

November 2010

# Newsletter

COMMUNICATIONS  
CONSUMER  
PANEL



## Latest news...

### Consumer Panel action makes it easier to cancel mobile contracts if coverage is poor

Many consumers will now find it easier to cancel their mobile contracts if they do not get the coverage they need, thanks to changes made in company policies following pressure from the Communications Consumer Panel. The Panel called for operators and retailers to make their policies simpler and more consistent, and recommended a 14-day minimum returns period for customers with coverage problems. It also called for operators and retailers to improve staff training, so that sales advisors could give the correct information about cancellation policies when asked. The most significant improvement is that Carphone Warehouse now has a single policy allowing consumers 14 days to cancel if they have coverage problems, rather than relying on the policies of the five mobile operators, and Phones4U has committed to implementing a single policy in 2011. The changes follow the publication in July 2010 of the Panel's research report *Can I cancel? Mobile coverage and contract cancellation*.

For full details on all the changes read the Panel's report *Improving mobile coverage cancellation policies: update* can be found at [http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Follow-up%20stmt%20on%20mobile%20covg%20research\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Follow-up%20stmt%20on%20mobile%20covg%20research_FINAL.pdf)

*Can I cancel? Mobile coverage and contract cancellation* is available on the Panel website at

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

### Two-tier internet could penalise low income consumers

Communications Minister Ed Vaizey this month announced a plan to allow internet service providers (ISPs) to create "a two-speed internet - favouring broadcasters and other media companies who pay them extra for a faster service". The Consumer Panel has welcomed the commitment to traffic management transparency, but expressed concern that this might not be enough to guarantee the online access that consumers need.

Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley said that if ISPs charge to give priority to certain types of content there is no guarantee that consumers would be able to use the online applications that they value in a reliable way: "The danger is that it could result in a two-tier internet, with content from those providers who are prepared to pay delivering a significantly better user experience. The quality of other content, including online public services, could suffer markedly."

## In short...

### Watch out for Rip Off Britain...

Panel Chair Anna Bradley's interview about our work on mobile contract cancellation policies for the BBC1 programme Rip Off Britain is being aired on Tuesday 14 December 2010 at 9.15am

### Watch this space...

In early December we'll be publishing research looking at consumer buying behaviour, and how policy-makers and regulators need to think especially carefully about more vulnerable consumers.

### Panel meetings...

To read minutes from previous meetings go to: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/angenda-and-minutes/2010>

## Emerging themes from Europe's net neutrality consultation

The European Commission has published its summary of the responses to its net neutrality consultation. Among the main findings were concerns about privacy, innovation and freedom of expression, and about a lack of transparency for consumers, Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley writes in her recent blog. "There was also a widespread view that transparency by itself would not allay all net neutrality concerns, particularly where there are barriers to switching between internet service providers. This was one of the areas the Panel highlighted in its response and we are pleased to see it has been noted by the Commission."

She writes that she was also pleased to see that some of the citizen issues had been highlighted, including privacy and freedom of expression: "However, we would like to see a more comprehensive assessment of the potential implications for citizens, as well as consumers, including the impact on provision of online public services."

To read Anna's blog in full go to:

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

## Consumer complaints under scrutiny

In a blog posted at the start of the month, former Panel member Leen Petre writes about how difficult it is for any consumer to make an informed choice about what the best complaint option is for them. "It makes sense," Leen comments, "to ensure that consumers have an overall picture of how individual companies are performing by giving them a straightforward comparator that we are all familiar with". She says that consumers have right to take their telecoms complaint to the next level if it's not resolved - the independent the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme. But, she writes, there are two organisations providing this service - Otelco and CISAS - and telecoms companies sign up to one of them: "Both systems have different operating modes, and both have their strengths and weaknesses." She questions whether consumers can get the same justice "or does it depend on which ADR provider their case goes to? Nobody seems to know for sure." Ofcom published its consultation into ADR Scheme in October 2010. "I hope that consumer representatives are writing in...If this opportunity is not used, then there won't be another one for quite a few years to come," Leen says.

To read Leen's blog go to:

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

## Rolling out the next generation - conference feedback

Blogging throughout the two-days of the NextGen 10 conference organised by the Independent Networks Co-operative Association (INCA), panel member Roger Darlington reported that the mood was very upbeat "with a strong feeling that, in the last 12 months, real progress has been made with the roll-out of next generation broadband in the UK". Roger describes contributions from industry and also chaired a workshop on digital inclusion.

To read Roger's blog go to:

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

## Net debate...

Visit the website to watch the video of the Consumer Panel/Polis seminar discussion:

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

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## November Panel meeting

At November's meeting the Panel discussed future Government plans for consumer advocacy in communications, and the Panel's future work programme:

- The Panel reviewed its work plan for the rest of the year, which will include publishing research on behavioural economics in December, and research into mobile usability early in 2011; conducting and publishing a new piece of research in early 2011; responding to Ofcom's switching review; and working with citizen and consumer bodies, and Government, on the future of consumer advocacy in the UK.
- The Panel discussed net neutrality and traffic management issues with the Broadband Stakeholders' Group (BSG). The Panel advised BSG to ensure that it identifies what information consumers want to know about traffic management, and that the code of practice can be understood by consumers.
- The Panel advised Ofcom of a number of factors of importance to consumers which should be taken into account when considering options for advertising broadband speeds.
- Discussing a paper on Ofcom's plans for its forthcoming spectrum auction, the Panel advised Ofcom that in considering options for the auction design it should develop an analytical framework that includes the social and economic benefits, both qualitative and quantitative, for citizens and consumers, including small businesses.