

When 0870 and 0845 numbers were first promoted to the public there was a simple implicit promise behind them namely that you wouldn't have to pay more than for local and national calls respectively. That is why we feel cheated in the present situation where the cost is typically 3 or more times that of a normal call. The document reveals that your predecessor OFTEL allowed revenue sharing to take place with these numbers. With hindsight, it is easy to see that this was the root of the present problem. However it is the job of the regulator to have foresight and they should have seen that in allowing revenue sharing they were creating a monster. There is now an obvious solution: slay the monster.

Before we get to that I need to underline the necessity for doing so with further observations. On your website you describe yourselves: "We make sure that people in the UK get the best from their communications services and are protected from scams and sharp practices, while ensuring that competition can thrive." I assume that this is a translation into common English of your statutory duty:

3(1) It shall be the principal duty of Ofcom, in carrying out their functions;
(a) to further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters; and
(b) to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition

Reading either statement, you have failed in your duty. 0845 is a scam and everyone knows it. We were promised by BT a number that would cost no more than a local call and you and your predecessors have failed to hold them to that promise. 0845 has become a near monopoly with more and more companies and organisations refusing to give consumers a proper (01/02) phone number to ring. Therefore you are failing in your duty to protect consumers by promoting competition because there isn't any.

My suspicion is that the phone companies are conspiring to keep the 0845 monster in place and the cash it brings in by failing to inform companies of 03 numbers or by making/threatening excessive charges to anyone enquiring of 03 or by lying about the functionality available for 03 numbers. Of course, I don't have much evidence to go on but you have the powers to investigate what is going on and why. The one piece of evidence I do have is this - I was at a meeting where Underground staff were able to meet people responsible for the Oyster Help Desk. Someone asked why it could not have an 020 number and the response was that normal numbers do not have the functionality of 0845 numbers. I asked why not adopt an 03 number and the response was that they had never heard of them and did not believe that it would not have the functionality of an 0845 number.

So you can plainly see there is a problem. Part of this seems to stem from your interpretation of your remit - that having created 03 numbers they will somehow promote themselves. Part of the job of a regulator is to protect consumers from the

market power of big business and this is not happening. Is that because the consumers that need protecting are not the ones commissioning the call centre services? I see that your report is aware of ignorance among ordinary people about 03 numbers, but have you looked into the ignorance of those commissioning call centre numbers as I have described above? One simple option might be for Ofcom to start a national advertising campaign promoting 03 numbers and highlighting the BBC and others that have already adopted them (and get the phone companies to pay for it).

However that was what should have happened when 03 was first created and it is too late now, given the stranglehold 0845 has on the market. I would suggest you have now only two options:

1. Slay the monster: announce an end date for 0845 and organisations and businesses will then have to choose between the consumer friendly 03 or a clearly designated more expensive number (I would say premium rate number but I understand you reserve this designation for super expensive numbers despite the clear meaning of premium).
2. Emasculate the monster: announce a date from when there shall be no more revenue sharing on 0845 and call charges can not be more than for a normal (01/02) phone call.

Which option will you choose? Please let me know.

Yours

Peter Young