

December 2012

COMMUNICATIONS
CONSUMER
PANEL



Panel newsletter

Seasonal greetings from the Communications Consumer Panel

Latest news...

Keeping in Touch: Making the Most of Communications Technology

Earlier this month, Panel and ACOD Chair, Jo Connell, chaired an Ofcom-hosted event for older stakeholders called 'Keeping in Touch: Making the Most of Communications Technology'. At the event Jo highlighted that "We need to ensure in the future we no longer have digitally excluded older people but instead digitally capable, empowered UK consumers and citizens."

During the event, local stakeholders found out about the role of the Panel, ACOD and Ofcom and their rights as both citizens and consumers. They also participated in hands-on demonstrations of communications technology, including mobile phones, the internet, tablet computers, audio description and 3D television. Ofcom has a specific duty towards older stakeholders under the Communications Act, 2003, in addition to a commitment under its corporate responsibility programme to work with local communities.

Ofcom's Draft Annual Plan

The Panel will be responding in the New Year to the publication of Ofcom's draft annual plan for 2013/14. Ofcom has already consulted the Panel about what its priorities for consumers should be for the coming year, and made presentations to Members. Ofcom's proposed priorities are to:

1. **Promote effective competition and informed choice.** This will include ensuring effective competition and investment in both current and superfast broadband, and promoting choice for consumers through clear information and efficient switching processes.
2. **Secure optimal use of spectrum.** Ofcom will implement a strategy for a potential release of future spectrum for mobile broadband, to meet consumers' growing demand for data - as well as clearing and releasing further spectrum bands.
3. **Promote opportunities to participate.** For consumers and citizens to benefit from communications services, they need to be able to access and make efficient use of them. Ofcom's work in this area will include securing the universal postal service and working in collaboration with Government and industry on the availability of superfast broadband.
4. **Protect consumers from harm.** Ofcom will develop and enforce consumer protection policy on a range of issues. This will include reforming non-geographic numbering to ensure price transparency and considering issues such as mid-contract price increases.
5. **Maintain audience confidence in broadcast content.** This will involve relicensing public service broadcasters to ensure continued delivery of high quality, widely available public service broadcasting.
6. **Contribute to and implement public policy defined by Parliament.** Ofcom has a role in supporting the development of wider public policy in relation to communications matters. Current examples include Ofcom's work to implement measures aimed at reducing online copyright infringement, under duties created by the Digital Economy Act 2010, and undertaking

a review of public service broadcasting.

The draft Annual Plan 2013/14 can be found at <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/draft-annual-plan-2013-14/>. Consultation on the plan closes on 22 February 2013. Ofcom is holding [public consultation events](#) on its draft Annual Plan in the Nations.

Vodafone Foundation 2012 Smart Accessibility Access Awards

Panel Member Bob Twitchin comments that the accounts of winning entries and runners up in the Vodafone Foundation 2012 Smart Accessibility Access Awards, illustrate the potential power of well designed apps to enrich the lives of disabled and older people and promote inclusion.

The Vodafone Foundation Smart Accessibility Awards is a contest to promote the development of IT applications designed to improve the lives of those with disabilities and people that are older, to help them get more actively involved in society. Four Android developers were awarded 50k euro prizes for apps designed for disabled or older people in categories of wellbeing, mobility, independent living and social participation.

The Smart Accessibility Awards are supported and co-organised by AGE Platform Europe, the European network that promotes the interests of the 150 million people aged 50-plus in the EU, and by the European Disability Forum (EDF), the NGO that represents the interests of 80 million Europeans with disabilities.

The winners were announced at a ceremony attended by Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship. Viviane Reding said: "Accessibility should not be seen as a burden. There is a strong economic case for it. Accessibility offers new business opportunities, as the candidates of the Smart Accessibility Awards have demonstrated. And better accessibility solutions in smartphones allow citizens to be informed, to communicate, to learn and to take advantage of the host of possibilities made possible by modern information and communication technologies..."

<http://developer.vodafone.com/smartaccess2012/home/>

Scotland's Digital Strategy

Panel Member Mairi Macleod updates on her previous report about the Scottish Government's broadband policy team that has engaged a team of consultants to help map out a route for Scotland to achieve world-class digital infrastructure by 2020. On 7 December, a briefing was held for stakeholders in Scotland to hear the latest on their vision, and to get feedback on the thinking so far. Mairi noted that she was pleased to see the consultants highlighting the fact that take-up and engagement are issues that need to be tackled, starting with the most excluded groups, and that different approaches such as one-to-one targeting need to be tried. The report on the work will be published in the New Year.

Consumer Focus Scotland

Panel Member Mairi Macleod reports that on 11 December, the Board of Consumer Focus Scotland held a breakfast briefing to thank the partners and stakeholders they have worked with over the years - since, as part of the UK government reforms of consumer advocacy arrangements, their wider role will be taken up by Citizens Advice Scotland and Consumer Focus Scotland will in future deal with consumer advocacy on energy, post and water. As well as highlighting the many important and successful campaigns that the organisation has run over the years, the Board also used the occasion to launch a collection of Consumer Insight Guides to help others take forward the issues on which they have been working.

Investigating broadband take-up in Glasgow

The Carnegie UK Trust is currently working on a survey to better understand the reasons for the low levels of household broadband take-up in Glasgow. A survey of 200 broadband users and non-users in the city is the most comprehensive of its kind, and is exploring the different barriers to broadband

access - and the potential solutions for addressing this issue. The report will be published early in 2013. For more information on this project contact Douglas White, Senior Policy Officer at douglas@carnegieuk.org.

4G auction applications

Earlier this month Ofcom received applications to take part in the 4G auction. Potential bidders had to submit their application on 11 December along with an initial deposit of £100,000. Today Ofcom announced the list of bidders qualified to take part in the auction - details are available at <http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2012/12/20/4g-auction-bidders-announced/>. Bidding will then start in January 2013 and is likely to take place over a number of weeks before the final result of the auction is known.

Digital UK - switchover completion report

Digital UK has published its final report on the UK's digital television switchover, which was completed on 24 October 2012. The report is available at digitaluk.co.uk/finalreport (pdf). Switchover was a highly collaborative project and the report features contributions from the many organisations involved.

Digital UK has also published a series of insights on its website digitaluk.co.uk/insights about how the programme was managed, including how it engaged with viewers at the community level and achieved significant savings.

Age Action Alliance first annual report

The Panel supports the Age Action Alliance network, which has just published its first year progress report. The Alliance report that when Age UK and DWP were asked by the Social Justice Cabinet Committee to help promote partnership working and practical action to improve later life, few could have envisaged the level of support it would attract. The Alliance now has support from over 250 members from diverse public, private and voluntary sector organisations. All are working to a common vision of improving later life, particularly for socially excluded and vulnerable older people through engagement, partnership working and practical action. Alliance Working Groups have been working collaboratively to address key issues such as:

- The need to address the threat of social isolation
- The value of promoting a positive attitude to later life
- The opportunities of digital inclusion
- The economic and social benefits of improved health and well-being

The Digital Inclusion Working Group states that it considers the digital inclusion of older people is critical, not just for older people themselves, but for the government and wider society. Key government policy areas are heavily reliant on citizens having digital skills to access, participate in, or influence, services and activities. http://ageactionalliance.org/?page_id=157

Ofcom fines npower for making abandoned calls

Ofcom has fined npower following an investigation that found the company made 1,756 abandoned calls to UK consumers and played messages containing marketing content during abandoned calls over a seven-week period. Ofcom now expects npower to remedy the harm caused, as required by the Communications Act. It understands that the company will be providing compensation to those who suffered harm as a result of the breach.

Taking into account this offer to compensate consumers, the number of occasions that npower was non-compliant with the rules, and the steps it has since taken to bring itself into compliance, Ofcom has imposed a fine of £60,000 on npower.

Further details about Ofcom's investigation into npower can be found at <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/enforcement/competition-bulletins/open-cases/all-open->

[cases/cw_905](#). A non-confidential version of the penalty notification is currently being prepared and will be published in due course.

Latest telecoms and pay TV complaints report

Ofcom has published its latest complaints data, revealing the most and least complained about major telecoms and pay TV providers between July and September 2012. Overall, complaints levels are much lower for pay TV and 'pay-as-you-go' mobile telephone services than for broadband services, landline telephone and 'pay monthly' mobile telephone services. <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/other/telecoms-research/complaints/q3-july-sep-2012/>

Guidelines for call centres dealing with vulnerable consumers

Contact centres are to be issued with new guidelines on dealing with vulnerable consumers by the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) as the industry's contribution to a government-led campaign to create a dementia-friendly society. The voluntary industry initiative has been recognised in the recently-published progress report on the Prime Minister's challenge on dementia, which aims to deliver major improvements in dementia care for the 670,000 people in the UK living with dementia.

The guidelines also cover a range of other groups of people designated as vulnerable consumers, including those with a limited understanding of English and those with mental health issues. The DMA's *Guidelines for call centres dealing with vulnerable consumers* sets out for call centres and companies engaged with telemarketing practical guidance on how to identify and manage a call with someone they believe is unable to make an informed decision.

The DMA's Contact Centres & Telemarketing Council produced the guidelines in conjunction with charities Alzheimer's Society, Dementia Action Alliance and Rethink Mental Illness, as well as companies including BT, trueCall, nPower, Blue Donkey, KMB Telemarketing and ReynoldsBusbyLee. <http://dma.org.uk/toolkit/white-paper-guidelines-call-centres-dealing-vulnerable-consumers>

Latest customer service satisfaction levels revealed

This month Ofcom published new research into levels of satisfaction with the customer service of landline, broadband, mobile and pay TV providers.

Thousands of consumers who had contacted their provider between July and September 2012 were interviewed and asked to rate their customer service experience. Various aspects of the providers' customer service were scored including: the speed with which issues were dealt with; the standard of advice given; and the attitude and ability of the advisor. Overall, satisfaction with customer service remained lowest in the fixed broadband (62%) market, although levels have improved year on year (from 58% in September 2011), compared to landline (64%), mobile (67%) and pay TV (69%).

Since Ofcom first began measuring satisfaction levels in 2009, there has been improvement in a number of aspects of customer service. The research reveals particular progress in the ease and speed of contacting customer services in the mobile, broadband and landline markets during this period. Furthermore, overall customer service ratings have risen in the landline market, increasing by six percentage points since 2009.

The research also reveals, however, that there are now more mobile customers who are dissatisfied with the standard of customer service (14%) than there were in 2009 (9%). <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/telecoms-research/customer-satisfaction.pdf>

Lost on the broadband super highway

Consumer Focus has published a report *Lost on the broadband super highway* that examines consumer understanding of information on traffic management.

The report outlines results of research that aimed to gain a better understanding of consumer awareness of traffic management practices. The research tested consumer perceptions of the traffic

management information provided by internet service providers in the UK, and investigated whether increased awareness of the issue could prompt changes to consumer behaviour and switching.

In addition to reporting detailed findings of a practical exercise of how consumers view information on traffic management, the report considers a number of the questions and challenges to the existing regulatory approach based on transparency and switching.

<http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/files/2012/11/Lost-on-the-broadband-super-highway.pdf>

Rural broadband

The Government's rural superfast broadband programme reached a milestone this month as Ainderby Steeple in North Yorkshire became the first community to be connected, with download speeds of up to 80Mbps. Communications Minister Ed Vaizey, who unveiled the cabinet that will provide superfast access to 90 rural homes, said: "Ainderby Steeple is just the beginning. Over the coming months we will approve the procurement of more than 40 rural broadband programmes, meaning that 90 per cent of UK homes and businesses will be connected at superfast speeds and the remainder at speeds of at least 2Mbps."

The Government is investing £530 million to help take superfast broadband to rural areas and a further £150m to create 'super-connected cities' with 80-100 Mbps broadband and city-wide high-speed mobile connectivity for ultrafast urban broadband schemes. The Government was given EU State Aid approval for its broadband plans in November 2012.

Second wave of super-connected cities announced

In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement earlier this month, he announced a second wave of super connected cities. The twelve cities are: Brighton and Hove, Cambridge, Coventry, Derby, Oxford, Portsmouth, Salford, and York in England; Aberdeen and Perth in Scotland; Newport in Wales; and Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland. Each will take a share of the £50 million Super-Connected City Programme fund set up to provide homes and businesses with ultrafast broadband (at least 80-100Mbps) and high speed wireless Internet access.

Government funding for this phase of the Super-Connected City Programme was open to cities with a Royal Charter and more than 45,000 homes and businesses, or more than 35,000 homes and businesses in Northern Ireland. Local authorities were invited to apply for funding, making a commitment to provide their own investment and to seek finance from the private sector.

The first wave of cities to receive funding was announced in the 2012 Budget. They are Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Leeds-Bradford (joint bid), London, Manchester and Newcastle. http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/media_releases/9576.aspx

International Communications Market Report

Ofcom has published its latest International Communications Market Report, which examines take-up, availability, price and use of broadband, landlines, mobiles, TV, radio and post across 17 major countries. The report found that UK consumers lead the world in using the latest technology to enhance their viewing experience and that the UK is ahead of other countries such as Japan and the USA for catching up with TV online and is at the forefront of using new technology such as smart TVs and digital video recorders (DVRs).

Ofcom's report shows that the UK has one of the highest penetrations of smartphones, at 58%, while just under one in five (19%) has a tablet computer. UK consumers are using laptops, smartphones and other connected devices to access the internet more often than other countries. One sixth (16%) of all website traffic in the UK was on a mobile, tablet or other connected device, higher than any other country in Europe. Much of the use of mobiles, particularly smartphones, appears to be driven by the popularity of social networking sites on mobile phones.

Internet shopping is now more popular in the UK than any other major country, and this is increasingly driven by use of mobile devices. UK consumers have now broken the £1,000-a-year spend barrier on

internet shopping - more than any other country in the research.

The research also examines the price of 'baskets' of communications services (fixed-line phone, mobile phone calls and texts, fixed and mobile broadband and TV) for five household types. It compares prices in the UK with those in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the USA. However, the research shows that while the UK remains the cheapest, the gap with other countries is narrowing. A family of two adults and two teenage children with average usage needs would pay £146 a month for its communication needs when bought individually. This was the lowest of the comparator countries: £32 less than in France, £101 cheaper than Italy and £168 lower than in the USA. When bought as a bundle, the lowest price available to UK consumers was £112, second to France at £94, and half the amount in the USA of £224. <http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2012/12/13/uk-a-nation-of-hi-tech-tv-lovers-3/>

International deployments of video relay services

Ofcom has published an independent report into international deployments of video relay services. Video relay services provide a system for converting British Sign Language (BSL) to speech and vice versa in telephone conversations. They do this through a video relay assistant, who provides the BSL translation in the form of a streamed video.

As part of Ofcom's review of the provision of services to users with hearing and/or speech difficulties, it wanted to find out more about the provision of video relay services to disabled users around the world. The report, carried out for Ofcom by Cambridge Strategic Management Group (CSMG), looks at how video relay services are implemented, how they are funded and levels of demand for the services internationally. http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/other/telecoms-research/video-relay-2012/?utm_source=updates&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=video-relay

December's Panel meeting

This month's Panel meeting included:

- an update on the Consumer Experience report findings
- discussion of PhonepayPlus' work and priorities
- an update on video relay
- discussion of Ofcom's Price Accreditation Scheme

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