The Panel has been doing some work to understand what people need to get online and participate, including developing a framework for digital participation...based on what people themselves say they need.”

Read Anna Bradley's speech to the Oxford Media Convention on 21 January 2010 in full at:

www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Read Roger Darlington's blog about the Oxford Media Convention at:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog-post/67>

File-sharing, universal broadband and a visit from the Ofcom Chairman

At the first of our monthly Panel meetings in 2010 the Panel addressed a range of issues, including universal broadband, illegal file-sharing and Ofcom's Draft Annual Plan. The Panel met the Chairman of Ofcom, Colette Bowe. She was interested to hear what the Panel thought about illegal file sharing, given that Ofcom will take on responsibility for the Code of Conduct that will implement the legislation, if it goes on the Statute Book.

We reiterated the concerns we had made in our response to the Government's consultation on illegal file-sharing. In particular: that the process must be "fair, reasonable and proportionate for consumers"; that there must be proper safeguards to protect consumers in relation to both the notifications process and whether any technical measures should be applied; and the need to recognize that the costs of the system will affect not just rights holders and ISPs but also consumers. Finally, since the proposed Code of Conduct will contain much of the detail of the system, we said we expect consumer interest bodies to be very much involved in discussions about that Code.

We also had a visit from the Department of Business to catch up on discussions about implementation of the 2 Mb/s Universal Service Commitment. The Panel wanted to know what had been happening and when we might see the promised procurement agency established. We pointed to the need to keep the consumer interest at the heart of the, now quite technical discussions. It will matter to consumers what 'universal' really means; who will get the USC and who won't. And it will matter what 2 Mb/s means; is it 'up to' 2 Mb/s, or something more meaningful for consumers, such as the ability to stream video content. We will be talking further with BIS about these issues.

For more information read the blog posting of Panel Chair Anna Bradley:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/news-and-media/blog-post/70/>

Finding out what consumers think about digital participation

The phrase 'digital participation' is widely discussed by policy-makers, but what's the consumer and citizen perspective? Do we really know what people themselves want from a digital future? That's the question that the Consumer Panel recently asked at a round-table discussion with representatives from Government and the Third Sector. The output from the session is helping to inform the Panel's own work in this area, including the development of a digital participation framework, which sets out what people themselves say they need to be able to get online and get the most out of the internet. We will be publishing a report on the event shortly. Look out for this on our website: www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Don't forget the Panel blog

Read about the latest on the January Panel meeting, and check out what other 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>

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www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk