

Responding to the SMEs Call for Inputs: Name Confidential

Question 1: What are the communications needs of SMEs and how may these differ by: business size, sector and business model, location, other relevant factors?:

Low cost and reliability

Question 2: How do the needs of SMEs for communications services differ from (a) residential consumers and (b) large enterprises?:

A)Service is mission critical

B)Probably no staff with either time the understanding or the expertise to deal with any problems.

Question 3: What are the types and degree of network availability issues that affect SMEs, for example issues with specific locations or services and what is the effect of these issues on SMEs? businesses?:

Nothing beyond the obvious.

Question 4: What opportunities do communications providers see in serving the SME market and how are these evolving as a result of developments in technology and infrastructure?:

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Question 5: How far does the choice, quality and price of products in the retail market meet the needs of SMEs?:

Genarally a product that can be boughtand replaced in Tescos will give better reliability than any specialist item

Question 6: Are there challenges for communications providers in targeting the SME sector, and do these vary by geography, SME size and SME sector?:

Question 7: Are there issues facing retail providers in engaging with wholesale providers in order to offer retail products which meet the needs of SMEs?:

Question 8: How far does the quality of service delivered by communications providers meet the needs of SMEs?:

In my own case I have had no failures for 6 years so all seems well.

Question 9: What issues face SMEs in ensuring that they have appropriate SLAs and are able to gain redress when quality of services falls below the standards expected?:

It seems everyone relies on BTOpnereach so a level playing field unless the supplier is wilfully or woefully negligent.

Question 10: What products and service enhancements are available, at what indicative price points, to deliver on SMEs? quality of service needs (e.g. in terms of technical product characteristics or fault resolution)?:

As pervious answer

Question 11: What information is available to SMEs to enable them to select communications services appropriate for their business needs? Please identify any additional information or measures which you consider would enhance transparency for SMEs and your reasons for this view?:

It is a minefield.

The key points of the contract need to be highlighted instead of hidden. For example "There is no penalty if you choose to terminate the contract early". "We will continue to invoice as normal - is that acceptable?" - the contract cannot be cancelled. The services to be billed for are frequently muddled to pretend the cost is lower. In general (certainly Unicom) a solicitor should be consulted before signing. The Ombudsman pretends the rep can be relied upon when in reality he is no more than a con man.

Question 12: What factors do SMEs take into account when they are considering changing their communications service or provider? Please identify any that you consider may deter SMEs from switching and your reasons for this view.:

The prime reason for switching is lower cost and/or unreliable service from the existing supplier.

The main deterrant to switching is the contract which may not have been explained or understood at the time of signing. Suppliers (eg Unicom) seem to rely on contracts which mysteriously turn into 3 year contracts after the SME has lost the documentation.

The word on the street is that Ombudsman Services will support a supplier no matter how dishonest the sales technique has been.

Question 13: What evidence is there of issues where bad practices by communications providers causes harm to SMEs?:

The main problem is lack of transparency or downright deception at the time of agreeing a contract. If I agree to a one year contract for two lines I do not expect a three year contract for three lines - nor do I expect Ombudsman Services to support the company in the deception. Apparently (Ombudsman Danial writes) Ofcom allow suppliers to change new contracts. One bunch of crooks looking after another bunch of crooks, it remains unclear where Ofcom fit into the scenario.

Question 14: Are there any other issues in relation to the provision of communications services to SMEs, or SMEs? experience of these services, which you consider should be included within our assessment?:

Question 15: For any issues identified in response to any of the questions above do you have any views on how they may be resolved?:

Resolve issues by:-

Transparent contracts, honest sales and fair arbitration. Obviously Ofcom should clarify whether they allow suppliers to change contracts (a crooks charter)