

Directory Enquiries – autumn 2004 market research

1. The Panel welcomes Ofcom's intention to both repeat and extend the research into the DQ market. In its reaction to the spring 2004 research the Panel did raise a number of issues and concerns and is pleased to hear that these are to be taken on board. It looks forward to more detail about how this is to be achieved.
2. In response to the specific points raised in your note of 30 September the Panel offers the following comments:

Mystery shopping

- a. In terms of the reference to 'all DQ services', the Panel does believe that it is important to understand consumer interaction with the entirety of the DQ market including usage of (and satisfaction with) additional services. However, the rationale for restricting in-depth research to the 30 services covering 95% of the market is accepted. The Panel hopes that the work that is proposed for the consumer awareness element of the DQ research will reveal more information about the basis on which consumers choose a DQ number at any particular point in time. More generally they would be interested to understand the basis on which the remaining 90+ services can remain commercially viable on just 5% market share. This latter is perhaps a topic that we could discuss informally.

International DQ services

- b. The Panel appreciates this point.

Text-back

- c. The Panel welcomes the proposals to include text-back accuracy in the survey particularly as this appears to be an area of usage which may be increasing.

Call connect

- d. Some members of the Panel are disappointed that Call Connect services may not be included in the research. Their concern arises from personal and anecdotal experiences that calls are often connected without charging information being provided. If possible they would welcome investigation into finding a way to accommodate the MRS guidelines – perhaps by using pre-identified residential numbers where residents had agreed to their number being used in such a way. Without understanding the way in which such services operate in practice it is difficult to establish whether consumers are being treated fairly.

Mobile price comparisons

3. The Panel has specifically asked for further thought to be given to the matter of mobile phone call costs. As you note, their previous advice made the point quite strongly that a focus on call costs based on BT fixed lines misses a considerable amount of call volume and thus masks the true costs that consumers may be paying for DQ calls. Whilst they appreciate that there will be a significant volume of information they do not agree that that in itself is reason not to explore the area. Rather they suggest that substantive attention is paid to effective presentation to make sure that it can be communicated to consumers in a way which is helpful to them. It may be useful to discuss this in more detail once information on e.g. how many calls are made to DQ numbers from mobiles etc is available.

Consumer awareness study

4. The Panel will be interested to see how the tracker studies are to be revised to take account of the Panel's earlier comments and would be happy to offer more detailed advice once work is underway on questionnaire development. They would remind the team specifically of the points made at paras 15, 16 18 and 19 in their previous advice when working on the awareness study.

Conclusion

5. In conclusion, the Panel welcomes the further work in this area and looks forward to the results - from which it should start to be possible to determine whether the anticipated benefits of liberalisation are being delivered to consumers. It looks forward to seeing in more detail the plans for the consumer awareness research in order to be confident that the points it has made previously to Ofcom on awareness, usage and satisfaction are being adequately addressed.



On behalf of Consumer Panel
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