January 2013
Panel newsletter

This month...

Communications Consumer Panel Work Plan 2013/14

Following debates led by Panel Chair, Jo Connell and Panel Member, Chris Holland, at recent events including the Consumer Forum for Communications, the Panel is preparing its draft Work Plan which will set out its proposed priorities for 2013/14. The Plan will be put out for consultation shortly and we'd like to hear feedback and comments from all interested parties. More information to follow soon...

Bridging the Gap: Sustaining Online Engagement

Panel Chair, Jo Connell presented the Panel's latest research – Bridging the Gap: Sustaining Online Engagement – at Ofcom's Consumer Experience event on January 8th.

The research aimed to understand more about the digital participation journey from a range of inter-related perspectives and how people who are less digitally engaged can get the most out of being online. Jo focused attention on how increasing the breadth of people's internet use can lead to greater digital participation and her hope that such research and debate could act as a springboard to harnessing the power of digital transformation.

The report details the Panel's recommendations to government and others. A full copy of the report can be downloaded from our website –

http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/research/bridging-the-gap:-sustaining-online-engagement

DTT Coexistence

Following the Panel's responses to Ofcom's DTT coexistence consultations, it has continued to engage with DCMS and the interim Oversight Board. Former Panel Member, Roger Darlington is providing consumer representation for the interim Oversight Board. Recently the Panel suggested that, in the case of vulnerable consumers, support should be offered in one visit for both a main and any secondary DTT installation as disabled and elderly people often depend on TVs in more than one room. Digital

Mobile Spectrum Limited (DMSL) has agreed to consider the Panel's suggestion. The Panel's consultation responses can be found at
http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/dtt/responses/Communications_Consumer_Pan1.pdf

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/949731/responses/Communications_Consumer_Pan1.pdf

Nuisance calls

Nuisance calls and texts remain a key concern for the Panel and we know that they continue to be a cause of complaint for thousands of consumers every month. Last year, Ofcom launched a guide for consumers on how to protect themselves against nuisance calls and messages and how to make a complaint. The guide was written in collaboration with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and other regulatory bodies and endorsed by a number of consumer groups. Since publication, it has proved to be one of the most popular guides on the Ofcom website and the nuisance calls main landing page has been viewed 54,563 times. You can read the guide at
http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/2012/10/tackling-nuisance-calls-and-messages/

Ofcom has also announced a 5-point action plan to tackle the growing problem of nuisance calls. The plan brings together industry, regulators and government to address the issue and incorporates:
- New research to create a clearer picture of the problems consumers are experiencing
- Tracing those behind nuisance calls
- Improving compliance amongst those businesses making calls in the UK
- Coordinated action – Ofcom is committed to playing a role in a coordinated effort to tackle the wider issue of nuisance calls alongside other regulatory bodies, such as the Information Commissioner's Office and Government
- Enforcement Action

http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/2013/01/action-plan-to-tackle-nuisance-calls/

BETT 2013

Panel Chair Jo Connell this week visited the Bett 2013 exhibition. Bett describes itself as "the global meeting place for educators with a passion for the transformational power of learning technology."

Jo noted that the exhibition highlighted how modern learning environments are becoming more mobile and 'learning anywhere' is more of a possibility. She added that such technological advances could help to ensure that in the future we no longer have digitally excluded people but instead digitally capable, empowered UK consumers and citizens.

Connectivity, content and consumers

Ed Vaizey's divided his speech at the Oxford Media Convention earlier this month into "three Cs" - connectivity, content and consumers. The last section referred to three issues, child protection online, nuisance calls, and data protection. In relation to the last two, he said:

"There are other issues of consumer protection; the biggest issue in my postbag from the public is probably silent calls, unsolicited marketing calls and spam text messages. Whilst direct marketing is a legitimate industry there is a need for better enforcement of the regulations to stop unwanted calls and texts. We have given enforcement bodies the teeth they need to do their work – through the

powers to issue fines of up to £2m for silent calls and £500k for unsolicited marketing, changes that we introduced over the last couple of years – and it is good to see Ofcom and the ICO are using these powers.

But much more needs to be done. The split of responsibilities between the Telephone Preference Service, Ofcom and the Information Commissioner's Office is confusing. The regulators need to bite, and bite hard, so that there is effective enforcement. So we want to give greater clarity to consumers about who to turn to, and critically I want to see more effective enforcement by the regulators to move with greater precision and speed in targeting rogue players.

The final consumer issue I want to touch on is personal data. Data is absolutely crucial to the success of on-line businesses. It is absolutely crucial that we strike the right balance between the protection of consumers – making sure that they know how their data is being used – and the ability of business to use this data to deliver products and services that people want...

At the same time, it is important that industry can show that it understands the concerns that have been expressed about user privacy and make real efforts to work with our colleagues in Europe to address those concerns. Simply balking at the proposals on the table is not good enough, this is not going to go away so we need to work together to ensure what we end up with is practical for business, and delivers real safeguards for consumers.

We are all living more connected lives, relying more on the communications industry to socialise, share, work, shop. And in this context we want everyone to feel confident that they understand and are able to manage their privacy, their interactions, their finance and their data online and across the different platforms. And we want to make sure that where this doesn't happen people know which bodies they can turn to for support.

Getting the framework right here – the right balance between regulation and industry action – is vital. Not only is it good for consumers, it is good for business and it is good for growth."

The full speech can be found at: http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/ministers_speeches/9683.aspx

Consumer Experience Report

Ofcom's seventh annual report on the consumer experience of telecoms, the internet, digital broadcasting and now postal services was published on January 8th. The report includes comprehensive data drawn from consumer research and market intelligence, and measures consumers' experiences of the electronic communications and postal markets.

One feature identified in the report is the continuing trend towards buying communication services as part of a bundle. Bundlers show the highest levels of interest and activity in services and are more likely to have switched providers.

However, some consumers say they faced difficulty in switching, with fixed broadband being the highest at 15% – equal to that for bank accounts. 'Hassle' is the main reason cited by consumers who considered switching their fixed broadband service in the last 12 months but decided not to. Ofcom is currently reviewing consumer switching processes and will update on this early in 2013. The Consumer Experience report is available here: http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/consumer-experience-reports/consumer-experience/

Improving access to electronic communications services for disabled people

Ofcom has issued a call for inputs to better understand the difficulties faced by disabled people in accessing communication services and the impacts this is having on them, as well as to understand the potential costs and benefits of possible changes to services aimed at improving access for disabled people.

Ofcom currently requires communications providers to offer a range of services designed to promote access to communications services for disabled people. The requirement to provide these services is set out in General Condition 15, which applies to all providers of communications services in the UK. These include:

- Provision of free directory enquiries for visually impaired people;
- Access to a text relay service for deaf and speech-impaired people;
- Provision of a priority fault repair service for users with disabilities who have a genuine need for an urgent repair;
- Provision of a safeguard scheme for disabled users who are dependent on the telephone, which must provide for third party bill management;
- Mobile SMS access to the emergency services for users with hearing and/or speech impairments;
- Provision of bills and contracts in accessible formats for blind or visually impaired users; and
- An obligation to take reasonable steps to ensure that the services it provides in order to comply with General Condition 15 are widely publicised, including in appropriate formats and through appropriate channels for disabled end-users.

The measures Ofcom is exploring through the call for inputs are:

- Updating the rules on the provision of accessible contracts to benefit other disabled end users, not just blind and visually impaired people, and to require fixed and mobile broadband providers to comply with this condition (not just voice operators).
- To extend the requirement to provide a priority fault repair service for certain disabled end users to fixed broadband providers (not just voice operators).
- To extend the current safeguard scheme for third party bill management to benefit all disabled end users who could benefit with help in managing their affairs, and to require fixed and mobile broadband providers to comply with this condition (not just voice operators);
- To extend the safeguard scheme to allow disabled end users to nominate a third party who can notify their provider of faults with the service (to apply to voice and broadband providers); and
- To add an obligation for Communications Providers to regularly inform disabled subscribers of the products and services suitable for them.

Responses to the call for inputs are invited by 22 February 2013. Read more at

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/access-electronic-services/

Safer Internet Day

Safer Internet Day (SID) is organised in the UK by the UK Safer Internet Centre in February of each year to promote safe, responsible use of online technology and mobile phones for children and young people. Safer Internet Day 2013 – the tenth edition of the event – will take place on Tuesday 5th February 2013, with the theme of Online Rights and Responsibilities, encouraging users to 'Connect with Respect".

The UK Safer Internet Centre is a partnership of three leading charitable organisations, Childnet International, the South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) and the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF). These organisations are committed to working to make a safer and better internet. All partners

recognise the unparalleled opportunities the internet offers and actively encourage its positive use for social, leisure, economic and educational advancement. The partners all work towards the Childnet target; to make the Internet a great and safe place for children. The UK Safer Internet Centre is online at www.saferinternet.org.uk.

Measuring mobile voice and data quality of experience

Publishing a call for inputs on measuring mobile voice and data quality of experience, Ofcom notes that consumers and citizens are growing increasingly dependent on mobile networks to make phone calls and access data services. The performance of these networks can vary between operators, by location and time of day and may not always meet the expectations of consumers. In the document Ofcom use the phrase 'quality of experience' ('QoE') to describe the technical performance of the services delivered to consumers.

Ofcom notes that the market can only operate effectively when consumers are able to compare the quality of the services on offer and this in-turn requires the availability of accurate and comparable QoE information. Ofcom has, for several years, collected information on broadband speeds which it considers has enabled consumers to improve their purchasing decisions, and appears to have driven improvements in service quality by operators. In this call for inputs, it wishes to explore whether there is similar information that it could provide in the mobile arena. Specifically, it wants to identify what network and/or service performance information Ofcom could gather which accurately reflects the consumer QoE and which it could publish in a way that would assist consumers in making informed choices about the mobile service they purchase. Responses are requested by 1 April 2013 - further details can be found at http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/mobile-voice-data-experience/

Mobile Phone Usage: Attitudes towards mobile phone functions including reception

Alongside the call for inputs into measuring mobile voice and data quality of experience, Ofcom has published a new report into mobile phone usage. Amongst the research's key findings are that:

• Rural users are more likely than those in urban areas to be very dissatisfied with their ability to make or receive calls;
• Over half of users have ever experienced problems with their mobile phone reception;

• Three quarters of mobile phone users in Northern Ireland have experienced problems with reception;

• Users in urban areas are significantly more likely than those in rural areas to say the ability to make calls indoors at their place of work or study is important;
• Outdoor rural locations are where people are most likely to have ever experienced a problem in making calls, though indoors at home is where they most frequently experience these problems; and
• Rural outdoor locations are most commonly cited as the place where users have experienced problems in their ability to access the mobile internet.

The full report can be found at http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/mobile-voice-data-experience/annexes/usage.pdf

4G auction underway

The UK's largest ever mobile spectrum auction has got underway, with seven bidders competing to acquire new airwaves suitable for superfast mobile broadband services.

The bidding process will take place online and is expected to continue over several rounds, with the final winners not known for a number of weeks. Full details and updates can be found at http://media.ofcom.org.uk/2013/01/23/bidding-in-4g-auction-under-way/

The Superfast and the Furious

The think tank Policy Exchange published its latest report in January. "The Superfast and the Furious; Priorities for the future of UK broadband policy" looks to identify the components necessary to upgrade the government's future broadband strategy. Based on insights drawn from 2,000 consumers and 500 SMEs, the report suggests five key elements that need to be considered:

- Vision – the government should focus on economic and social outcomes rather than pursuing speed as a proxy for progress on broadband connectivity.
- Red tape and regulation – continue to clear the way for the rollout of the next generation networks, building on steps already taken by the government to cut red tape around the deployment of street cabinets, cables and access to private land
- Consumer Empowerment – empower consumers and small businesses to gain the maximum benefit from access to the internet, and to put enough pressure on broadband providers to ensure that competition works in everyone's interests.
- The long view – place a higher priority on communications when it comes to designing national infrastructure policy, including the importance of digital communications as an enabler for smart cities, intelligent transport and other future technologies.
- Joining up Government – strengthen the role of the minister responsible for broadband, giving the post an explicit remit to promote economic growth opportunities from mainstream use of the internet.

A copy of the report can be downloaded from Policy Exchange's website http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/publications/category/item/the-superfast-and-the-furious-priorities-for-the-future-of-uk-broadband-policy

PhonepayPlus Report

Parents who don't talk to their children about what they spend via smart phones can be hit with bills that run into hundreds or even thousands of pounds, PhonepayPlus, the UK regulator of premium rate telephone services warns in a report published earlier this month.
The report highlights the potential dangers and costs around seemingly free apps and social media linked to smart phones. It shows a 300% increase in complaints to PhonepayPlus about children and charges made via social networks and apps between 2010-11 and 2011-12.
The PhonepayPlus report, Children as Connected Consumers, lays out the regulator's plans and priorities to tackle the problem and help children and parents understand the potential costs involved in the use of smart phones and other connected devices.

Protecting consumers from mid contract price rises

Ofcom has launched a consultation on how to protect consumers from price rises during fixed contracts

for landline, broadband and mobile services. The consultation follows an Ofcom review into the fairness of certain contract terms. This review and Ofcom's analysis of consumer complaints identified issues concerning the clarity and effectiveness of current rules which has led to consumer harm.

Of the options put forward, Ofcom's proposed approach is to intervene to allow consumers to exit their contract without penalty if their provider introduces any price increase during the term of the contract. Alongside this, Ofcom would expect providers to be clear and upfront about the potential for price increases and of the consumer's right to cancel the contract in the event of any price increase. This proposed change seeks to address consumer concerns that it is unfair that providers are currently able to raise prices, while they themselves have little choice but to accept the increase or pay a penalty to exit the contract. Under the current rules, the exception is where a provider agrees that the price increase would be likely to cause 'material detriment'. The consultation also considers three other possible approaches to address price rises in fixed term contracts. The consultation closes on 14 March 2013 and Ofcom expects to publish a decision in June 2013.
http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/price-rises-fixed-contracts/

Broadband Stakeholder Group 2013/14 Work Plan

The independent advisory body on broadband, the Broadband Stakeholder Group (BSG) has just published its 2013 work programme. The programme puts the issue of usage of broadband at its heart and focuses on the key question of how broadband infrastructure can be best exploited for socioeconomic benefit to the UK. Commenting on the publication of the programme, BSG CEO Pamela Learmonth stated, *"... 65% of UK premises can now access speeds of 30Mbps+ and this will increase over the next couple of years through private and public sector investment. What we need to focus on now is how to ensure consumers and businesses use this connectivity and the services it supports to the best advantage."*

In 2013 the BSG will lead this policy discussion on better understanding the links between the provision of broadband infrastructure, the uses this infrastructure supports and the benefits that ensue. Welcoming the BSG's programme, Secretary of State Rt Hon Maria Miller MP, commented: *"Better connectivity is critical for driving UK growth and attracting investment. We want to ensure that businesses and individuals can fully exploit the benefits of having better broadband, which is why we support the BSG's 2013 plan and why Broadband Delivery UK continues to work closely with partners like Go ON UK to ensure broadband projects incorporate effective campaigns to boost demand."*

The BSG 2013 work programme can be found at: www.broadbanduk.org/2013plan

Scotland - £24 million investment to make Glasgow a city of the future

Glasgow has been chosen to receive £24 million of government investment to demonstrate how a city of the future will work. The city beat competition from 30 other cities to host the Technology Strategy Board's "Future Cities Demonstrator".
Glasgow will demonstrate how providing new integrated services across health, transport, energy and public safety can improve the local economy and increase the quality of life of citizens. The demonstrator will also show how innovative use of technology can improve the Council's service provision, while additional potential benefits include improved crime prevention, a reduction in anti-social behaviour and improvements in travel infrastructure. For more information visit www.innovateuk.org.

Northern Ireland – broadband provision

Agriculture Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA has announced the release of a further £5million for the provision of rural broadband as part of plans to maximise the potential of the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013. The Minister said: "I want to see a Rural Development Programme that delivers the greatest benefit for everyone living or working in our rural areas."

The Belfast Telegraph also reported Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster's comments stressing the importance of everyone living in Northern Ireland having access to broadband speeds of at least 2Mb. As she addressed the Assembly on telecoms and broadband services, the minister said that, living in a rural area herself, she understood the frustrations of people who did not have an adequate service. "Our lives are increasingly dependent on telecommunications, whether you are shopping online, booking a holiday, doing homework, emailing friends or working from home," Ms Foster stated. "I want to ensure that a basic broadband service of 2Mb is available to everyone and to further improve the availability of superfast services." She said the Executive also wanted to improve mobile phone services, which would include tackling roaming charges.

http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/business-news/foster-vows-to-improve-broadband-services-16264378.html

Wales - Superfast Cymru Programme

Earlier this month, Edwina Hart AM, Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science gave the Assembly an update on the Superfast Cymru programme which aims to boost commercial roll-out to deliver high speed fibre broadband to 96% of homes and businesses in Wales by the end of 2015. Work has now started on the roll-out of the Superfast Cymru programme which, the Minister said was "set to transform the broadband landscape in Wales and to promote economic growth and sustainable jobs in Wales. It will ensure we are at the forefront of the global digital economy and help to champion Wales as a great place to live, work, invest and visit."

The fibre broadband roll-out will start in 14 unitary authorities during 2013/14. They are Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Swansea and Vale of Glamorgan. Roll-out will be underway in all unitary authorities during 2014/15. More information is available on the new Superfast Cymru website: www.superfast-cymru.com

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