



Press Release

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Choice a barrier to going online: end-to-end advice and technical support needed to help people get the benefits of the internet

Many consumers are put off going online by the choice of equipment in shops and don't know what to buy or how to set it up, people told the Communications Consumer Panel in new research. The Panel has now called on retailers to improve the support they give customers.

Launching *Delivering digital participation: the consumer experience today*, Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley said: "Consumers are faced with a bewildering choice of computer equipment. Many people told us how unsure they are about what to buy, and say that they have no idea how to set it up and go online. Others told us of their fears of being ripped off. We also discovered that without the right support new users can get stuck, eventually giving up on the internet altogether."

Anna Bradley said this is a serious concern and it is vital that people are not put off: "More and more of the best deals, from shopping and banking to insurance, are only available online, and people risk losing hundreds of pounds in savings every year. People also risk losing out on exciting new services delivered over the internet, like telemedicine. We want retailers to do more to provide support to help consumers choose and set up the equipment that is right for them."

Interviews with people all over the country revealed how some know that they are missing out by not going online. In Wales one man told us:

"I just feel a bit robbed really, when my friends talk about how they got cheap flights or better insurance deals. I feel like I'm missing out."

Support to purchase and set up the equipment needs to form part of a wider package of end-to-end support. People need help to:

- identify the benefits the web can offer;
- learn to use computers and the internet; and
- stay safe online.

As one woman in England told us:

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“I’ve no confidence. I have trouble with the remote, if I’m honest... I am not someone who learns things easily - in one ear and out the other.”

The research shows that without the right support even the most enthusiastic learner can get frustrated and give up.

The new research is part of the Communications Consumer Panel’s work to put the views and experiences of consumers at the heart of government, industry and third sector efforts to get more people online. The research is published alongside the Panel’s Consumer Framework for Digital Participation. The Framework sets out all the different things people need to get online and get the most from the internet. It is being used by Ofcom, the communications regulator, and organisations that provide training and support, to help target activity at those who need it most.

“If we don’t understand the issues from where consumers sit we’ll never be able to provide the right help and support to get them online.” Anna Bradley explained. “That’s why our research is key, it puts the views and experiences at the heart of the debate.” she said.

Key findings

- People must see a compelling personal benefit.
- Many people need end-to-end support.
- There is a support gap at the purchase and set up stage.
- There needs to be more focus on needs of disabled people.
- Some people might never get online.

Call/priorities for action

- Campaigns are needed to engage friends and family.
- Buddy networks should be set up.
- Support and advice should be provided to help people buy and set up equipment.
- More research is needed into the needs of disabled people.
- Government action is required to increase accessibility for disabled people.
- Suitable offline alternatives to online public service delivery need to be available.



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The Consumer Panel is a panel of independent experts that looks at issues in the communications sector from the perspective of consumers and small businesses, and advises the regulator Ofcom, government and industry.

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

Copies of *Delivering digital participation: the consumer experience* are available in PDF from the website

www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

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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