

Responding to the SMEs Call for Inputs

Representing:

Organisation

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?:

SMEs need advice to choose a business based communications solution that is reliable. It must be cost effective and expandable for the future

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

SMEs want a tariff that applies to outbound calls made during the normal whereas residential customers will be looking for free calls at weekends and evenings. Free call tariffs usually include a subscription that can work out to be more expensive than a flat tariff.

SMEs usage will by the size of the business make less calls than large enterprises. SMEs therefore cannot get the lowest tariffs.

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?:

The location of the SME is still critical especially for good service options especially ADSL.

Rural areas are popular for new businesses as small offices can be set up at home or on what was old farms. These tend to be in rural area away from the telephone exchange

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?:

Due to the lack of service given to SMEs it becomes essential that service providers give them an appraisal of what is available at the best price

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

There are a lot of choices that can confuse the SMEs without the smaller providers they would not be able to take clear decisions on what is available

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

The challenges tend to come down to geographical location. The location of the office for a new SME can have negative connotations for the services levels available.

The size of the SME is important but without the services it becomes fairly non-critical

The SME sector can have a knock on effect

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?:

No Comment

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

From discussion with SME customers the bigger communication providers tend to be difficult to deal with as they treat SMEs as if they were residential. Advice is not given and it is offered as a take it or leave it

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?:

SMEs in most cases are not aware of the SLAs. When a problem arises SMEs do not know enough to get adequate redress

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)?:

SMEs need to be made aware of the service enhancements that are available as they grow or their communications needs to change to improve their customers experience.

Price changes must be made clear along with the benefit in quality of service needs to be explained

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?:

When dealing with SMEs or new customers we try to let them know without trying to confuse them what service would be best for them.

Time-scales for some service installations are not clear enough to the SME and this can be critical

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.:

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

The contract terms are never made clear i.e. What penalty for early contract break.
In addition how much notice is required to transfer a service to another service provider. We should stop the 3 month notice requirement now
None of the main communication suppliers make it clear to their prospective client how much they are charged for connection

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?:

Communication providers must be more honest about BB speeds and include contention ratios.
In our experience this information is not made known. There is too much concentration on price for BB.
Contract length should also be no longer than 2 years.
We have seen with 5 year contracts that the per minute is so far out on cost it is farcical.

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?:

Communication providers should ensure that their staff are honest about rates and fixed costs.
Stopping the long term contracts would open the market up even further.