



23 October 2009

TIO calls on industry to focus on customers

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) has called on the industry to focus on communications, people and processes to improve customers' experience.

Releasing the TIO's 2008/09 Annual Report, the Ombudsman, Deirdre O'Donnell, said one of the biggest increases in complaints to the TIO continued to be about poor customer service or complaint handling.

Ms O'Donnell said that left many customers feeling their phone or internet company did not really care about them, or did not follow through on commitments.

She urged providers to focus on improving communications with customers and to ensure their processes put people first.

The TIO responded to 230 065 complaints from consumers and small businesses in 2008/09, which was a 54% rise on 2007/08.

However, 90% of these complaints were resolved with a referral back to the service provider.

Billing and payment of telephone and internet services continued to be the main area of concern, but the highest increase in complaints was among mobile phone users (79% rise), followed by internet (57%), landline (40%) and mobile premium services (13%).

"The increases reflect the greater take-up of broadband internet services and a greater variety of services offered through mobile phones used by Australian consumers," Ms O'Donnell said.

Complaints about issues* surrounding customer service and complaint handling almost doubled, with the main concern being incorrect or inadequate advice by the service companies. Many consumers said their providers had failed to follow through on promises.

The Ombudsman said the level of complaints about customer service was still unacceptably high. (The TIO's six-month **connect.resolve** campaign this year shone the spotlight on the industry's customer service performance.)

In 2008/09, the growth in complaints about mobile premium services slowed significantly. However, Ms O'Donnell reiterated that a sustainable improvement across all areas of customer service could be achieved if telecommunications companies, regulators, policy makers and key consumer and industry groups continued working together to resolve issues.

more follows

"providing independent, just, informal and speedy resolution of complaints"

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*calls from mobile phones may incur charges



** Each complaint to the TIO may raise several issues. For example, a consumer complaining about a landline fault may also complain about the way the service provider dealt with the complaint. This year, the TIO logged 481 418 complaint issues compared with 268 645 in 2007/08.*

The TIO classifies complaints according to a) the type of service used – an internet, landline, mobile or mobile premium service and b) the issue the consumer claims to have experienced with the service – for example, billing and payments, faults or customer service. Every complaint involves a service type and for each service type there is at least once complaint issue.

For further information, please phone TIO Communications Manager, John DuBois, on (03) 8600 8378 or 0417 559 287.

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