



Summer 2010

Panel newsletter

Latest news...

Over half of consumers not told about mobile coverage cancellation policies

In July the Consumer Panel published mystery shopping research into what information consumers are given about cancelling their mobile phone contracts if they get poor coverage. The report *Can I cancel?* found that over half (56%) of people buying a mobile phone contract in-store did not receive accurate information about cancellation policies in the event of coverage problems. The research also found that operators and retailers had significantly different policies - and that consumers often lost out. In some cases operators would not allow customers to cancel contracts even if they had no coverage at all. And where consumers could cancel their contract the time limit allowed varied dramatically. The Panel has called on the industry to provide an across-the-board minimum 14 days to cancel contracts where consumers have coverage problems. The Panel believe this will give people enough time to test coverage in the places where they want to use their phone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Consumer Panel is calling on operators and retailers to give consumers:

1. a minimum 14-day time limit cancellation policy for poor or no coverage
2. the right to cancel their contract if coverage doesn't meet their needs
3. consistent cancellation policies within individual operators and retailers
4. accurate in-store information
5. staff trained to explain company policies correctly.

To download a copy of *Can I cancel?* and detailed research findings go to:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/research/can-i-cancel>

Consumer Panel wants Ofcom to publish complaints data

The Consumer Panel called on Ofcom to press on and publish robust complaints data in response to the publication of the new consumer complaints Code of Practice. Anna Bradley welcomed the new code because it will make it easier for consumers to complain about their service. But she added that greater transparency in complaints data would give providers an incentive to improve their performance.

In short ..

Panel meetings...

Meetings from the July Panel will be available on the website soon. To read minutes from previous meetings go to:

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

Are you on our mailing list...

If you'd like to receive this newsletter monthly by email - just join our mailing list by emailing

contact@communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Don't forget the Panel blog...

Read about the latest news from Panel members by going to our home page and click on the blog at:

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

Plans to improve broadband services are a welcome move, but ISPs should help consumers more

New plans to strengthen the Voluntary Code of Practice on Broadband Speeds are a welcome move, but the Consumer Panel believes that they do not go far enough to help consumers. Panel Chair Anna Bradley said that the code leaves it to consumers to find out what speed they are getting. She went on to call on internet service providers (ISPs) to provide even more practical support to consumers, and suggested ISPs should:

1. Go back to consumers within a month of their contract starting to tell them what actual speeds they are getting.
2. Give consumers a discount or move them to a lower cost package if they aren't getting the speeds they were expecting.

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/BB%20speeds%20release.pdf>

Tough action needed when silent calls are malicious

Ofcom's consultation into how to tackle silent nuisance calls has come to an end, with the regulator introducing a limit to the number of times a company can make an automated call to a consumer in any 24-hour period. The Panel believes this will stop many consumers being troubled by silent calls, but says this is not the end of the story. It is urging the regulator to monitor companies that use automated calling systems and the impact of the change on consumers. It is also calling on Ofcom to ensure effective enforcement action where silent calls are malicious.

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/SILENT%20CALLS%20response%20final.pdf>

July Panel meeting: members look at broadband speeds advertising, how the digital agenda in Europe is shaping up and the accessibility of mobile phones

- **Advertising speeds:** The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) came along to talk about their review of broadband advertising, partly prompted by earlier input from the Consumer Panel.
- **The EU digital agenda:** The EU consultation on net neutrality is high on the agenda, and the Panel has asked Ofcom to make sure its response takes the consumer as the starting point. The Panel will be feeding into discussions by BEREC and Ofcom on other issues such as internet protection rights and licensing.
- **Regulating phone-paid services:** PhonepayPlus came to the Panel to present its ideas for a new code of practice to regulate premium rate telephony services (PRS). The Panel welcomed the code, which we believe is likely to deliver positive benefits to consumers while allowing PhonepayPlus sufficient flexibility to respond to an evolving market. The new Code represents a step change for industry and regulator alike and that always brings its own risks, so the Panel will be monitoring the implementation once the code is approved.

To read about the proposed new Code of Practice for the regulation of premium rate telephony services (PRS) follow this link:

<http://www.phonepayplus.org.uk/output/Research.aspx>