

September 2012

COMMUNICATIONS
CONSUMER
PANEL



Panel newsletter

In short...

Rural consumers and small businesses still waiting for superfast broadband

The Government announcement of funding for superfast cities is welcome, but Panel says that many rural consumers and SMEs are still waiting to benefit from improved services...

http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/media_releases/9350.aspx

Which? investigates if customers are being misled over 'fixed' mobile contracts

The Which? *Fixed means fixed* campaign investigation is looking into whether mobile phone shops are misleading customers by telling them that contract prices won't increase. For more information go to....

<http://www.which.co.uk/news/2012/08/customers-misled-over-mobile-phone-contracts-293108/>

New report calls for more action to deliver community broadband

Developing rural economies could provide a big boost to the UK economy, but the process needs to be carefully managed to avoid a two-speed rural society, a new report from Carnegie UK Trust warns.

Future directions in rural development highlights the need for better networking and resource allocation by Government to allow rural communities to determine their own future. To find out more go to... <http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/news---events/latest/carnegie-uk-trust-warns-of--two-speed--rural-econo>

Follow us on Twitter

Follow the Panel's news on Twitter...

@NewsCCP

Latest news...

Government needs to redouble efforts to improve digital participation

In its response to the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) Communications Review the Panel has said that the Act should ensure that virtually all citizens and consumers enjoy access to high-speed broadband and ubiquitous mobile coverage.

Panel Chair Jo Connell said to achieve this further intervention was needed: "There are cases where, for understandable economic reasons, the market does not provide the infrastructure and services that consumers and citizens need," she explained. She said that Government is working towards ensuring near-universal broadband, but that "it now needs to redouble its efforts to encourage, and support tangibly, the wide range of initiatives to improve digital participation".

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/CCP%20Response%20to%20Comms%20Review%20Sept%202012%20.pdf>

Ofcom has also submitted its response to the DCMS Communications Review - it can be read here:

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/ofcomresponses/Response_to_DCMS.pdf

Sustaining online engagement: progressing the digital journey

The Panel held at successful seminar with the Consumer Forum for Communications exploring the issues surrounding online engagement, following up its recent research into digital participation *Bridging the gap*. The Panel was joined by speakers talking about the latest developments from the BBC's Media Literacy Team, Consumer Focus, the Government Digital Service, Ofcom and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). A report of the next steps identified at the event will follow shortly. To read the Panel's report *Bridging the gap* go to: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/DP%20Scotland%20FINAL.pdf>

Markets work better if consumers are empowered

Speaking at the Westminster eForum seminar on online advertising and the consumer perspective on trust and accountability, Panel member Kim Brook said that today's consumers are bombarded by spam, telemarketing and scams: "Consumer trust is under stress. Evaluating these communications requires understanding and familiarity, but the pace of change makes this difficult."

He highlighted the growing market in consumers' online personal data, and recent Panel research that raised significant concerns about how people can manage the collection and use of their personal online data - and how they make the important decisions about releasing that data.

"When we conducted research into how people behave online, and consumers' awareness about how their data is collected and used, we found a significant lack of awareness coupled with concerns about how people's data is used. Nearly four-fifths (79%) of the people we surveyed said that they were highly concerned about their data being sold to third parties to target them with offers."

Kim Brook told the audience that markets work better if consumers are empowered: "But for this to happen consumers need better information to help them make informed decisions, control over the use of their data, reassurance from companies that they will minimise the amount of data collected - and importantly that it will be stored securely, and that companies will follow the rules."

Online personal data: the consumer perspective:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Online%20personal%20data%20final%20240511.pdf>

News from the Consumer Forum for Communications

Consumer Forum for Communications members at the September meeting updated the group on their involvement in the Department for Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) Communications Review. This included taking part in the recent series of DCMS seminars and submitting responses to the review. These are available on the CFC Groupsites.

<http://ofcomconsumerforum.groupsites.com/main/summary>

Consumer Focus (CF) gave CFC members a brief overview of their research findings on what consumers want from their postal services over the next five to ten years. The research found that what consumers really want from Royal Mail and Ofcom is reliability and predictability. They specifically told CF:

- Quality of service
 - should be regulated and monitored
 - 'payback' for reduction in service frequency
- Consumer protections
 - regulator needs powers to ensure all consumers are protected
 - prevent exclusion of most vulnerable members of society
 - continued deliveries to the home
- USO operator
 - most wanted Royal Mail will continue to be the primary carrier of letters and packets in ten years' time
 - consumers hope that a new, more competitive Royal Mail will emerge.

Ofcom updated the group on its consultation procedures project, which is looking at how the organisation consults and what improvements can be made. The project is expected to be completed by Spring 2013.

Sweden best internet nation on world wide web index

Sweden has been placed at the top of a world wide web Index, which ranks 61 nations according to the impact and availability of the internet. The UK came third on the index, and the US second.

The report was compiled by the World Wide Web Foundation, set up by internet-founder Sir Tim Berners-Lee. It uses data from the last five years to score nations in seven different categories: communications infrastructure; institutional infrastructure; web content; web use; political impact; economic impact; and social impact. Berners-Lee hopes that the index will be used to identify and address barriers to the web experienced by many citizens.

<http://www.webfoundation.org/wp-content/cache/supercache/www.webfoundation.org/2012/09/web-foundation-launches-the-web-index/>

News from the Nations

Wales

Broadband campaign in Powys aims to get faster internet

People in Montgomeryshire, Powys, are being encouraged to test their broadband speeds as part of a campaign to get faster internet access. Led by local Assembly Member Russell George, the Monty Broadband campaign has been set up to highlight areas that need better broadband.

The speed test will give a much clearer picture of where broadband services need to be improved. "Robust and reliable broadband is a service that we all need," Panel member for Wales Kim Brook commented.

The campaign has broad backing from eXwavia, a local internet service provider (ISP), the Federation of Small Businesses, Mid Wales Manufacturing Group, Farmers Union of Wales, NFU Cymru and Age Cymru.

<http://www.exwavia.co.uk/en/tag/monty-broadband/>

Access to superfast broadband is essential for Wales

The Welsh Affairs Committee wants the Welsh and UK Governments to work together to improve connectivity speeds in Wales in line with the rest of the UK as a matter of urgency. Publishing a new report on the state of broadband in Wales, Committee Chair, Monmouth MP David Davies, said it was hard to believe there are still some areas in Wales with no connection at all.

Panel member for Wales Kim Brook commented: "Without an improved broadband infrastructure in Wales it's hard to see how consumers will be able to access essential public services such as the forthcoming universal credit, or businesses thrive and develop."

The report found that the availability of broadband has been "consistently lower" in Wales than the rest of the UK. Although that gap has narrowed in recent years, the latest figures show the difference between Wales and the UK overall has widened again.

The Welsh government signed a deal with BT earlier this year to upgrade the network to fibre broadband for 96% of properties by 2015 in a £425m deal. Cardiff is also one of the first cities to benefit from becoming a superfast city with £11m of funding.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmwelaf/580/58002.htm>

Scotland

Broadband take-up increasing across Scotland

The latest Ofcom Communications Market Report (CMR) for Scotland reports that broadband take-up across Scotland has increased by 7% to 68%, compared to the UK figure of 76%. Smartphone and tablet take-up also increased.

However, Mairi Macleod said that broadband take-up in Glasgow still remains the lowest of all cities analysed: “At the meeting much of the discussion centred on the extra analysis provided on this issue. The analysis shows that demographic differences partly explain lower take-up, but in fact Glaswegians are less likely to have broadband regardless of age or socio-economic group.”

Mairi said that speakers at the Ofcom CMR Scotland event also discussed the Consumer Panel's *Bridging the Gap* report, which included interviews with non-users in Glasgow: “The Carnegie UK Trust announced that will be conducting further research in Glasgow that builds on the Panel's work,” she added.

To read the CMR for Scotland go to

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr12/scotland/>

The potential of mobile technology to deliver health care

Panel member for Scotland Mairi Macleod also attended the most recent meeting of the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on digital participation. She reported that an intensive care consultant told the group how mobile technology had the potential to deliver health care in rural areas: “But, mobile coverage still presents a problem because health teams can't contact each other easily.” She said that one of the doctors surveyed by report author Dr Andrew Inglis explained how improved mobile coverage “would really transform our working lives and patient safety here”.

Technology for life

Panel member for Scotland Mairi Macleod reported how the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) is developing new thinking and strategies to improve accessibility. Attending the RNIB's *Technology for life: tools for inclusion* conference in Glasgow, she explained that several speakers talked about how involving users at the design stage would lead to usable products: “Building in accessibility from the start could also bring costs down - and give added benefits to all users,” she said, adding: “Often, the RNIB has had to take the initiative and develop prototypes themselves by developing a basic device.”

The RNIB presented findings from its recent research on digital exclusion. Mairi Macleod said: “This focused on older people and the internet, and made reference to the fact that they had found the Consumer Panel's Framework for Digital Participation extremely useful in framing their findings.”

She said that Ken Reid, chair of RNIB Scotland, had been clear in his concluding remarks: “Digital exclusion can lead to even greater social exclusion.”

Insight Radio recorded all sessions and workshops at the *Tools for inclusion* conference, and they can be listened to here:

<http://www.insightradio.co.uk/technologyforlife.html>

September Panel meeting

This month's Panel meeting included:

- an update on Ofcom's research plans
- discussion of priorities for Ofcom's Annual Plan
- an update from Ofcom on the text relay consultation
- a presentation on DTT co-existence.

Unsubscribe...

If you no longer wish to receive our newsletter please reply to this email with unsubscribe as the subject.