

April 2011



Panel newsletter

In short...

Watch this space...

In May the Panel will be launching its Work Plan for 2011/2012 - and we want you to tell us what you think. We'll be alerting stakeholders when we publish the draft plan on the website. There will be a two-week consultation period for you to respond, and then we'll report back to you with the final plan for the coming year.

The Panel will publish its annual review for 2010/2011 at the end of May, and research into consumers' attitudes about the use of their personal data online is due for publication in early Summer.

Usability is the key...

Ability Magazine's Spring issue carried a two-page feature on the Consumer Panel's research into the usability of mobile phones. To read the article go to:

www.abilitymagazine.org.uk

Panel meetings...

To read minutes from previous meetings go to:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/agenda-and-minutes/2011>

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Latest news...

Panel welcomes publication of Ofcom telecoms complaints data by provider

In 2010, the Consumer Panel called on Ofcom to publish data on the numbers of consumer complaints about telecoms providers. The Consumer Panel therefore welcomed Ofcom's first publication this month of complaints data broken down by provider. Panel Acting Chair Bob Warner said this was a first step by the regulator towards greater transparency: "Publishing the numbers of complaints by provider is good news for consumers, who will now be able to make an informed choice about the provider that is best for them - and give telecoms providers an incentive to improve their service." He has urged Ofcom to look at ways in which the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) schemes could also publish data that consumers can use when choose a phone provider.

www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Ofcom's *Telecoms complaints* report is available to download at:

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/telecoms-research/complaints/oct-2010-feb-2011.pdf>

Empowering consumers

Earlier this month the Government launched its Consumer Empowerment Strategy: *Better choices: better deals consumers powering growth*. The strategy sets out what Government and others can do to

help increase consumer power in a rapidly changing and demanding economy.

In December 2010, the Panel urged regulators and policy makers to:

- understand consumer behaviour differences, particularly for vulnerable consumers
- identify where different behaviours may cause vulnerable consumers disadvantage
- be cautious about relying on information as a way of responding to consumer needs
- provide less complex and confusing consumer information.

The strategy aims to put consumers in charge so that they are better able to get the best deals for themselves, individually and collectively. It also looks at ways of helping the most vulnerable and disadvantaged who may not otherwise benefit from rapid technological and social change. The strategy notes the vital role now played by modern communications technology "...there are now many more ways by which consumers can try to find good information about both products and businesses as well as knowledge of their rights - all before they make a purchase. The challenge for consumers is often in knowing what is relevant information and what is not; knowing what is accurate and what is not; and what can be trusted and what cannot".

Acting Panel Chair Bob Warner said: "This move to help enable consumers to make more informed choices and get better deals is a crucial step in the right direction. Our recent research into behavioural economics clearly shows that low income consumers are more likely to suffer in complex communications markets. The evidence shows that when consumers are faced with decisions that involve too many options or too much information, they become less inclined to take action and more likely to make bad decisions." He said that the panel will be exploring this in its response to the forthcoming Government consultation.

To read *Better choices: better deals* go to <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/consumer-issues/consumer-empowerment>

You can download a copy of our report *Behavioural economics and vulnerable consumers* at <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/cms.php?page=315>

Online advertising self-regulation framework for Europe a useful step forward says Panel



Acting Panel Chair Bob Warner said the introduction of a Europe-wide framework to give consumers greater control over online advertising is an important move: "Consumers must have access to information about behavioural advertising so they can make informed decisions about the extent to which they want to be involved and have the ability to exercise control over the use of their data."

The Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) Europe has launched a self-regulatory Framework for online behavioural advertising signed by the industry's leading businesses. It outlines good practice to improve transparency and consumer control. An icon in or around an advert allows consumers to click on it for more information in their own language, or to stop receiving behavioural advertising by using a new website www.youronlinechoices.eu. The initiative is already being piloted in the UK with the

support of Communications Minister Ed Vaizey.

A copy of the *Online behavioural advertising framework* can be downloaded at:
www.iabuk.net/en/1/europecommitstoselfregulation140411.mxs

Next steps for making mobile phones easier to use

Speaking about the Panel's research into the usability of mobile phones, Acting Panel Chair Bob Warner told the audience at a recent meeting of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' (BIS) Accessibility Forum that making it easier to use mobile phones will benefit everyone - including older and disabled people - and release an as yet untapped consumer market. The Panel called on manufacturers to improve design, and to work with operators, retailers and voluntary groups to develop an industry-wide labelling system so consumers can see at-a-glance if the handset will meet their needs. "We also highlighted the need for retailers to provide better staff training to help people choose the phone that meets their needs," he told the conference. "Our next steps are to work with Ofcom to look at how we might bring together all the key organisations to progress our recommendations."

The Panel's research *Making mobiles easier to use* is available at:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Final%20usability%20report%20260111.pdf>

A look at the April Panel meeting

This month's meeting looked at:

- The Panel thanked Anna Bradley, who has completed her term as Panel Chair, for her leadership and commitment during her time in office. Panel member Bob Warner is now Acting Chair.
- Panel members discussed their priorities for the 2011/2012 workplan, which will shortly go out for public consultation. Plans include research into digital participation and work around consumer advocacy, as well as continuing to monitor mobile coverage and broadband speeds.
- Detailed plans for the upcoming launch of the online data privacy research report were discussed, including hosting a roundtable event.
- The new arrangements for the Consumer Panel are now in place.