

Consumers have widespread concerns around privacy and data protection

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UK consumers are savvy and switched on users of new technology, but they fear intrusion into their privacy and don't trust that their personal data will be protected. Switched on, a new research report for the Ofcom Consumer Panel shows that even the most technology literate consumers worry about on-line protection.

The report reveals that consumers have little idea about what rules exist to protect their data, and told the Consumer Panel that they felt exposed to others "out there" who they feared could find out too much about them. Without exception, consumers said that privacy should be heavily protected. Among other things, they said they felt under siege from spam on the phone and the web and they expressed particular concerns about dodgy dates, paedophiles and unscrupulous internet vendors.

Anna Bradley, Consumer Panel Chair, explained: "The communications technology market is fast-moving and is providing real benefits to UK consumers that they clearly value. However, this research shows that there are serious challenges ahead in relation to privacy and the use of personal electronic data. Service providers, regulators and other policy makers need to give consumers greater confidence that the risks are well managed. In addition, we need to help consumers understand about the existing protections, make the residual risks clear to them and help them to make their own electronic environment safer."

One of the people researchers spoke to expressed concern that some services gave others information about them and access to their lives: "Some companies, when they interview people [for a job] they'll type them into the internet... That scares me... That's too much information." In another example the survey found that people using social networking sites were not 'gung ho' about their privacy: "But then what about the people who you don't want to find you? You're listed on your friends' profiles as their friend so you have no control over who knows you're on there..."

Switched on examined the impact that communications technologies are having on consumers today - from mobile phones and the internet to digital TVs and gaming. The research identified how people use the new technologies and how they might develop in the future.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

1. The Ofcom 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.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk for more information.

2. The Panel's members appointed by Ofcom are:

- Anna Bradley, Chair
- Ruth Evans, Deputy Chair
- Fiona Ballantyne
- Roger Darlington
- Simon Gibson
- Graham Mather
- Kevin McLaughlin
- Jeremy Mitchell

- Kate O'Rourke
- Bob Twitchin
- Allan Williams

3. Switched on: an exploration of Britain's tech savvy consumers is available from the Ofcom Consumer Panel website www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk. For a hard copy please ring 020 7783 4021

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