Telecoms Complaints Data

Ofcom receives and monitors complaints from consumers who are dissatisfied with their experience in the communications sector. It uses this data both to take enforcement action against specific companies that are breaking existing Ofcom rules and also to highlight problem areas where new rules may be needed to protect consumers.

The chart below shows complaint trends for key areas of consumer dissatisfaction over the last 12 months.

Mis-selling/Slamming – Fixed line

In some instances consumers may be given incorrect or misleading information to encourage them to switch providers.

Consumers who receive false or misleading information by a phone company to convince them to switch telephone supplier have been “mis-sold” the service. Additionally if a consumer receives a bill from a company they haven’t signed up to, it’s possible they’ve been “slammed”. In other words, the new company has switched their account without first obtaining their permission. Ofcom has recently consulted on new rules to strengthen the regulations around mis-selling.

Ofcom has an enforcement programme in progress which monitors instances of mis-selling and the conduct of communication providers when transferring customers. Ofcom has taken enforcement action against providers who have been found to be in breach of the rules including fining two companies the maximum 10 per cent of turnover.

Complaints about fixed line mis-selling/slamming can be registered here.
Silent Calls

The vast majority of silent calls are not made by pranksters or burglars. In fact they are simply the work of a machine, called a predictive dialler, used by call centres to phone large numbers of people in one go.

Predictive diallers are used by telemarketing firms (who phone people up to try to persuade them to buy products or services), by market research firms, by debt collection agencies and many other types of company. They work by dialling telephone numbers automatically, then connecting the customer to a call centre agent as soon as the customer answers the phone.

Unfortunately, if all the call centre agents are busy when the customer answers the phone, there’s nobody free at the other end of the line when the customer picks up the receiver. So, as a result, the customer simply hears silence, and can be concerned or frightened as a result.

Ofcom has rules regarding the use of diallers and has an enforcement programme to make sure organisations are complying with the rules. Ofcom has taken enforcement action against silent and abandoned calls, and has fined companies such as Abbey National, Barclaycard and Carphone Warehouse.

Complaints about silent calls have risen since September. We believe this growth is linked to the greater prominence given to silent calls and the associated complaints form on our website. There has been no significant change in the number of telephone complaints to Ofcom on the issue and calls to BT’s Nuisance Calls Bureau have fallen over the period.

Complaints about receiving silent calls can be registered here.

Customer Services

The category Customer Services records complaints to Ofcom about providers’ customer service including: queue times, no response to letters or emails, refusal to escalate complaints, quality of and rude staff and incorrect information given.

Most communications providers view customer service as a key component of their operations and will endeavour to treat their customers fairly. It is not the role of Ofcom to regulate customer service standards. Our aim instead is to ensure that when something goes wrong consumers are able to find out easily how to make a complaint and can be assured their provider will have appropriate processes in place to receive and handle their complaint. Indeed Ofcom has a specific duty under the Communications Act to secure, as appropriate, ‘that the procedures established and maintained for the handling of complaints and the resolution of disputes are easy to use, transparent and effective’.

Ofcom requires all providers to have a code of practice setting out their complaints handling processes and to be members of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme, where their customers can take disputes after 8 weeks. We have recently published proposals aimed at improving consumers’ awareness of ADR and ensuring basic standards of complaints handling.
**Additional Charges**

Consumers are sometimes required to pay additional amounts over and above the headline prices they expect. For example, they may pay more in order to pay bills by cash or cheque, rather than by direct debit, or to receive a fully itemised bill. Most contracts are also of a minimum length and include an early termination charge to end a contract early. These types of charges are allowed but they must be fair.

Ofcom has recently completed a review of additional charges and published final guidance in December 2008, setting out its views on the law as it applies to these types of terms. It began an enforcement programme on 1 April 2009 to make sure companies are complying with the law.

Complaints about additional charges can be made by calling the Ofcom Advisory Team on 0300 123 3333.

**Mis-selling/Slamming – Mobile**

The term 'mis-selling' covers a range of misleading or aggressive sales and marketing activities including ‘slamming’, where customers are simply switched from one company to another without their express knowledge and consent. Ofcom has recently strengthened rules and companies can be fined up to 10 per cent of their relevant turnover if they are found to be breaking the rules. Ofcom opened an enforcement programme on 16 September to monitor communications providers’ adherence to the rules.

Complaints about mobile mis-selling can be made by calling the Ofcom Advisory Team on 0300 123 3333.

**Broadband Migrations – Tag on line**

Tag on Line is an issue that can occur for consumers who are buying broadband for the first time or have just moved into a new property. Consumers may be advised by their provider that there is a ‘tag on the line’ and that it will need to be removed before their order can be progressed. Tags can occur for a variety of reasons and, in the majority of cases, the new provider is best placed to investigate and fix the underlying cause of the Tag, on the consumer’s behalf and, if necessary, liaise directly with BT to have the Tag removed.

For guidance on how to deal with a Tag on Line complaint click [here](#).
Broadband Migrations – problems around Migration Authorisation Codes (MACs)

A MAC enables a consumer to switch from one broadband provider to another with minimal disruption to the broadband service. The code consists of four letters always beginning with L followed by between seven and nine numbers, a slash, and five alphanumeric characters (e.g. LAEM1234567/1F6HT). A MAC should be given to a consumer by their current provider within five working days of a request. A MAC may not be required where consumers are being supplied with broadband in conjunction with their telephone service over a fully unbundled loop or via Virgin Media’s cable network.

To register a complaint about problems experienced in switching broadband providers click here.