

Ofcom Triple Play Switching Study

Qualitative research report

Published July 2016

Produced by



On behalf of:



Richard Smith

Tel: 020 7400 1018

Richard.Smith@bdrc-continental.com

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Background	6
Research objectives	7
Method and sampling	7
Background and Market Context.....	10
The market for triple play services is complex for consumers to navigate	10
Lack of clarity around contracts.....	10
Consumers resent paying charges for a landline when they don't use it for voice calls.....	16
Main findings	18
How do consumers navigate this market?	18
Non considerer/ inactive	18
Two sub-categories: passive and active consumers	18
Engage (open to the idea of switching)	19
Triggers for engagement.....	19
Assess (researching options).....	21
Barriers that prevented respondents from getting beyond assessment	21
Act (making a decision)	25
Negotiating with providers resulted in a better deal	25
Complete.....	26
Switchers recall some difficulties.....	26
Final Thoughts	29

Executive Summary

The triple play market can be complex for consumers to navigate

The differences in the equipment required for the various platforms in the market (e.g. Sky – satellite for Pay TV element, Virgin – cable, Openreach – fibre optic, wires and copper cables), affected the ways in which respondents perceived the market and assessed competitor offerings.

Not all respondents had access to all three platforms, which reduced choice for some; with restrictions from some landlords or areas where Virgin cable or high speed fibre optic via Openreach was not available.

Over-the-top (OTT) services, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, added further complexity to decision making. When considering switching respondents tended to evaluate which channels were delivering most value for them, who they were paying for these channels, for how long (monthly renewal at a low price point versus longer term contracts), and how their needs were evolving (for example as their children grew out of kids' channels and became more interested in tablet-based apps).

Some 'non considerers' are engaged with the market, and others are not

The research found that some respondents who were not actively interested in changing provider were not necessarily inert. Some 'non considerers' kept abreast of offers which new customers were getting and offers advertised by competitors, in order to ensure that they were able to negotiate effectively with their provider. These consumers were unwilling to seriously consider switching, either because they were happy with their current services or were put off by the perceived hassle in changing systems, but they were keen to ensure that they were getting value for money. However other 'non considerers' were passive and had relatively low awareness of how their current deal compared to what other providers offered.

Cost, poor service and changing household needs reported as key triggers to engage

Many respondents reported shifting from inertia to engagement as a result of gaining awareness that they might be paying too much. Cost-related triggers were usually prompted by one or more of the following:

- Significant and/or repeated price increases imposed by a provider
- Finding out that others are paying less for similar/better/more services
- Advertising, including direct mail of cheaper deals

Other triggers included:

- Persistent or intermittent service failures (e.g. slow broadband)
- Realisation that the TV channel/programme mix no longer met the needs of the household
- Greater usage of OTT services to view streamed TV, films and box sets at low cost and with short term contracts

In some instances initial triggers, largely those related to poor current quality of service, continued to motivate respondents to switch, despite being made an offer by their existing provider.

Changing household needs and tailored packages made comparisons difficult

For many triple play respondents the package of services, including Pay TV channels, had evolved over time from the original package they signed up to. Many reported that they had been offered a range of 'add-ons' to encourage contract extension at the end of minimum contract period(s); for example additional channels, OTT services (such as Netflix¹), free calls and broadband speed upgrades. As such comparing their current package to generic offers often didn't compare like with like.

There was also variation with regards to the type of set top boxes used, whether content was stored on these and the number of rooms supplied with services. This degree of variation made assessing a competitor offer, even via comparison sites² (only a minority used these), quite difficult.

Assessment of the market was often either curtailed by a lack of information or limited in scope. Only a few of those who went on to switch reported assessing more than one competitor, either due to perceived or actual lack of choice and/or brand perceptions. In particular, among some cable or satellite users there tended to be a lack of awareness and/or unwillingness to consider other Pay TV services as direct substitutes.

The cumulative impact of uncertainty about the process, perceived hassle in changing systems, difficulty comparing options and losing provider contact deterred some from switching

Most respondents were unsure precisely what they needed to do in order to switch, in terms of which provider they should contact (current provider, new provider or both) and who they should contact first. They also did not know what to expect with regards to appointments, installation, in-home equipment and changes to wiring.

After undertaking an assessment of their options, respondents who 'decided not switch' or only considered switching reported a number of tangible and perceptual barriers which prevented them from changing provider.

Tangible barriers included:

- Limitations in the range of viable alternatives, for example few are willing to consider broadband which is too slow to stream video content
- Difficulties with assessing the market /comparing their own services and current needs with competitor offers
- Lack of awareness of the competition, competitor offers and where to find information (and that comparison sites / independent sites could be used to help switching communications services)

¹ Consumers reported that some providers offered a Netflix subscription for free for a limited period either at the beginning of a contract or at the end of a minimum contract period.

² Whilst consumers were aware of and used comparison sites for other services such as energy and financial products, few were aware that such sites included information on switching communications services.

- Lack of confidence/certainty in the broadband speed and reliability that a new provider would supply them with, set against the known experience of their current provider

Perceptual barriers included:

- Anxiety around the potential disruption involved in changes of platform concerning: changes of equipment, additional wiring, new set top boxes and/or other physical changes in the home
- Anxiety around the switch itself:
 - Dealing with providers: negotiations, leaving conversations and sales related conversations
 - Making appointments / taking time off work
 - Disruption and mess in the home
 - Fears around gaps in service

Uncertainty, and the anxiety related to this, was cited by some of those not switching as a key reason for not doing so. Some of these anxieties appeared to be tied into previous poor experiences of switching communications services, while others appeared to be based on word of mouth or hearsay.

Broadband seen as an essential service, and switching considered complex and risky

Broadband was used for multiple tasks and activities and by the entire household. In the in-depths the children we interviewed were asked to pick a device, and this was typically a tablet or laptop rather than a television. For the modern family, it was almost as if not having broadband was as disruptive as having their water supply turned off!

Therefore it was a very clear finding of the research that respondents have very low tolerance for loss of broadband or lack of consistency in broadband service. Among switchers who lost service during the switching process a range of 'coping' strategies were mentioned like spending more time at work, in cafes, using mobile data or in a few cases moving in with friends and family.

In addition, the risk of ending up with lower quality or unreliable broadband was high on respondents' lists of considerations when thinking about whether to switch providers. There was also some evidence that fear of service loss was a barrier for those who decided not to switch.

Mixed views around offers from the existing provider - many accepted these and decided not to switch, while others found these offers awkward

Negotiation of a new deal, whether initiated by the provider or customer-driven, appeared to divert switching intentions in a large number of instances. For some respondents the offer of a reduced cost or an enhanced deal from their current provider, without the perceived disruption and hassle involved in switching, resulted in a decision to stay.

There were mixed views on these types of provider discussions. Some respondents said they appreciated the opportunity to negotiate with their existing provider, while others didn't want to have to go through this once they had made their mind up to switch. A few of those who wanted

to leave found these conversations particularly awkward and stated that they would prefer an online non-phone based option.

Hence offers from providers were not always accepted particularly in cases where customer service and/or quality of current service(s) had been significantly below expectations; this experience had acted as a trigger to leave despite provider offers.

Others had not even considered negotiating with their provider, which led to quite wide variations in what respondents across the sample were paying for similar services from the same provider.

There was some uncertainty around contract terms

A number of respondents across the switching journey (considerers and switchers) felt they had been offered additional services towards the end of a minimum contract term and their provider was not sufficiently explicit that these changes resulted in them entering a new contract term. Among those who didn't realise they were entering a new contract, there was often discontent when they found out the reduced price went up after some time and they found themselves locked into a contract.

Other respondents reported price increases being imposed mid-contract and many were unaware that this could constitute an opportunity to break contract. In some instances, respondents reported being surprised at being asked to provide notice after the minimum term of contract expired.

A range of difficulties were noted by switchers

While there was variation in experience (even within the same switching journey), perhaps due to the uncertainty around what was required of switchers in terms of communication or action, some journeys appeared less troublesome than others. The more troublesome 'switches' tended to be those requiring a physical change (e.g. equipment/wiring changes /new set top boxes).

Amongst switchers, a range of difficulties were reported, largely falling into three broad categories:

- Difficulties contacting and cancelling with the losing provider for those undergoing a cross platform switch
- Difficulties co-ordinating the switch, including making appointments, avoiding gaps in service, and avoiding overlapping services / double-paying
- Equipment-related issues including faulty or incorrect equipment (which also led to gaps in service for some)

Overall, the range and nature of 'difficulties' experienced by the switchers would appear to indicate that current switching arrangements were confusing for respondents as they were uncertain of the actions and communications required of them when switching.

Background

Ofcom has a principal duty to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition. In light of this duty, Ofcom's objectives in relation to switching are to ensure that:

- It is easy and convenient for consumers to change their communications provider if they wish to do so
- Consumers are appropriately protected throughout the switching process or processes involved
- Switching processes do not deter consumers from switching or act as a barrier to competition

In July 2015, Ofcom commissioned BDRC Continental to conduct qualitative and quantitative research among residential consumers. The overall aim of the research was to provide a detailed understanding of consumers' experiences of switching triple play services including the nature and scale of any difficulties and any differences between the following types of switching arrangement:

- Openreach Switch (ORS) where a switch is *within* the Openreach network. This should usually be managed by the consumer's new provider, and is referred to as a Gaining Provider Led (GPL) process.
- Cross Platform Switch (CPS), where the consumer is switching to/from Virgin cable or Pay TV from Sky³. Consumers will need to contact the existing provider in order to terminate the contract as well as the new provider to set up the service, and this is referred to as Cease and Re-provide (C&R).

The research focussed on decision makers and excluded the following groups:

- Consumers who requested a migration authorisation code (MAC) from the losing provider in order to switch fixed broadband.⁴
- Virgin Media National (i.e. not Virgin's cable service) customers that were transferred to TalkTalk as part of a contractual arrangement that was agreed by the two providers.
- Those who had switched because they had moved house, as these switches may be affected by a number of additional issues outside of the switching process.

This document reports the findings from the qualitative element of the research. This was conducted prior to the quantitative survey to identify difficulties experienced when switching in order to ensure that the design and terminology used in the questionnaire was reflective of consumer experience.

³ Switching triple play from Sky involves both C&R (Pay TV) and GPL (FL & BB).

⁴ This process was removed in June 2015. The research was designed to understand experience of current switching arrangements and as such excluded these 'switchers' from the sample.

Research objectives

Ofcom commissioned the research in order to better understand consumers' experiences of switching triple play services including the nature and scale of any difficulties experienced. It focussed on:

- Triple play consumers (with fixed line, broadband and Pay TV from the same provider)
- Dual play consumers (fixed line and broadband from the same provider)

It explored consumer experiences of switching and their perceptions of the switching process:

- Exploring the key barriers/reasons for considering but not switching providers and inertia
- Understanding each stage of the customer decision making process, from engage through to assessment, action and completion
- Understanding the nature and scale of any difficulties experienced and whether these were related to specific switching arrangements
- Exploring any potential confusion caused by multiple switching arrangements
- Investigating attitudes towards OTT services among users and whether these are considered 'supplementary' or a 'replacement' to existing or previous services

Method and sampling

Between 10th August and 2nd September 2015, a total of eight mini-groups and fifteen in-home household interviews were conducted. A total of eighty five participants took part in the research (including the children in households where in-depths took place).

Previous research⁵ suggested that decision making around providers and services regarding triple play bundles took account of the needs of all members within multi-person households. Therefore a qualitative approach was adopted which included an element of in-home research among different type of households (including families, single person dwellings and flat sharers).

The other element of the research involved mini-groups with consumers who had varying degrees of engagement in the market from: non considerers, decided not to, active considerers, through to those who had recently switched provider.

'Non considerers/ inactives' had not considered changing provider in the last 2 years.

'Active Considerers' were defined as consumers who 'had thought or were thinking about switching to another provider' and therefore engaged with the market to some extent, but had not yet taken any action.

⁵ http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/telecoms-research/Ofcom_Switching_Comms_Provider_Research_Futuresight.pdf

‘Decided not to switch’ consumers were recruited to participate on the basis that they had taken one or more actions in the direction of switching: reviewing competitor websites, talking to a competitor or with their current provider about switching, but decided not to switch. The key objective was to understand the reasons why consumers who engage in the switching journey ultimately decide not to switch.

The qualitative sample included a cross section of consumers who were currently with or had switched providers to reflect different types of switching process: GPL and C&R. The main focus was on triple play customers, but the research did include one group of dual play (landline and broadband) switchers.

Mini-Focus Groups

A total of eight mini-focus groups were conducted across the UK. Respondents were given a pre-task and asked to illustrate all the connection points, equipment (routers, dishes and other associated items) and devices used within their home. The duration of each group was 1 ½ hours.

Mini Focus Groups: Sample Frame

Type of group	Previous Provider	Current Provider	Location
Non considerers/ inactives	n/a	At least 1 Sky, 1 Virgin, others mix between BT, EE and TalkTalk	Belfast
Active considerers	n/a		London
Active considerers	n/a		Belfast
Decided not to switch	n/a		Glasgow
Decided not to switch	n/a		Cardiff
Switchers	Sky	Mix of BT, TalkTalk and EE	London
Switchers	To or from Virgin		London
Switchers (Dual play)	At least 1 Sky, 1 Virgin, others mix between BT, EE and TalkTalk		Glasgow

Within each group at least two participants were recruited who used OTT services in addition to the TV package supplied by their provider. In the majority of the groups at least half reported using OTT services.

Household In-depth Interviews

In addition, a total of fifteen household in-depth interviews were conducted. Respondents were pre-tasked with finding images which expressed their thoughts or feelings around switching communications services. Each interview took the form of a one-to-one interview with the main decision maker (or decision makers if this was shared), followed by a shorter group session with all household members.

Interviews lasted between 1 ½ -2 hours depending upon the composition of the household.

Household In-depth Interviews: Sample Frame

Type	Group	Household Type	Location
Recent Switcher	C&R (CPS)	Young Family	London W
Recent Switcher	C&R/GPL	Older Family	Surrey
Recent Switcher	C&R/GPL	Young Sharers	Glasgow
Recent Switcher	GPL (ORS)	Older Couple	Cardiff
Recent Switcher	C&R (CPS)	Young Family	Belfast
Decided Not to Switch	Range of providers: Virgin/Sky/BT and TalkTalk	Older Family	London SW
Decided Not to Switch		Young Family	Surrey
Decided Not to Switch		Older Couple	Birmingham
Decided Not to Switch		Older Family	Cardiff
Decided Not to Switch		Younger couple no children	Birmingham
Active Considerer		Young Family	London W
Active Considerer		Older Family	Birmingham
Active Considerer		Sharer	Glasgow
Active Considerer		Young Family	Birmingham
Active Considerer		Single / Sharer	Belfast

Background and Market Context

This study provides insight into how consumers experience the communications market in their everyday lives. This context is useful when seeking to understand consumer behaviour and perceptions around switching communications.

The market for triple play services can be complex for consumers to navigate

Different platform options requiring different equipment in the home

The way in which the market has evolved in the UK has led to different platform options for consumers with landline, broadband and Pay TV services in the home. These include:

- Cable (Virgin) – where all services are provided via cable
- Satellite (Sky) – where the Pay TV element is supplied via satellite and the landline and broadband are supplied via the Openreach network
- Openreach network (BT, TalkTalk, EE, Sky for landline and broadband) – where all three services are delivered via copper wire and/or fibre optic cable

Each of these platforms requires different equipment/infrastructure within the home and/or outside the home. Respondents were generally aware that switching from one provider to another often involves an equipment change and/or requires consumers to ‘learn’ something new:

- New routers/hubs
- New set-top boxes (with different menus for finding content)
- New or additional wiring in the home and/or outside the home / installation of a satellite dish

Also consumers weren’t clear on what happens to existing hardware that is no longer needed. Switchers reported a variation with regards to what was required; for example, Virgin consumers noted that they were asked to return the set top boxes, whereas other providers did not mention this.

For some respondents in the study, these changes were seen as a ‘hassle’

“It’s getting new routers, getting set top boxes and things like that, and disposing of the ones that we’ve got. It is just a hassle.” Active Considerers, Young Family, London

These changes are visible, tangible and lasting, and were easy for respondents to recall and discuss.

“I’m not one of these guys that can just do all the wiring myself. So my thoughts about when we change provider is that there obviously be new engineers coming in and making lots of changes. One of my negative thoughts about changing provider is the mess; they come in and they drill holes and you have two people in your house maybe all day.” Switcher, Older Family, Surrey

The differences between platforms led to confusion among some respondents in so far as they were unsure what work needed to be done inside or outside their property, and whether they needed to be there to provide access. They were also unsure of what changes would be required

for in-home equipment and whether this would be installed by an engineer or sent by post. There was lack of clarity around what to do with old equipment from the previous provider: whether this would require disconnection, would they need to send it back, or could they simply discard it?

"I remember them saying the switch will happen at this time and an engineer will be there to do something and I thought that I had to be in the house. So I'm sitting in the house at 2 o'clock or whatever waiting for this engineer who never showed up, and then I phoned up and I was where's this guy, and they were "no, it's all happened, it's live now" except we didn't have any equipment to even test it out. It can't have been explained that clearly because I ended up off work for an afternoon and I didn't need to." GPL and C&R Switcher, mini group, London

Not all consumers had access to all three platforms either because of limited availability of particular platforms or restrictions. For example some respondents living in rented accommodation were not allowed to have a satellite dish installed, others were not allowed or didn't have access to cable.⁶ It was reported that some blocks of flats in urban areas had a particular system installed as a default during construction, with little provision in place for individual flats to switch. Furthermore, not all households had access to high speed fibre optic broadband via the Openreach network.

"I would have had to contact my landlord to make sure that he was okay with them [Provider X] coming in and installing the box on the outside of the building." Active Considerer, mini-group, London

Anxiety and perceptions of risks deter switching/consideration

Anxiety around switching prevented some respondents from switching, or considering switching. In most instances this was hypothetical; there was an assumption that the switch process would involve gaps and would be frustrating:

"It's being left without isn't it? Because they come in remove one device, and then come in and install the other one straight away. Say, "Yes, we'll come in Monday we'll fit it". So the one that's cancelled is turned off, you're like oh it's only a day or two, the next thing you know, the guy's not turned up, you've got to take a day off work, then they don't come and you're sat there then with no internet and it's just not a nice experience really. The crossover can be quite frustrating, it puts you off, well it does to me personally." Decided not to switch, mini-group, Cardiff

Consumer usage of Pay TV is changing

The research showed that respondents' choice of channels (particularly among males) was heavily influenced by the range of sports content on offer, particularly with regards to football (Premier League and Champion's League). All sports oriented respondents were aware of content and of the price and other trade-offs (including risk of buffering as opposed to real time signals).

⁶ In recruitment we tried to ensure that all had cable access, but inevitably some consumers in suburban areas did not have access.

- For some, price of the content they were most engaged with (i.e. Premier League / Champions League) was the key driver
- For others, breadth of sports coverage and technology led considerations

Further, some consumers reported they thought OTT services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime had relatively low price points making it an attractive option in increasing channel choice.

When switching, or thinking about switching or adapting an existing bundle which included Pay TV, respondents reported taking the following aspects into consideration:

- What they were currently paying for, how they were paying for these channels (part of a package or separately) and, critically, what delivered most value for them
- What the household needed or wanted, and how those needs and wants had changed - perhaps as children had become older and were less interested in kids' TV channels

The research also found that some respondents were not aware which of the channels in their package were available free via Freeview (particularly HD channels).

Broadband seen as an essential service, and switching seen as complex and risky

During the research we observed the importance of broadband in the lives of respondents. Children rely on broadband for entertainment via apps and for their schoolwork. Many adults have become used to streaming content on multiple devices. Without functional broadband, the functionality of these devices and needs of the household is severely compromised.

It was a very clear finding of the research that respondents had very low tolerance for loss of broadband or lack of consistency in broadband service. Among switchers who lost service during the switching process a range of 'coping' strategies were mentioned; like spending more time at work, in cafes or using mobile data; or in a few cases moving in with friends and family. In addition, the risk of ending up with lower quality or unreliable broadband was high on respondents' lists of considerations when thinking about whether to switch providers. There was some evidence that fear of loss of service was a barrier for those who decided not to switch.

In order to think about changing their broadband to another provider, consumers said they need to consider:

- The differences in providers (cable and fibre optic) with regards to both reliability and speed
- The wide range of advertised speeds, which many respondents said they were aware reflect maximum figures and not necessarily the actual speeds they may or may not be able to get in their home⁷

For many respondents understanding the choices within broadband packages was difficult and there was limited awareness of knowing where to go to check speed (or reliability) up front.

⁷ Some of the more savvy respondents were aware that the distance from their property to the nearest cabinet would have an impact on the actual broadband speeds they were able to receive.

“One of the things that I think is a fault with price comparison websites ...is that they list on speed and price and not on quality. While we are price-driven, there has got to be a good level of quality [reliability and consistency of speed] for us too. So I spent quite a lot of time actually googling reviews of providers on forums where people complain to see what type of complaints they were making, but it is quite hard...broadband quality varies so much from area to area that it's really hard to say what it is going to be for you.” Switcher, Young Sharer, Glasgow

Households need tailored packages

Another dimension which added complexity for respondents was the degree to which the needs and wants of each household varied with regards to:

- Number of rooms where TV services were required
- Pay TV channels required
- Degree to which the landline was used for voice calls (and whether the telephone number was considered important to keep or not)
- The (sometimes) conflicting needs and wants of different family members

and to a lesser extent:

- Whether email addresses supplied by the provider were used by some or all family members
- Whether content was stored in provider owned devices or provider managed cloud-based offerings

While all providers offered standard packages and bundles for triple play customers, respondents often said they needed something tailored to fit their households' needs. Even looking at aggregator or independent websites (which were generally not widely used for these services), only provided an indication of what was available and at what price but not the ability to tailor requirements.

“You have these elements of your package and you're trying to measure them out and fit them together and you always want more when you switch, you're never going to switch for anything less, so you're always trying to work it out. When they have you on the phone and you're panicking, thinking, what have I got? 'Can you give me a few seconds?' They always have that one where it's only on offer for now, if you hang up it's gone forever!” Active Considerer, mini-group, Belfast

Lack of clarity around contracts

Contract renewal and notice periods

The majority of respondents reported a lack of clarity in their dealings with providers with regards to contract terms, lack of transparency of pricing, end of contract charges and notice periods.

Most consumers stated that they had signed up for a fixed minimum contract period; often a year or 18 months however many were not clear on when their contract ended and there was mixed understanding on whether they were required to give notice and how much.

Some reported being offered additional services by their provider when approaching the end of their contracts, typically via a phone call. Often they reported that this conversation did not cover that the acceptance of new offer/deal constituted contract renewal or extension. In some cases, respondents considered this behaviour an unfair way of retaining their business, as it was neither 'open nor transparent'.

"The first phone call I made to [Provider X] to tell them that I was leaving, they informed me I couldn't leave for another six months because I had changed my contract six months previously. So I took them at their word and I mentioned this to somebody else who told me, 'a load of nonsense.' Because I had actually reduced my package and I could therefore have left that day if I'd wanted."

Active Considerer, mini-group, Belfast

Others reported to be on different contract lengths for different services and then being offered 'additions' to ensure that different contract end dates continued.

"For some reason the Internet and the TV are on separate contract times, so one month they'll phone up and say, 'Do you want to renew your TV package? We'll give you this,' and last time it was the Internet, and that was when we got Netflix. So, they're pretty good with their offers and deals. You don't have to propose, 'Oh, well, I'll stay with you if you offer me X, Y or Z.'" ⁸ Decided not to switch, Young Family, Surrey

In other instances, respondents reported receiving written notice of a price increase (either in isolation or attached to the offer of additional services) in the middle of a contract period which they felt was not sufficiently clear:

- Did this mean they could break the contract if they were not prepared to accept the increase?⁹
- Did acceptance, even if passive (by not responding) indicate the start of a new contract?

For those who switched services from a rolling contract some remembered giving 30 days' notice, however this experience was not universal. There were reported instances of respondents being told that their notice period would need to run from the date of their next direct debit payment. Others who switched at the end of contract reported being told that they could only begin their notice period from the very end of the minimum contract period (converting an 18 month minimum contract period into a 19 month minimum contract period).

"I'll be paying an extra month which I don't want to be paying for. So it was just kind of to-ing and fro-ing and it was really awkward. But I was adamant I

⁸ N.B. This customer had two separate contract periods for their Pay TV and landline/broadband.

⁹ Whilst such letters might include information on this, respondents typically did not report seeing this or being aware that they were in a position either to switch or negotiate.

wanted to get out of it, so I was persistent in trying to give my notice and do what I had to do.” Switcher, mini-group, London

Pricing transparency and negotiation

Respondents felt that pricing for communications services was not always transparent:

- Costs for broadband and landline were often split out separately, which did not reflect the reality that they were generally unable to have one without the other
- Variation across different Pay TV packages made it hard for consumers to assess overall value
- ‘Offer prices’ for particular bundles of services often did not match their precise requirements, making it difficult to compare across providers

Some more engaged respondents also felt that pricing for communications services was not fixed and there was considerable scope for negotiation. This appeared to be less of a factor with regard to new contracts with a provider, perhaps where the switch was made in response to a particular advertised offer, although even at this point respondents reported being able to negotiate somewhat. However, once minimum contract periods had expired, many of those defined as non-considerers/inactive, active considerers or decided not to switch, reported negotiating new terms with their current provider, either by threatening a switch or simply by highlighting other offers available to new consumers or from other providers.

“I got a leaflet in from [Provider X] in the last year and I thought that looks reasonable compared to what we're paying. I phoned them up just to see but all their packages confused me, because they have the XXL, the XL. I phoned up my provider and said, “I've just phoned [Provider X] and they're offering me... x, y and z, there's sports, there's this, it's excellent.” My provider said “we'll find something better” and they did, they knocked more off it! Decided not to switch, mini-group, Glasgow

Not all non-switchers felt that they wanted to negotiate and some didn't feel capable or confident of doing so. But it was apparent in the groups that those who did negotiate on the whole had a better deal with their provider and paid less. As a result, the price paid for the same services with the same provider varied considerably amongst respondents. This was most clearly illustrated during the inactive mini group in Belfast, where a ‘negotiator’ was sat next to a passive/inert respondent who was paying considerably more for an almost identical package of services from the same provider.

“...it's really hard to break down your bill and see exactly what you're paying for until you phone them... I pull it up on the computer, you know, the broadband choices (broadbandchoices.co.uk)... So when they go, 'Well, we'll give you that' and I go, 'X can give me that. Y can give me that,' and you just play it off and before you know it, they've given you another deal.” Non Considerer/inactive, mini-group, Belfast

Within each of the mini-groups conducted we encountered at least a couple of respondents who had been able to negotiate a better deal with their existing provider at the end point of a contract, which was sufficient to stop them from looking any further into switching.

Some respondents reported that providers called them towards the end of a contract and that sometimes they offered them new services in order to stay. Others reported that this form of negotiation only occurred in reaction to them contacting their provider in order to negotiate or threaten to switch.

“They've got us [Provider X] at the moment as a customer, so if in the past I've said to them, 'Oh, I'm going to [Provider Y]. I can get a good deal,' they go, 'Oh, don't do that!' We've always managed to be able to negotiate. There's been a couple of times when we were serious about leaving [Provider X] because, again, it was the football; they had more football on [Provider X]. That's not the case now....” Decided not to switch, Young Family, Surrey

“[Provider X] constantly put their prices up and up and if you phone them up and say, 'I'm leaving', all of a sudden your price is reduced.” Decided not to switch, mini-group, Glasgow

Consumers resent paying charges for a landline when they don't use it for voice calls

A large proportion of the respondents we spoke to complained about having to pay for their landline:

- Some said that they did not even own a landline telephone to connect to the service
- Others complained that they very rarely used the landline to make calls
- Many complained that incoming calls tended to be direct marketing or scams of one sort or another

There was a degree of resentment that irrespective of which provider was used, that there was a built in charge for the landline whether this is used or not. Also some respondents highlighted that when looking at fees and charges for broadband, the cost of the charge for the landline was hidden, making it hard for them to make cost comparisons.

“I remember thinking, 'I have to get the landline to get the broadband' - just useless to me. I can't actually find the house phone. It's cordless, and it's been missing for a few months, and the battery's gone, so I can't call it to find it.”
Switcher, mini-group, London

“I'm waiting for the time when I can ditch my landline, because I never really use it, everyone rings a mobile. I don't ring many people on their landlines, people I know have a mobile and most of my friends and family ring me on my mobile... If the landline rings it's usually somebody trying to sell me something. Yes, it's really funny, the amount of times you ring a landline now is just negligible. So I'm paying for that, I'm paying for the landline and bearing in

mind the broadband and phone come through on the same line. It's not like there's a broadband line and there's a phone line, broadband comes through the phone line, so you're paying for it twice really. I'm paying £15 for the phone, which I barely use, and I'm paying £22 for a broadband line." Switcher, Young family, London

Main findings

How do consumers navigate this market?

Ofcom has previously identified four stages of consumers' switching journey:

- **Engage**
 - The point a customer enters the market with a view to switching
- **Assess**
 - Searching and researching alternatives, including interaction with current and potential new providers
- **Act**
 - The point the consumer makes the decision on whether to switch or not, making contact with the relevant provider
- **Complete**
 - The processes of managing, co-ordinating and finalising the switch

This model was used as a navigation tool during this research for taking respondents through the journey of switching, with a view to focussing on the end stages of switching when a customer has made a decision on whether or not to switch - where the outcomes of the different switching processes were assumed to be at their most visible. The study also looked at respondents outside of this journey, i.e. Non considerers/inactive consumers.

The research highlighted that respondents had little or no awareness that there are different switching processes dependent upon which providers and services are switched to or from. Many assumed that they needed to contact both their new provider to arrange the switch and their existing provider to cancel the contract. It is worth noting that a few reported being told by the new provider that the losing provider would be informed on their behalf.

We also encountered a few respondents who were aware that where switching involved either connection or disconnection of a telephone line this could involve a BT Openreach engineer, whether or not the switch involved BT as a service provider. But none had a full understanding of the different switching processes beyond a consideration of those elements of installation (and equipment) that would be required to switch from one 'system' to another.

Non considerers/ inactives

Two sub-categories: passive and active consumers

We interviewed a number of respondents who had not engaged in the communications markets, (defined as non considerers/inactives) to explore the reasons why they had not recently considered switching communications providers. The research identified two sub-categories of respondents within this group:

- ‘Passive inactive’ customers who simply had little or no awareness of the market and therefore had low understanding of whether the amount they were currently paying for the services they had represented good value or poor value.
- ‘Active inactive’ customers who may have had no intention or desire to switch, but were keen to ensure that their current deal remained competitive. Therefore they kept an eye on the costs of their own services relative to those available to new customers and to those available from other providers. The reasons for not considering switching for these consumers were:
 - fully satisfied by their current provider or not dissatisfied enough to switch and/or
 - they believed that switching would be difficult/disruptive or they were simply resistant to change

Engage (open to the idea of switching)

Triggers for engagement

The research identified a number of triggers or drivers for engagement, and often these involved cost or other key parameters that breached a tolerance threshold for the respondent. All of the sample groups in this study (except those classified as non considerers) were asked about their reasons for considering switching.

The key triggers identified broadly fell into three groups:

- Perceptions that a high cost is being paid for services
- Perceptions/actual poor service quality
- Changes in household requirements (e.g. in relation to the TV channel mix)

Each of these is discussed in detail below.

Perceptions that a high cost is being paid for services

For many of those we spoke to there was a sudden realisation that the cost they were paying for their communications services had risen beyond the point where they felt comfortable. The potential triggers for this realisation were:

- Increase (or succession of increases) in costs imposed by their current provider
- Conversation with a friend or relative or colleague where the subject arose leading to a realisation or suspicion that they were paying more than others for similar services
- Advertising from a competitor provider (direct mail mentioned multiples times, particularly cable)
- Noticing advertising from their current provider (offering deals for new customers that were not available for existing customers, which got some respondents riled)

Perceptions/actual poor quality of service

Cost was the key threshold, but there were others; experiencing persistent poor quality of service e.g. lower than required broadband speeds, poor customer service, service failure/loss, protracted disruptions in service and availability/choice e.g. channels not available from their existing provider.

In particular changes over the past few years in the usage of streaming content has made the speed of broadband become a hygiene factor in service provision. Broadband that was unreliable or inconsistent (variable speed, service disruptions and faults) was seen as a source of frustration and key driver to switch. To a much lesser extent some people reported switching to television services that were unreliable or inconsistent in picture quality.

Notable was that a combination of increased costs and substandard service experiences, provided respondents with very strong driver to switching away from their existing provider.

The TV channel mix no longer meets households needs

The third main trigger for engaging in the market involved a realisation that their current TV channel mix was no longer optimal:

- Paid for channels or packages that were no longer viewed - in other words had low value relative to cost
 - Families provided the example of children's channels that were no longer watched as interest had moved away towards use of broadband, gaming or Freeview channels
 - Other respondents mentioned that they were using OTT services (at low cost, with no contract) to view streamed TV and films more than they were using paid for film channels and box sets (at high cost / fixed contract)

"The cost was the main one but also I got tired of just switching channels all the time and it's all with repetition of the same things. I thought why am I paying £50 a month for this rubbish? So I got Netflix and I also got some applications that allow me to watch American Netflix and American series. So I get National Geographic channels, Discovery, millions of films and it's just £6 more. I could even cancel the TV licence because I don't watch live TV anymore." Switcher, mini-group, London

For some consumers, sport was a key driver in Pay TV choice.

- Due to changes in the market for Pay TV some were missing things that they wanted to see; invariably this involved live sport and often football (Premier League and Champions League) although live rugby, cricket and golf were mentioned by a few respondents

Those highly engaged with watching live sport also tended to be more highly engaged with the market for Pay TV, such that they knew which games and sports were available via which providers and that competitor channels were also now available, but sometimes at differential cost rates.

- That box sets were available via different (sometimes OTT) channels/devices where they were more easily accessible.

Set against this desire for change or optimisation, was a desire to keep certain channels or programmes that they had become used to and valued. Sky Atlantic was reported in this regard as not thought to be available via other providers as yet.

NB: While there have been other changes in the market including widening access to HD (and now UHD content) and 3D channels, these were not mentioned by respondents with regards to being drivers of engagement or switching consideration.

General attitudes towards switching communications provider

The research also obtained a view from participants about how they felt about switching communications providers. Towards the beginning of each session to gain an unprompted response, we asked respondents to choose images (from a selection of Visual Explorer cards provided) which expressed something about the switching process for them.

The following verbatims were illustrative of the degree of anxiety and negativity around switching among those who had considered switching, but had not yet taken any action (active considerers).

"[image of large wave breaking] ...I think when you do it, or you make the decision to do it, it's a bit crazy, you're making all these calls and you're waiting around. You've got people coming in and out of your house and you're trying to figure out how to set it up. You're on the phone to the helpline and there's all this craziness which I thought was like the huge wave. But with a wave, once it passes it's nice and calm and the water goes calm, and once it's settled everything's good again." Active Considerer mini-group (talking about a previous switching experience), Belfast

"[image of eagle swooping] The eagle comes down and it's got you. So once you're with them, you're basically like that, I mean if you decide to move! When you hear other people, my services are that and I bought this, that and the other and you hear problems, you're thinking, shall I just stay shackled to this company or do I take the risk and try to escape..." Active Considerer, mini-group, London

Assess (researching options)

Barriers that prevented respondents from getting beyond assessment

As already discussed, some respondents simply had no desire to switch, they were satisfied with their current provider and were either non considerers/ inactives or had 'considered' switching (active considerers and some of those who 'decided not to switch'), but with low intention of actually making a switch. For the latter group a key consideration was whether they wanted to switch from a known and trusted service, to one which would involve a series of unknowns, and that they perceived *might* involve a considerable amount of time and hassle. For these people

‘engagement and assessment’ was driven primarily by a desire to get a better deal from their current provider rather than to actually go ahead and switch.

“Just thinking about the decision you have to make, researching the options that you have to look at when you're thinking about changing it, and thinking about family, what they want. If you're going to swap to a new package, what it is that you're going to benefit from, so taking everybody into account when you're making a decision.” Decided not to switch, mini-group, Glasgow

Just as different respondents had different thresholds/drivers for engagement, those who made an assessment of their options had different ‘pain thresholds’, real or perceived which acted as restraints on them moving from assessment into action.

Most respondents who had decided not to switch did so during their assessment, either because they had very little intention of switching or because they were deterred from doing so. The key aspects that deterred these respondents from moving further than making an assessment of their options were:

- The prospect of conversations with providers, the losing provider in particular
- Anxiety around changing equipment
- The fear of loss of broadband
- Lack of alternatives – real or perceived
- Difficulties making comparisons

Each of these barriers is discussed in more detail below.

The prospect of conversations with providers

Some were put off quite easily once they realised that switching would likely involve a conversation with one, possibly two providers. The ‘thinking of leaving us’ call provides an opportunity for the losing provider to negotiate – which some are uncomfortable with, once they’ve decided to leave they want to be allowed to do so easily. For some already confused by what they were able to glean from provider websites, this was simply too much to contemplate as it would be too much hassle and could confuse them further.

Anxiety related to platform change

As already stated, one consideration was perceptions around the degree of change involved in switching between systems:

- Changes in equipment
- New wiring (for some switches)
- New systems to get used to (boxes, buttons, remotes, menus etc.)

While it should be borne in mind that this was qualitative research, it appeared that those respondents already ‘invested in’ one of the systems involving specific wiring and equipment in the home (cable or satellite) illustrated the most reluctance to switch. They were concerned that this would entail a large amount of change, perhaps resulting in redundant cabling infrastructure

(boxes, dishes etc.) alongside that required for the replacement system. For some respondents the thought of doing anything themselves even loosely related to electrical wiring induced some anxiety.

“We've got a bit of a BT box down there and I think I can't do anything with it because it could be live. So I don't want a box that's there that I can't do anything with. We've got boxes everywhere....and I've asked people and they've said, 'Oh, no, don't touch them because they could be live because they could still be connected.” Decided not to switch, Older Family, London

In parallel with this was a fear that the switch itself would involve a considerable degree of:

- Mess – caused by the installation process
- Inconvenience
- Hassle

Perceptions of the potential disruption of switching do not necessarily bear comparison with what happens in reality. This is illustrated by the response of one respondent who compared and contrasted his expectation of what switching would incur with his actual experience of switching:

PERCEPTION: *“One of my negative thoughts about changing provider is that you have to wait in, take a day off work and the chaos they create.”*

AFTER: *“They were helping me with my lack of technical knowledge and they showed the kids how to use the programme....Not too much mess; all it needed was a bit of hoovering. They were good workmen so it wasn't as bad as I perhaps thought it might've been, being cynical in the past.”* Switcher, Young Family, London

The fear of loss of broadband

Another barrier was the fear of being without broadband for short period of time (or perhaps longer) if something went wrong with the switch:

“But when we changed the new router from the old router we didn't have internet for at least two days. I'm sure it was something like that, a day or two days, and that's just changing the router, so you could imagine if you're changing your old system and you've got to wait for them to fit it in.” Decided not to switch, Older Family, Cardiff

Lack of alternatives, either real or perceived

Another barrier to switching, realised through assessment, was that there were restrictions on the options available:

- Restrictions on the property or applied by the landlord, on what services could be installed
- Limitations in terms of the number of options (provider) available for their property which included high speed broadband

As well as tangible, physical barriers around the lack of options available, awareness was also an issue.

- Many were only willing to consider one, perhaps two other providers as alternatives. This tended to be particularly true of cable and satellite respondents who tended not to have considered other options as their primary Pay TV platform.
- In some cases, awareness of the options available in their location was limited; they were not sure if they had access to cable (via Virgin) or fibre optic (via Openreach).

Lack of available information

Across the research only a handful of respondents were aware that comparison sites could be used for communication services. Even those who had used comparison sites for insurance renewals and energy switches had not considered looking for comparison sites for communications services. And those who did try to use such sites found it difficult to compare their existing 'deal' with those available from other providers due to the large number of possible combinations for individual households:

- Variation in broadband speeds - current speed received vs. those available/achievable via other providers
- Wide variation in Pay TV channel configurations across different households - both current offers and those related to previously available bundles, packages or offers
- Variation of need with regards to number of set top boxes held or required and/or number of rooms where services required

While provider websites carried information on current deals, and comparison sites held this information on an aggregate level, this information only served as a guide; at best a starting point for finding an optimal solution.

Many of the offers available included discounts that did not last for the full minimum contract period, making it harder for respondents to calculate value over the entire minimum contract length.

It appeared that even those who had switched other services did not appear to categorise switching communications services as something that *should* be done on a regular basis in order to gain best value, like for example motor insurance.

To further complicate matters, respondents reported finding it difficult to build a package or bundle of services with any given provider that met all of their needs, but without the inclusion of additional channels which they did not want/need and did not want to pay for.

"Sometimes I feel that you have to pick what they're selling." Switcher, mini-group, London

Act (making a decision)

Negotiating with providers resulted in a better deal

Among the 'Decided not to switch' respondents, many had not gone beyond looking at one or more provider websites and decided not to switch for the reasons set out above.

A minority had gone further than this and contacted at least a couple of providers (these tended to be their existing provider and at least one alternative), described their needs and engaged in a series of negotiations.

In several cases, the switch was side-lined by negotiation on the part of the current provider following a cancellation request and the respondent was persuaded not to switch:

"I looked at [Provider Y] before because I thought, right, I've had [Provider X] for so long and it's as if all the deals you see are all to do with new customers. They don't really seem to have anything for existing customers. So I looked at a better deal and I couldn't be bothered with the hassle of moving, but I thought, no, I'm going to get a better deal. When I phoned [Provider X], straight away they said, 'No, we don't want to lose you, you've been our customer for x amount of years.' I think I got a discount on my phone, discount on the broadband and something else." Decided not to switch, mini-group, Glasgow

Some respondents reported negotiation 'acceptable' and 'part of the process', while others considered this a barrier to switching:

"It sounds easy, you phone them up, I say, "I want to switch". "Okay, when do you want to switch?" You set a date, they turn you off, the next day another company turns you on, but it's not like that. They'll try every single trick in the book to keep you. "Well what if you keep on for another month, we'll take £20 off your bill or you can have sports free for the next two months, or you can have the movies free for the next six months if you stay with us."" Decided not to switch mini-group, Cardiff

"I found it would have been easy to switch, but there was a fair bit of sort of - not pressure, but you do get a fair bit of, "oh, we can also save you money here, here and here," and all of a sudden, the bill comes down by £20 a month. Yes, we did lose a few things, but it was mostly things that we didn't need." Decided not to switch, Young Couple, Birmingham

For some of the respondents we spoke to, the thought of having to tell their losing provider that they were leaving (and the expectation that attempts would be made to dissuade them) made them nervous and unsure of themselves.

There were a variety of individual reasons why respondents didn't proceed with their switch. These included:

- Realising that the deal they had seen for a competitor provider didn't include the cost of the landline (making it less attractive compared to their existing provider)¹⁰
- Inability to get permission from a landlord to install equipment
- Fear of losing content from the set top box
- Discovering that they were still in contract with their existing provider and they were unwilling to pay in order to end the contract
- Memories (in some cases going back several years) of poor previous experiences of switching including:
 - Gaps in service
 - Loss of landline number

One of the key findings of the research was that respondents often focussed on a collection of factors which, in combination, made the thought of switching unpalatable. This is perhaps best illustrated by the following comment from one mother with a young family about switching:

"It's trying to find a period where you want to stop and how long does it takes to re-install. Say we were going to [Provider Y], so one finishes and we've got to inform [Provider X] and then we've got to get [Provider Y] to come in on the same day, otherwise we're not going to have the Internet and such. Just being without it is bad and it's getting new routers, getting set up boxes and disposing of the ones that we've got. It is just a hassle, when you really think into it, there's a lot of little things that you don't generally think of that just start springing up and you're thinking, it's a lot of hassle. You've got to look into if you have to have a new phone number because you're paying for the line with [Provider Y] or whether they offer the service to keep your landline. Then if you do have to change, you've got to inform every one of your new number and... I don't like the thought of having to ring up [Provider X] as well and explain why I'm leaving. I hate doing that...", Active Considerer, Young Family, London

Complete (switching)

Switchers recall some difficulties

Amongst switchers, a range of difficulties were reported, largely falling into three broad categories:

- Cancelling services (including awareness of T&C)
- Co-ordinating the switch (including arranging appointments)
- Installation and equipment issues (including returning and setting up new equipment, and dealing with faulty or incorrect equipment)

¹⁰ The Advertising Standards Executive recently published a statement recommending 'a tougher approach to broadband price claims in ads': <https://www.asa.org.uk/News-resources/Media-Centre/2016/Insight-We-confirm-tougher-approach-to-broadband-price-claims-in-ads.aspx#.V2f0PPkrKUK>

These are set out in detail below.

Cancelling services (including awareness of terms and conditions)

While some respondents reported challenges in dealing with sales staff at their new provider (being sold to rather than advised on choices), more reported issues in dealing with the provider they were considering leaving.

As already reported many switchers said that they were unclear of their contract terms at the start of the process. Some were happy to wait until the end of their minimum contract period; others were prepared to pay in order to terminate their contract early and some found out charges after they had decided to switch.

Difficulties with cancellation were experienced mostly by cross platform switchers¹¹, where this is a required part of the process. Whilst some ORS switchers we spoke to notified their previous provider that they were leaving (they assumed that they needed to do so), less difficulties were mentioned. Some providers were criticised for making it difficult for consumers to communicate their decision to leave and for being quite forceful in their attempts to persuade customers not to switch. Others, it was claimed, made the experience of switching longer and more difficult than necessary.

“We had real difficulty with cancelling [Provider X]. We could not get to speak to anybody. It was a nightmare. I ended up having to email them and just stopping my standing order because I literally could not get to speak to a person in [Provider X]. It was just - I think they try to avoid speaking to you so that you can't actually cancel with them.” Switcher, Young Family, Belfast

“They [Provider X] made it very, very difficult. And they sort of said, “well, you still owe us this, and there's still this part that you still owe us, so your final bill's going to be double what you've been paying, because you have to give a month's notice before the fourth of the month.” And they've got their own sort of little rules and regulations which are all there and designed to make it as difficult as possible to get out of.” Switcher, mini-group, London

After cancelling their service, some reported receiving a letter to sign from their previous provider, although the majority did not. Those switching from Virgin did report receiving requests by letter and email for the return of equipment and instructions on how to do this.

Co-ordinating the switch (including arranging appointments)

A number of respondents said that they struggled to get convenient engineer appointments. This appeared to be more of a challenge where:

- There was a need for one or more engineers from different companies to do something at their household in order to connect (run cables, install wiring, install satellites)

¹¹ Cross Platform Switch (CPS), where the consumer – switching to/from Virgin cable or Pay TV from Sky, will need to contact the existing provider in order to terminate the contract as well as the new provider to set up the service, this is referred to as a Cease and Re-provide (C&R) process.

- The respondent needed to coordinate both the disconnection with their previous supplier and a reconnection with a new supplier

Several switchers we spoke with had experienced gaps in service and a number of others experienced overlaps. In some cases, gaps occurred when respondents were unable to coordinate a disconnection date with a connection date from the new provider. In others, there was some kind of issue or minor fault with the new connection which took a few days to resolve. Generally speaking respondents were more concerned about experiencing a gap in service than they were about an overlap (paying double) for a few days, although some did resent the thought of having to have an overlap:

“It was a massive obstacle to try and figure out as well without...changing without losing money or without paying too much money, do you know what I mean, going from [Provider X] to [Provider Y] and not paying for two things at one time.” Switcher, mini-group, London

It was apparent during the research that not all respondents were aware that for cross platform switches they needed to cancel with their previous provider as well as sign up for new services with a new provider. A minority assumed that their previous service had automatically been disconnected and were surprised when payments continued to be taken.

Respondents talked about experiences of switching other services (e.g. in current accounts) where guarantees are in place and/or it is not necessary to contact the losing provider - this may account for some of the confusion in this area.

“They installed everything, the guy with the cable box, showed me how to work it, gave me the information I needed to know and it was up and running within five minutes or something, my phone was the same. So I was really pleased about it, and the only problem I had was the billing, the next month, I was paying [Provider X] and [Provider Y] a monthly payment. Because when I phoned [Provider X] they said that the direct debit hadn't been cancelled, and then it took me about four months to get the money back.” Dual Play, Switcher group, Glasgow

Equipment related difficulties

There were fewer appointment related difficulties where it was possible to send equipment through the post for the customer to install themselves. However, some respondents experienced difficulties installing new equipment and getting it up and running:

“...then we had that nightmare - everything was set up but the internet wouldn't work for a particular reason, so we spent a lot of time on the phone to them and then they sent someone over free of charge to have a look at it. It was some sort of connection within - I really don't know, but they sorted it for us. But it took them a while to get an engineer out to me.” Switcher, mini-group, London

Others complained of not getting the right equipment in the first place:

“When they sent me the package the cable wasn't long enough so I had that problem. The cable wasn't long enough from the reception to the lounge, so I had to buy one -so I looked

online, at bloggers and how to fix these things and found out that I could get a Wi-Fi bridge - it's just a plug that sort of connects the Wi-Fi to your TV. So that was a bit of a problem. It took me a little while but I got it sorted." Switcher, mini-group, London

Final Thoughts

- Those respondents who were more engaged with and had a better understanding of the market for communications services tended to claim a better deal than those who were either inert or put off from fully assessing the market by the degree of complication involved.
- Changes in the market, in particular the widespread use of OTT services, were changing the way in which respondents assessed the value of their Pay TV package.
- There was uncertainty around contract terms. Respondents reported being offered additional channels, price reductions or other services (either proactively or in negotiation) by providers without realising they were signing up to a new minimum contract period.
- Some did want to negotiate with their current provider and went into the switching journey with that mind-set. Others wanted to switch and would rather not have to have the “leaving conversation” directly with their losing provider but felt they had to in order to switch.
- While there was considerable variation in experience (even within the same switching journey), some journeys appeared less troublesome than others – and that this related as much to the degree of physical change required by the switch as to the actual processes involved.
- Respondents were unaware that different actions were necessary on their part (e.g. contacting a losing provider) dependent upon which platforms or brands they were switching to and from.
- Broadband is perceived as an essential service and the perceived risks of loss of broadband or of switching to less reliable or slower service is a significant deterrent to switching.
- Switching processes that involve having to deal with both providers appeared to have greater scope for confusion and greater risk that consumers experienced gaps in service or double payments. Respondents reported experiences of other markets where the provider they switch to manages the entire process (energy, current accounts).