March 2012

Panel newsletter

In short...

Switching event
The Panel is planning an event with Consumer Focus and the Consumer Forum for Communications to discuss Ofcom's current consultation on proposals to change the processes for switching fixed voice and broadband providers on the Openreach copper network. More details to follow soon ...
http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/switching-fixed-voice-broadband/

Latest telecoms consumer complaints data
The Panel says the latest Ofcom figures provide useful information for consumers to help them decide which provider to use, and should encourage telecoms companies to improve their performance...
http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/2012/03/ofcom-publishes-latest-telecoms-complaints-data-3/

The devil's in your details
The Devil's in Your Details campaign brings together Action Fraud, The Telecommunications UK Fraud Forum (TUFF) and the Financial Fraud Action UK and reminds people to protect their personal information...
http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/majority-of-women-feel-falling-victim-to-fraud-is-inevitable-according-to-new-study
http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/careless-generation-are-more-concerned-about-their-Facebook-profile-than-falling-victim-to-fraud

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

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Latest news...

Panel's expertise on broadband infrastructure welcomed by Scottish Government
Following the evidence given by Panel Member, Fiona Ballantyne, the Scottish Government's Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee has published its report on *Broadband Infrastructure*. The report notes: "The Committee heard evidence about work by the Communications Consumer Panel and the Royal Society of Edinburgh in the field of broadband take-up and recommends that the Scottish Government taps into this expertise and knowledge when it is developing its own work."
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/42943.aspx

Online contracts
Speaking about how online providers need to make contracts more understandable for consumers,

Panel Chair Bob Warner said that if consumers' behaviour is to be regulated by contract "then it would be a good idea for them to know how they had been contracted to behave".

Bob Warner told the Nominet annual policy forum debate into *Shaping the Development of the Internet* that reading the terms and conditions to access new software or buy something online is something that most people don't do, and they readily tick the box: "Consumers are most likely to find out what they can and cannot do online from friends "rather than reading the terms and conditions."

He ended by saying that consumers needed standard information to understand and compare what's on offer: "I wonder if there is scope for providers agreeing standard terms for those areas where there is commonality, so that differences could be highlighted?" Bob Warner asked.

Consumers need straightforward information to control their online privacy

Responding to Ofcom's *Adults Media Use and Attitudes* research, Communications Consumer Panel Chair Bob Warner said that the report showed how internet use was now playing an ever increasing role in many consumers' lives. However, he feared that people over 65 were facing disadvantage because they are still more likely to be offline and unable to access essential online services. "The Panel is also concerned about the numbers of online users who admit they never read the terms and conditions (T&Cs) and privacy statements before deciding whether to use a site or service. Companies should provide straightforward information and tools – rather than the complex small print of company T&Cs and privacy policies. Consumers will only genuinely be empowered in the online world if they have enough information about the implications of releasing their data," he said.
http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Adult%20media%20lit%20release%20FINAL.pdf

Panel takes part in Ofcom's DTT discussion event

As previously highlighted, Ofcom is consulting on measures to reduce the risk of interference to Freeview television reception from future 4G services in the 800 MHz spectrum band. Following the Government decision to require new licence holders of the 800 MHz spectrum to form a company to address and resolve interference issues, the Ofcom consultation discusses how best to implement the Government decisions, including proposals for providing information and filters to households likely to be affected.

Representatives of the Panel joined a range of stakeholders gathered to discuss the proposals in the consultation.
http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/second-coexistence-consultation/

Consumers have to have confidence in m-commerce

"There has to be something in it for the consumer", Panel Chair Bob Warner told a Westminster eForum event discussing m-commerce and the future of mobile.

Speaking at the Westminster eForum Keynote Seminar: The Future of Mobile 2012, he said that consumers were concerned about security, that m-commerce is as easy to use as cash, widely available and that the technology works: "Consumers have to have confidence that the risks will be limited, and aren't faced with unexpectedly large bills to pay. But, importantly, and also the most difficult thing to get right, is redress if things go wrong in what is a complex value chain. It is critical to give customers confidence."
http://www.westminsterforumprojects.co.uk/

Report into promoting broadband across Europe published

BEREC has published its report on the Promotion of Broadband. The report identifies the measures being used across Europe to promote broadband adoption. In its earlier submission, the Panel had advised BEREC that broadband access for all is necessary to ensure that people can go online in a reliable and consistent way. BEREC's report makes a range of recommendations to support

broadband adoption such as: information and digital literacy campaigns on the advantages of broadband adoption; giving tax incentives and subsidies for people on low incomes; promoting universal design to make equipment suitable for use by people with disabilities more accessible and more affordable; measures to encourage the production of content in a country's national language, promotion of online public services and implementation of transparency measures.
http://berec.europa.eu/doc/2012/bor12-13_bb_promotion.pdf

On the margins of internet use: young people risk exclusion

Panel member Roger Darlington last week spoke at the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) along with academics and other experts to discuss a rarely debated problem: the number of young people (16 to 24-year-olds) who rarely use, or never use the internet. OII is researching the subject and delegates were invited to make an early input into their thinking, Roger explained. Research suggests that non-use is now 4% among young people, which means that about 300,000 people are affected. "We have to beware of being too prescriptive," Roger commented, adding: "Not everyone has to use all communications media, but limited or no internet use will limit young people's consumer and citizen benefits. Digital exclusion remains part of the wider social exclusion agenda", he concluded.
http://www.rogerdarlington.me.uk/commswatch/?p=3865

March Panel meeting

This month's Panel meeting included:

- A discussion on the Panel's response to Ofcom's second consultation on the spectrum auction.
- A presentation from the BIS midata project group.
- An update from BDUK on broadband rollout and MIP.
- A presentation on the Panel's digital participation research project.