

BULLETIN

Communications Consumer Panel calls for greater support for microbusinesses to realise their potential for growth through communications services

The Communications Consumer Panel has called for greater support for micro businesses from government, industry and communications providers to help them maximise the opportunities presented by communications services.

There are an estimated 4.9 million private sector businesses in the UK and 95% of them can be classified as a micro business. They account for 32% of UK private sector employment and 18% of turnover.

The Panel commissioned Jigsaw to carry out independent, qualitative research with 115 micro businesses from across the UK. The research highlights that communications services play a critical role in the success of micro businesses. However, they face a wide range of challenges in using and fully exploiting the opportunities offered by these services and technologies for the benefit of business.

The Panel's report, ['Realising the potential: micro businesses' experiences of communications services'](#) (pdf), highlights that, for micro businesses to gain greater benefit from their communications services, action needs to be taken in three key areas:

- Government, in association with the regulator (Ofcom), industry and communications providers, should focus on supplying improved speeds and coverage for both fast broadband and mobile voice and data.
- Communications providers should consider offering tailored communications service packages for micro businesses, facilitating access to robust services and business grade support levels.
- Government, Ofcom, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, chambers of commerce, trade associations and communications providers should review the information and advice they offer about the benefits of investing in communications, tailored to the needs and time constraints of micro businesses.

The Panel will be arranging a series of follow up seminars across the UK to discuss the research findings and its recommendations with key stakeholders later this year.

Panel Chair, Jo Connell, said; "Greater adoption of communications services has the potential to enable micro businesses to 'punch above their weight', thus stimulating growth. The challenge is to enable them to tap into this potential. This research highlights three key areas where government, communications providers and those offering information and advice could help support micro businesses."

Richard Hill Joins Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

The Panel is delighted to welcome Richard Hill as the new member of the Communications Consumer Panel for Northern Ireland and ACOD.

He is Chairman of the Consumer Council (Northern Ireland), owner/director of Titanic Gap Ltd, Media Consultancy and a board member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation.

Following degrees in Applied Maths and Church History, Rick worked as a parish minister for 17 years. He left church work in 2007 to develop a portfolio career. Rick has previously been Chair of Northern Ireland Screen Commission, Chair of Consumer Focus Post and member of the Consumer Focus UK Board, a member of the BBC Audience Council for Northern Ireland and BBC Broadcasting Council for Northern Ireland.

He was made MBE for services to Broadcast Media 2014.

Inclusive Communications

The Office for Disability Issues and the Department for Work and Pensions have published a guide to help businesses produce communications that include, accurately portray and are easily accessible to disabled people. There are over 11 million people with a long term illness, impairment or disability in Great Britain. The Office for Disability Issues, who wrote the guidance for government communicators, acknowledges that such guidance would be useful to others.

Communicators must be confident their messages will reach everyone, including disabled people. This can be done by ensuring all communications are inclusive and accessible.

This guidance aims to help businesses to:

- Communicate using inclusive language and know which words to use and which to avoid when writing about disability.
- Include disabled people in communications and campaigns and make sure that they're portrayed positively and realistically.
- Make sure communications are accessible.
- Choose and use appropriate communication channels to reach disabled people.

A copy of the guidance can be found at [Inclusive Communications](#)

'Next generation' text relay service goes live

People with hearing or speech impairments can now hold faster, more fluent telephone conversations thanks to a 'next generation' text relay service, which is now available.

Text relay enables people with hearing or speech impairments to communicate with others over the telephone. A relay assistant acts as an intermediary to convert speech to text, and vice versa for the two people in conversation.

In October 2012, Ofcom decided that an improved text relay service must be made available to UK users, allowing them to have more natural conversations and easier access on a wider range of mainstream devices, such as PCs, laptops, tablet computers and smartphones.

The new service has been developed by BT, but all landline and mobile telephone providers are making it available to their customers.

Ofcom has today published a [new consumer guide to text relay](#) to help users make the most of the additional benefits offered by the 'next generation' service.

Get Online Week

This year, the eighth national Get Online Week takes place from 13 - 19 October.

Get online week is the biggest campaign in the country that supports people to improve their computer and internet skills. Now in its eighth year, this year's campaign aims to encourage people to improve their skills and see what the internet can do for them. Thousands of events will be taking place throughout the country, where people can get taste of what the internet has to offer.

You can find out more by visiting <http://getonlineweek.com/>

Lamy Report: 'Future Use of the UHF band' published

The European Commission has published Pascal Lamy's report on the future use of the UHF band. He has proposed a "2020-2025-2030" formula with the aim of enabling Europe to fulfil the 'Digital Agenda for Europe' broadband targets in three steps, while giving broadcasting a clear path to invest and develop further. Further details and a copy of the report can be found on the [European Commission website](#)

Ofcom outlines plans to support small business

Ofcom has outlined its programme of work designed to enable small businesses to get the best out of communications services in the UK. You can read more details [here](#).

Practical tips for improving broadband speed

There are a number of factors that can affect the speed of broadband connections. The distance a home is from the telephone exchange, the time of day people go online and their internet provider's traffic management policy can all have an effect on the performance of a broadband service.

Ofcom has published a [guide of practical tips](#) to help consumers improve their broadband speed.

Campaign to explain major changes for telephone users

Ofcom and the UK telephone industry are working together on a major new consumer information campaign to explain the biggest changes to UK calls in more than a decade.

The six-month national campaign is planned to launch in January 2015, under the banner UK Calling. It will explain two important changes coming into effect on the same day in summer 2015: clearer call rates for 08, 09 and 118 calls; and Freephone (0800 and 0808) calls becoming free from all mobiles.

An information website - ukcalling.info - has been set up so that people can find out more before the full campaign launches next year. More information can be found on the [Ofcom website](#)

Chair of the Consumer Forum for Communications

The Consumer Forum for Communications exists to promote dialogue and information sharing between consumer bodies (and other relevant organisations as appropriate) about issues of common concern relating to communications policy and developments at UK, European and international level.

Ofcom is now seeking to recruit a new independent Chair of the Forum, to succeed Claire Milne.

The successful candidate will need:

- A proven interest in the needs of consumers, particularly those for whom the market will not always deliver
- An understanding of the communications sector and how it is regulated
- Strong analytical and communications skills, including the ability to understand and represent a broad range of consumer views
- The ability to work with a diverse range of stakeholders

=Closing date: 31 October 2014

Further information can be found [here](#).

UK cable broadband speeds overtake fibre

Internet connections via cable broadband are faster on average than those using fibre, new Ofcom research suggests. [Ofcom's eleventh report](#) measures actual residential broadband speeds in the UK and shows that between November 2013 and May 2014:

- the average actual UK broadband speed increased by 5% (0.9Mbit/s) to 18.7Mbit/s;
- superfast connections (those with a headline speed of 30Mbit/s and above) increased from 24% to 28% of connections, while average superfast speeds remained stable at 47Mbit/s;
- the extent to which speeds were maintained during peak evening times varied significantly between broadband packages, ranging from 76% to 96% of maximum speeds.

Alongside the report, Ofcom also published [new information](#) to help consumers understand their options when choosing a new broadband service or get the most from their existing broadband.

A summary of the report can be found on the [Ofcom website](#)

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