



Northern Ireland News Release

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Consumer Panel calls for ‘try before you buy’ solution to mobile coverage problems in Northern Ireland

Consumers and small businesses in Northern Ireland experience regular problems with their mobile coverage, the Communications Consumer Panel reveals today in new research, and is calling on the regulator Ofcom to work with mobile network providers to improve coverage and information available to consumers. The Panel will also write to the network providers to seek a ‘try before you buy’ get out clause in mobile contracts to help consumers get the coverage they want.

Researchers found that over half (59%) of consumers in Northern Ireland have difficulty with mobile coverage – a third (36%) of them regularly. Small business across the UK also experience problems, with a third reporting regular problems with coverage.

Coverage problems include ‘not spots’, where there is no coverage at all, poor quality or intermittent coverage, delayed text messages and dropped calls.

The quality of coverage depends on a number of factors: whether you are near one of your provider’s transmitters; whether you are using your phone inside or outside; the local landscape; and even the weather. But there is scope for coverage to be improved. So we welcome Ofcom’s intention to conduct research to better understand the causes of coverage problems. We are asking Ofcom and industry to work together to use the findings to improve coverage for calls and texts, including coverage at home and on the move.

The Panel is asking Ofcom to work with industry to explore how to improve 2G coverage for calls and texts, including efforts to enhance coverage while on the move.

“While all the focus is on rolling out new services like mobile broadband, the Panel’s research shows that consumers and small businesses in Northern Ireland have real and persistent problems making even basic voice calls. This kind of basic coverage is hugely important to consumers and essential for

small businesses to thrive,” Communications Consumer Panel member for Northern Ireland Maureen Edmondson said today.

“And it’s essential that consumers aren’t trapped into contracts that don’t give them the coverage they need. We would like to see shops offering consumers a ‘try before you buy’ clause that allows them to use their mobile and, if they don’t get coverage, take it back.

“The importance of mobile phones will continue to grow, and it will be increasingly vital for consumers and small businesses to have the coverage they expect and need,” Maureen Edmondson commented.

Key findings

- 59% of consumer respondents in Northern Ireland have experienced problems with reception, while 36% of Northern Irish consumers experience problems regularly
- 91% of UK small businesses have experienced problems with coverage, 34% of them regularly
- The most common problems experienced by both consumers and small businesses are not-spots, where they receive no coverage at all
- 17% of Northern Irish consumers took some sort of action as a result of reception problems.
- 57% of UK small businesses took action as a result of reception problems.
- The most common response among consumers was to contact their providers’ customer service team, while small businesses were most likely to stop using their phone in certain circumstances
- Some consumers and small businesses have also resorted to buying a new phone or changing provider.

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

Maureen Edmondson, Consumer Panel member for Northern Ireland is available for interview.

The Consumer Panel conducted face-to-face interviews with consumers and business people, and the vox pop are available on the website at www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Sample size means it is not possible to do country breakdowns for the small business statistics.

Copies of the research reports are available in PDF from the website <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/research/mobile-coverage>

Buying a mobile phone from a shop often ties the consumer into a contract that gives them no rights to take it back if they change their mind. However, a consumer has seven working days to cancel a contract for goods ordered by telephone, mail order, email or fax. http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/after_you_buy/know-your-rights/mobiles/

The Communications Consumer Panel was established to advise Ofcom on the consumer interest in the markets it regulates. The Panel is independent and sets its own agenda. Visit www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk for more information. The Panel's members appointed by Ofcom are:

- Anna Bradley (Chair)
- Fiona Ballantyne (member for Scotland)
- Louisa Bolch
- Kim Brook (member for Wales)
- Colin Browne
- Roger Darlington (member for England)
- Maureen Edmondson (member for Northern Ireland)
- Leen Petre
- Damian Tambini
- Bob Warner

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