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Telcos take first steps to improve customer service: Ombudsman

The Telecommunication Industry Ombudsman (TIO) has called on service providers to continue putting customers' interests first in a bid to improve the consumer experience.

The Ombudsman Deirdre O'Donnell made the comments today at the launch of the TIO's connect.resolve report, which shines the spotlight on the telecommunications industry's customer service performance in the first six months of this year. The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy launched the report in Melbourne today.

The report shows the number of complaints about customer service matters to the TIO increased by 1.8 per cent during the campaign, compared with a 46 per cent rise in 2007-08.

Ms O'Donnell said although the overall number of complaints stabilised during the campaign, further action was needed.

"The stabilisation shows that our collaborative approach with service providers has been effective, but they need to continue their efforts to prioritise customer service," she said.

"The proportion of complaints about customer service-related matters has remained unacceptably high and, in the TIO's view, the industry still has much work to do in this area."

The connect.resolve campaign was created to encourage the 10 largest telecommunications companies to refocus on their customers' experiences and the need to improve their customer service practices.

Throughout the campaign, service providers received monthly data about their customers' complaints to the TIO, as well as examples of consumer 'voices' so they could have a better understanding of which areas needed improvement, and further develop their customer service processes.

Some companies acknowledged they needed to make substantial changes to the way they approached customer service and some had already begun to do so.

"All the changes that the telecommunications industry is making will greatly benefit its customers and the community overall," Ms O'Donnell said.

However, she emphasised the industry must continue to give priority to improving customer service.

More follows

“To achieve a sustainable improvement, the collaborative effort that has been initiated through connect.resolve, involving telecommunications companies, regulators, policy makers and key consumer and industry groups, needs to continue,” Ms O’Donnell said.

The TIO will continue to report publicly on the industry’s performance through its quarterly consumer newsletter TIO Talks.

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