

Consumer Panel: advice to Ofcom

CONSUMER
PANEL

Ofcom
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Title of Ofcom Project:	Quality of Service Review
Date:	18/05/07
Author:	Ben Wallis
Advice given at meeting:	QoS sub-group
Date:	24/04/07
Attendees: Ofcom Panel	Xxxxxxxxx XXXXXXXXXXXX Roger Darlington, Jeremy Mitchell, Allan Williams, Ben Wallis
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1. As part of Ofcom's pre-consultation with stakeholders in advance of its Quality of Service (QoS) Review, members of the Ofcom Consumer Panel met with Ofcom to give their views on the QoS indicators published on the TopComm and TopNetUK websites, and any possible expansion of such schemes.
2. The issues were then discussed in a meeting of the full Consumer Panel. The Panel expressed its support for the valuable role of these QoS comparison websites, and made suggestions for how the schemes could be expanded and improved. The Consumer Panel undertook to put these views in writing to Ofcom.

The value of current QoS schemes

3. QoS information is an important factor in making consumers more active in the telecoms market. The Ofcom Consumer Panel's 2007 "Consumers and the communications market" research report¹ showed (figure 5.6) that 22% of consumers would use service information if they were to change fixed line phone supplier, with 27% as the comparable figure for switching mobile network.
4. Furthermore, the Consumer Panel believes that the publication of QoS indicators is a valuable incentive to industry to maintain and improve standards. TopComm and TopNetUK are the only truly independent sources of QoS data in their respective sectors. As such, the websites are monitored by telecoms providers which compare results with their

¹ www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents/Consumersmarket2007.pdf

competitors, and which often fix their own network notspots in response to the published information about them.

5. Consumers are thus benefiting from the added competition between providers, and the improved network quality, that QoS indicators bring. Consequently, the Consumer Panel believes that consumers would benefit also from expanding the existing QoS schemes.

Expansion of QoS schemes

6. In a converged and bundled communications market, we believe that it makes sense for Ofcom to expand the scope of QoS information to cover broadband and to provide more information in the area of mobile phones. This is both because of the utility of information to consumers, and because of the incentive the data provide for industry to improve standards of service.
7. In the longer term, the Consumer Panel would like to see QoS indicators integrated with price-comparison information. Ofcom recently relaunched its price accreditation scheme for companies and websites that provide consumers with price-comparison information on goods and services in the communications sector.
8. Having price-comparison information and QoS data in the same place would be more useful for consumers, as it would enable them to make their own trade-offs between the two.

Promotion of QoS schemes

9. Finally, the Consumer Panel thinks that there is great potential for Ofcom to promote TopComm and TopNetUK more widely through its website and in its publications.
10. For its part, the Panel undertook to provide links to the TopComm and TopNetUK from its own website and to consider further means in which it could publicise the two sites.

May 18, 2007