



## *e-newsletter* March 2010

### **We'd like just a minute of your time.....**

We want to make sure that we're getting the right information to you in our newsletter, so we'd like to ask you to spend just a few minutes responding to this short online survey. <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6H7B3TW>

### **Latest news...**

#### **Panel principles published to guide government broadband commitment**

In the week that the Government reiterated in the Budget its intention to deliver a universal service commitment for broadband, the Communications Consumer Panel published a set of eight principles to guide the commitment's implementation. The principles are designed to ensure that the needs of consumers are central to this process. Anna Bradley, Panel Chair, said that "The ultimate test of success for the universal service commitment will be whether consumers can carry out essential online activities in a reliable and consistent way."

Read the Panel's press release here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/USC%20PN%20final.pdf>

For a copy of the consumer principles go to the Communications Consumer Panel website at: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/digital-inclusion/universal-service-commitment>

#### **Consumers must have right to cancel if misled on broadband speeds**

The Panel responded to Ofcom research that found that internet service providers are failing to meet the standards set out in the voluntary code of practice on broadband speeds, with mystery shoppers receiving conflicting and potentially misleading information. Colin Browne, Consumer Panel member said that, "Many consumers are signing up to broadband packages without access to crucial information about the speeds, and therefore the range and quality of services, they can expect. This is unacceptable."

The Panel therefore welcomed Ofcom's commitment to tighten the Code and ensure that consumers are given adequate information about their broadband service when making purchasing decisions. If Ofcom cannot secure agreement on tightening the code, or ensure full compliance with it, the Panel's supports their proposal to move to formal regulation to ensure consumers are protected.

The Panel also believes that consumers should be able to cancel their contract without penalty if their ISP cannot provide them with the speeds they were led to

expect. Ofcom has announced its intention to explore the possibility of incorporating this in the Code, and we will be encouraging Ofcom to make sure that this happens.

Read the Panel's press release here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/290310%20consumers%20must%20have%20right%20to%20cancel%20if%20misled%20over%20broadband%20speeds.pdf>

## **Panel calls on Ofcom to publish complaints data**

The Consumer Panel has called on Ofcom to raise standards of complaints-handling by publishing data on how providers perform. Panel Chair Anna Bradley says that this will give providers an incentive to improve how they handle complaints. Ofcom has been consulting on a new code of practice for providers, which the Panel says is an important step towards improving how consumer complaints are dealt with.

Read the Panel's press release here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/300310%20response%20to%20Ofcom%20complaints-handling.pdf>

You can find the Panel's response to the consultation here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Response%20to%20Ofcom%20complaints-handling%20review.pdf>

## **Government adopts Panel's framework for digital participation**

The Government has adopted the Consumer Panel's framework for digital participation, making it central to the National Plan that Minister for Digital Britain Stephen Timms announced at the beginning of March.

The framework is based on a comprehensive review of research with people at all stages of their digital participation journey and sets out what people themselves say they need to get online and get the most out of the internet.

Panel Chair Anna Bradley, said: "The Panel's job is to make sure that government puts people at the heart of policy. We are therefore delighted that Stephen Timms asked to use our consumer framework in the National Plan. Of course, understanding what people need to get online is only the first step. The next step is making sure that everyone can get help to meet those needs. We will be working closely with government and the Digital Participation Consortium led by Ofcom to achieve this."

The Panel will be publishing the framework, along with the research in spring 2010.

Read the Panel's response to the Government's National Plan here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/digital-participation/national-plan-for-digital-participation>

## **Raising the stakes on silent calls to £2 million**

The Communications Consumer Panel has welcomed the Government's decision to raise the maximum level of fines on companies that make persistent silent calls to £2 million. The Panel had argued in response to the Government's consultation that raising the maximum fine to £2 million would enable Ofcom to protect consumers better.

Read the Panel's press release here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Silent%20calls%20press%20release.pdf>

Read the Panel's response to the consultation here:

[www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/25.01.10%20Letter\\_CCP%20response\\_silent%20calls.pdf](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/25.01.10%20Letter_CCP%20response_silent%20calls.pdf)

## Consumers should be able to use single switching process for all communications services

The Panel welcomed strengthened rules to protect consumers against fixed line mis-selling. Panel Chair Anna Bradley asked Ofcom "to enforce the new rules and impose financial penalties on providers that break them to raise the level of compliance across the industry".

At the same time, the Panel restated its view that a priority for Ofcom should be to work with industry to develop more unified switching processes for consumers. Increasing numbers of consumers now buy bundles of services such as fixed-line telephone, mobile and broadband products, and need to be able to switch to new providers easily. The Panel is pleased therefore that improving switching processes is a priority in Ofcom's Annual Plan 2010/11.

Read the Panel's press release here:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Fixed-line%20mis-selling%20comment%20v4.pdf>

## Getting the most from switching mobile providers

The Communications Consumer Panel has collaborated with Consumer Focus and Ofcom to produce a guide designed to help consumers get the most from their mobile phone deal and save money. The guide provides helpful tips on what information consumers should find out from a provider before buying, such as length of contract and network coverage.

*How to get the best mobile phone deal* leaflet is available in PDF at:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/mobiledeal%20FINAL.pdf>

## March Panel meeting

Panel members discussed the future of content regulation following a presentation by Ofcom. The Panel is also developing a response to the BIS (Department for Business Innovation and skills) consultation on next generation access. The Panel will be publishing its response in April. The Panel has also been carrying out research into people's experiences of learning how to get online and enjoy the benefits, and the meeting was updated on the latest findings. The research will be published in May, together with the Panel's digital participation framework.

To read the minutes from Consumer Panel meetings go to:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/angenda-and-minutes/2010>

## Look out for....

There will be lots more news to catch up on in the April 2010 issue, including:

- Feedback from the Panel's consultation on its draft work plan for 2010/11, which closed on March 26. We asked you for your views on whether we have identified the right areas to address and if we've targeted the right action. So, we'll be letting you know what was said and how we intend to incorporate your thinking into our work. You can still read the draft plan on our website at: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Work%20Plan%20consultation%202010-11.pdf>

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[www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk)