

News Release

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

Around a third of small businesses 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 businesses get the coverage they want.

Researchers found that 91% of small business respondents have difficulty with mobile coverage – a third of them (34%) said that this was a regular experience. 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, our research reveals that large numbers of small businesses are still having problems making even basic voice calls. This kind of basic coverage is essential for small businesses to thrive,” Communications Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley 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 small businesses and consumers to have the coverage they expect and need," Anna Bradley commented.

Mobile coverage problems are not limited to rural and isolated areas. Talking to business people in London, the Consumer Panel found many examples of people's dissatisfaction with their mobile network's coverage. One businessman said that he had had poor experience that affected his work: "It can affect business if you suddenly get cut off, or if you don't receive calls because there's no reception there."

Key findings

- 91% of small business respondents and over half (56%) of consumers and have experienced problems with reception, while 34% of small business respondents and 33% of consumers experience problems regularly
- 80% of business respondents say they have experienced not-spots and 24% have experienced this regularly
- 57% of small business respondents and a fifth of consumers took some sort of action as a result of reception problems.

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

Communications Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley is available for interview.

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

Copies of *Mobile coverage: a small business perspective* are available in PDF from the website: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/research/mobile-coverage>

Some mobile operators do offer a returns policy for mobile broadband, but this is not the case for most standard mobile phone contracts.

Buying a mobile phone from a shop 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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