

## **News Release**

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

Around a third of consumers and 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 the 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 (56%) of consumers and 91% of small business respondents have difficulty with mobile coverage – a third of all those surveyed said 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.

Providing accurate information about the level of coverage an individual consumer will receive will always be an inexact science. But the Panel thinks that the networks could do more to offer accurate coverage information so consumers can make an informed choice about which network to choose.

“While all the focus is on rolling out new services like mobile broadband, our research reveals that large numbers of consumers and small businesses are still having 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 Chair Anna Bradley said today.

“It’s essential that consumers aren’t trapped into contracts that don’t give them the coverage they need. We would like to see providers 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," Anna Bradley commented.

Mobile coverage problems are not limited to rural and isolated areas. Talking to Londoners, the Consumer Panel found many examples of dissatisfaction with mobile coverage. One woman told us:

"Quite often I see neighbours walking up and down the road holding their phones up in the air, and we're all on different networks."

A young man explained how he had no coverage at all in his house, and was unable to make or receive calls. A businessman said that he had had poor coverage 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**

- Over half (56%) of consumers and 91% of small business respondents have experienced problems with reception, while 33% of consumers and 34% of small business respondents experience problems regularly
- 36% of consumers say they have experienced not-spots and 18% of consumers experience them 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 have taken some sort of 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

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](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk)

Copies of *Mobile coverage: a consumer perspective* are available in PDF from the website [www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk)

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/](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](http://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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