

February 2012

COMMUNICATIONS  
CONSUMER  
PANEL



## Panel newsletter

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### In short...

#### Communications Green Paper event

The Communications Consumer Panel is planning an event in May with Consumer Focus to discuss the Government's much-awaited Communications Green Paper, which is expected shortly. Details to follow soon...

#### Success for Safer Internet Day 2012

The Panel was one of a range of partners that joined together to support Safer Internet Day 2012. Read more about the activities that took place around the theme of 'connecting generations'...

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

#### Panel to publish digital participation research in spring

The Consumer Panel is publishing its research into digital participation in spring 2012, and planning a series of related events including one focusing on internet take-up in Glasgow. Further information about the events will be published shortly on our website...

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/>

#### Panel work plan 2012/13

The Panel's consultation on its draft work plan for 2012/13 remains open until 16 March. Send comments to: [contact@communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk](mailto:contact@communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk) Once all comments have been considered, we will publish the final plan on the Panel's website...

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/>

#### New guidelines to help industry promote internet safety to parents

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) has launched new guidelines for organisations and internet service providers (ISPs) to make sure parents and children get reliable and consistent internet safety messages...

<http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00203161/new-guidelines-to-help-industry-promote-internet-safety>

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### Latest news...

#### Panel calls for co-ordinated response to bill shock problem

The Communications Consumer Panel has called for a co-ordinated response to the growing consumer problem of bill shock. In response to Ofcom's review of unexpectedly high phone bills, Panel Chair Bob Warner said that he wanted to see "industry develop better information and mechanisms to give consumers control over their spending and alert them when they are likely to incur additional costs".

He added that providers should also use the information they hold on typical customer usage profiles to intervene earlier if a phone is lost or stolen "to help to protect people from charges for

unauthorised use”.

The Panel also again expressed concern about the costs of calling some non-geographic numbers such as *freephone* services from mobiles, which are often significantly higher than using a landline. “This particularly affects people on lower incomes who are more likely to have mobiles rather than a landline, and use their mobile to call essential services,” Bob Warner explained.

Ofcom is carrying out a review of 08, 09 and 118 numbers and ways to improve consumer awareness of the cost of calling these numbers. This includes options to introduce standardised charges and make *freephone* calls free from mobiles as well as landlines. The regulator will publish a further consultation, and the Panel will remain closely engaged with this issue.

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Bill%20shock%20final.pdf>

Ofcom consumer guide <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/2012/03/billing-problems/>

### Panel consults on draft work plan 2012/13

As part of the Communications Consumer Panel’s public consultation on its work plan for the coming year, the Panel held a stakeholder event to ask for people’s views on the key consumer issues it has provisionally identified for 2012/13.

“Our work plan explains the Panel’s role and illustrates the different ways in which it engages with issues, and how we chose our proposed priorities for the coming year,” Panel Chair Bob Warner explained.

The meeting generated a fascinating discussion that ranged from why superfast broadband is essential for small business across the UK and the need to minimise potential risks from mobile micro payments, to asking the Panel to hold a watching brief on digital radio switchover.

“Once the Panel has considered your views, we’ll be publishing a final version of the work plan on our website in early spring,” Bob Warner said.

Look out for the draft work plan 2012/13 on our website:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/about-us/panel-work-programme>

### New plans reflect Panel’s call to make switching easier

The Panel’s advice to Ofcom that switching communications providers needs to become easier for consumers and small businesses has been reflected in Ofcom’s new switching proposals. Panel Chair, Bob Warner, said this should make changing broadband and landline suppliers simpler and more reliable: “As society becomes ever more reliant on internet services, it is unacceptable that one in five consumers switching broadband provider lost their service for about a week. If consumers are more aware of the benefits of switching, and can move between providers quickly and easily they will benefit from the enhanced competition in communications markets.”

The Panel has gone further and encouraged Ofcom to develop unified switching processes for all communications services such as mobile, pay TV and cable services, and is urging providers to work with the regulator to design a unified system as quickly as possible. “If consumers are discouraged from switching bundles because of the complexity of the processes, this risks reduced competition and a worse deal for consumers,” Bob Warner warned.

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

### Good news that broadband speeds are improving, but Panel urges action so consumers can compare providers and packages to get the best deal

The Panel has welcomed the improvement in average broadband speeds reported by Ofcom in new research, but Panel Chair Bob Warner remains concerned. He said that many people with ADSL-based broadband connections continue to experience much lower average download speeds than the headline ‘up to’ advertised speeds.

“We believe that the new CAP guidance that will be in place from April doesn’t go far enough, and the additional qualifying information should be equally prominent to consumers when they are thinking about which broadband package to buy. Consumers can only make an informed choice if they can easily compare different packages and providers.”

The guidance requires that at least 10% of an internet service provider’s (ISP) customers achieve the ISPs speed claims. Only where a significant proportion of people are unlikely to receive a speed close to the one advertised will further qualifying information be included.

“We will be watching carefully to see if the new guidelines are effective,” he added.

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Ofcom%20BB%20speeds%20research%20final.pdf>

- Ofcom research found that in November 2011, half of consumers who had paid for an ‘up to’ 8Mbit/s broadband package only received an average speed of 3Mbit/s or less. While half of consumers who had paid for an ‘up to’ 20/24Mbit/s service received average speeds of 5Mbit/s or less.

<http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2012/02/02/jump-in-uk-broadband-speeds/>

## February Panel meeting

This month’s Panel meeting included:

- Discussion with the Federation of Small Businesses and the Communications Managers Association.
- An update from Ofcom about the plans for the spectrum auction and mobile not-spots.
- An update on the Panel’s digital participation research project.

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