Nuisance calls can cause considerable concern and annoyance for consumers. There are many different types of nuisance calls and the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and Ofcom share responsibility for enforcing the rules and taking action against organisations that break the rules.

The ICO is responsible for tackling nuisance marketing calls and text messages; whereas Ofcom is responsible for addressing the issue of silent and abandoned calls.

In the last year Ofcom has issued over £800,000-worth of fines to companies found breaking the rules on silent and abandoned calls. Most recently, npower was fined £60,000 by Ofcom for making abandoned calls to UK consumers and playing messages containing marketing content during abandoned calls.

In support of our ongoing enforcement work to tackle silent and abandoned calls, Ofcom recently announced a five-point action plan, bringing together industry, regulators and Government to tackle the wider issue of nuisance calls.

**The five point plan encompasses:**

1. **New research**
   Ofcom is aware that many consumers find it difficult to distinguish between the different types of nuisance calls. We have therefore commissioned new research, which aims to create a clearer picture of the problems consumers experience. A sample of UK adults will keep a diary recording any calls that they receive, holding on the line long enough to be able to determine the nature of the call, and detailing their experience. This will help to understand the frequency of the different types of nuisance calls and the companies and sectors generating them. Ofcom intends to share the findings with other bodies such as the Information Commissioner’s Office, the Office of Fair Trading, and the Ministry of Justice.

2. **Tracing those behind nuisance calls**
   In 2013, Ofcom will work closely with industry to identify ways to trace companies behind nuisance calls where they try to hide their identity, and to look at ways to prevent such calls.

3. **Improving compliance**
   Ofcom, along with the Information Commissioner’s Office, will write to businesses making calls in the UK warning them of the requirement that they abide by Ofcom’s rules on silent and abandoned calls. Those that breach these rules could face fines of up to £2m.
4. Co-ordinated action
Ofcom has regulatory responsibility for tackling silent and abandoned calls. It has also committed to playing a role in a co-ordinated effort to tackle the wider issue of nuisance calls alongside other regulatory bodies, such as the Information Commissioner’s Office and Government. Ofcom has already published an online consumer guide to tackling nuisance calls and messages in collaboration with other regulators and consumer groups. Our guide has been viewed online over 75,000 times.

5. Enforcement action
Ofcom will continue to take enforcement action where appropriate to ensure companies comply with its rules on silent and abandoned calls. Ofcom has issued fines totalling over £800,000 during the last year to those companies found in breach of Ofcom rules.

Ofcom announces winners of the 4G auction

In February Ofcom announced the winners of the 4G mobile spectrum auction. 4G is the fourth generation of mobile phone technology and follows on from 2G and 3G. 4G services should make it much quicker to surf the web on mobiles, tablets and laptops.

After more than 50 rounds of bidding, Everything Everywhere Ltd, Hutchison 3G UK Ltd, Niche Spectrum Ventures Ltd (a subsidiary of BT Group plc), Telefónica UK Ltd and Vodafone Ltd have all won spectrum. This is suitable for rolling out new superfast mobile broadband services to consumers and to small and large businesses across the UK.

The auction has achieved Ofcom’s purpose of promoting strong competition in the 4G mobile market. This is expected to lead to faster mobile broadband speeds, lower prices, greater innovation, new investment and better coverage. Almost the whole UK population will be able to receive 4G mobile services by the end of 2017 at the latest.

A total of 250 MHz of spectrum was auctioned in two separate bands – 800 MHz and 2.6 GHz. This is equivalent to two-thirds of the radio frequencies currently used by wireless devices such as tablets, smartphones and laptops. The lower-frequency 800 MHz band is part of the ‘digital dividend’ freed up when analogue terrestrial TV was switched off, and is ideal for widespread mobile coverage. The higher-frequency 2.6 GHz band is ideal for delivering the capacity needed for faster speeds. The availability of the two will allow 4G networks to achieve widespread coverage as well as offering capacity to cope with significant demand in urban centres.

Next steps
Once bidders have paid their full licence fees, Ofcom will grant licences to the winners to use the spectrum. Operators will then be able to start rolling out their networks, with consumer services expected in spring or early summer 2013.

3G and 4G mobile broadband speeds research
Ofcom will also be carrying out research to measure the performance of 3G and 4G networks.

This will be broken down by operator and will assess the average mobile broadband speeds received by 3G and 4G customers. It will be designed to help consumers understand the performance benefits of 4G over 3G mobile services and assist them in making informed purchasing decisions.

Ofcom expects to conduct this research around December 2013 and publish the results in spring 2014.
**Proposals to tackle mid-contract price rises**

In January this year, Ofcom launched a consultation on how to protect consumers from price rises during fixed contracts for landline, broadband and mobile services.

Of the options put forward, Ofcom’s proposed approach is to intervene to allow consumers to exit their contract without penalty if their provider introduces any price increase during the term of the contract.

Alongside this, Ofcom would expect providers to be clear and upfront about the potential for price increases and of the consumer’s right to cancel the contract in the event of any price increase.

The consultation follows an Ofcom review into the fairness of certain contract terms.

This review and Ofcom’s analysis of consumer complaints has identified issues concerning the clarity and effectiveness of current rules which has led to consumer harm.

**Next Steps**

Ofcom is inviting stakeholders’ views on all the options put forward for consultation to address this issue. The consultation closes on 14 March 2013 and Ofcom expects to publish a decision in June 2013.

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**Price comparison websites gain re-accreditation**

Ofcom has recently re-accredited two price comparison websites: simplifydigital.co.uk (Nov 2012) and broadbandchoices.co.uk (Dec 2012).

The Ofcom Price Accreditation Scheme logo is only awarded to websites that have had their price comparison services put through a rigorous independent audit.

The audit checks whether the information provided to consumers is accessible, accurate, transparent, comprehensive and up to date. Audits are conducted 12 months after the award of the accreditation and every 18 months thereafter.

There are currently six sites accredited by Ofcom - BillMonitor, Broadband Choices, SimplifyDigital, Cable.co.uk, Mobilife and Broadband.co.uk

For more information on Ofcom’s Price Comparison Scheme, see Ofcom’s consumer FAQs.

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**Consumer Experience Report 2012**

Ofcom recently published its annual Consumer Experience Report for 2012, which tracks key trends in consumers’ use of communications services to inform Ofcom’s regulatory and consumer protection initiatives.

The report includes comprehensive data drawn from consumer research and market intelligence, and measures consumers’ experience of the electronic communications and postal markets. It also includes a policy evaluation which explains how Ofcom’s regulatory and consumer protection initiatives are targeted to achieve good outcomes for consumers.

One feature identified in the report is the continuing trend towards buying communication services as part of a bundle. Bundlers show the highest levels of interest and activity in services and are more likely to have switched providers.

In the first quarter of 2012, 57% of consumers were subscribers to a bundled service, up from 40% in the same period of 2008. Dual-play landline and broadband bundles (27%) and triple-play landline, broadband and multichannel TV bundles (19%) remain the most popular packages.

Nearly a fifth (19%) of consumers switched at least one communication service in the past 12 months. Overall levels of switching for each service remain unchanged – with landline at 10%, mobile at 9% and fixed broadband at 9%. Switching main TV providers was lower at 3%.

Research shows that bundlers are more likely to have switched providers than standalone purchasers. For example, 11% of consumers who purchased their fixed broadband as part of a bundle switched, compared to 4% of those who bought it as a single service.

However, some consumers say they faced difficulty in switching, with fixed broadband being the highest at 15% – equal to that for bank accounts. ‘Hassle’ is cited by consumers who considered switching their fixed broadband service in the last 12 months but decided not to, as the main reason for not doing so. Ofcom is currently reviewing consumer switching processes and will update on this and advise stakeholders of next steps in summer 2013.
Which type of communicator are you?

New analysis of the UK's communication habits has found that people can be categorised into five different groups of communicators, ranging from the 'always on' to the 'detached'.

The study classifies adults into one of five groups, divided by the ways they choose to communicate and how often:

'Always on' (22% of adults)
The youngest group, with half (50%) aged under 35, they communicate a lot, especially with their friends and family. They are almost twice as likely to use services such as Twitter (28%) than the national average (16%) and more likely to own a mobile phone which they use especially for texting (90%) and calls (88%).

'Enlightened' (19% of adults)
A younger group, with 44% aged under 35, enlightened communicators like to keep up to date with the latest technology. They are more likely to say they are knowledgeable about the internet and use text and email to keep in touch with friends and family.

'Middle-of-the-road' (22% of adults)
Generally aged 35-54, their levels of communication are much more in line with the general population. They tend to use a range of methods to keep in touch, with face to face (78%) their favourite, and they will tend to let others try out new services first before they give them a go themselves (11% say they are the first to try new products and services compared to 21% overall).

'Conventional' (21% of adults)
The oldest group, with almost half (47%) aged over 65, conventional communicators tend to be retired and live on their own. Conventional communicators are more likely to have a landline phone (81%), rather than a computer (39%) or mobile phone (73%). Their top preferred method of keeping in touch with friends and family is meeting face to face (75% compared to 67% nationally). On special occasions such as birthdays, they are more likely to send their friends or family a card or present in the post (69%) than the overall population (58%).

'Detached' (16% of adults)
More likely to be men across a wide range of ages, communication isn't a priority for them. They are least likely to choose to meet someone face to face and are more likely to use newer quick form text methods of communication, such as Twitter than the overall population (19% v 16%).

Main methods used on a daily basis by each group to communicate with friends and family (percentage of adults):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Text messages</th>
<th>Voice call (mobile)</th>
<th>Social networking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always-on</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlightened</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-of-the-road</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detached</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
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We'd really welcome your views on our Consumer Bulletin. Please e-mail rachel.bennett@ofcom.org.uk or call 020 7783 4482 if you have any views on how we can improve the next issue.