

## **Responding to the SMEs Call for Inputs: (Name Confidential)**

### **Representing:**

Self

### **Additional comments:**

#### **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?:**

I believe that communications technologies are vital for today's small/medium enterprise. The ability to work anywhere has released entrepreneurs from the issues (and expense) of renting offices enabling great businesses to start with less burdensome capital outlay.

The internet has also brought global business into the reach of the SME as well. My company is small - only 5 employees including me, and yet I have clients in the USA and China. I am only able to achieve this because of the internet. Furthermore it is web-based cloud services that enable me and my team to communicate and share information quickly and easily - even though we all work from home all over the UK.

Communication needs do differ slightly because of the size or sector of a business. But fundamentally, the UK's business owners need good mobile phone communications; good cost-effective landlines and of course high-speed broadband. With all of these, location becomes less important - allowing business owners such as myself to operate anywhere and allowing us to take on employees who can live anywhere too. I service clients all over the UK, including Scotland and Wales, even though I live in Bedfordshire.

I also access services such as design or video production from other SMEs, and can do this via internet-based services. We're spending money with other businesses and helping to fuel their growth too - but only because we can communicate, share files, watch video etc via the Internet. Without that, we simply could not work in this way.

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

Given my above comments, I think that the requirement for SMEs of good communications differ from residential customers in that we require 100% reliable, fast broadband.

Residential customers may differ slightly, but not much. Again the same applies to the comparison with large enterprises - my business needs reliable broadband as much as any large business. Perhaps more so, because the internet is the central core of much of what we do.

#### **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?:**

I work and live in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire. I live on a brand new housing estate (2,000 homes many of which are still being constructed).

The local council and the consortium of house builders are currently trying to get BT to put in fibre optic cables to give us the high speed broadband that's required. We currently have shockingly low broadband speeds (far lower than the government's vision for the UK). The consortium has paid BT £85,000 to lay the cables - on top of the money BT receives from Government to carry out this work.

Basically, because BT has a monopoly, it simply does not care about local requirements of businesses or residents. It is an arrogant, lazy, greedy corporation. BT has even ignored requests for information from our local MP, which I think expresses just how disconnected the organisation is with the rest of the world.

If BT's monopoly were properly and finally removed, and other companies allowed to lay down the cables required to move this country to a reasonable level of broadband supply, then I think that single step would finally move the whole country one enormous leap forward. Ofcom needs to be a lot tougher with BT and to step in more to push BT to do what it is supposed to be doing.

As to the effect on my business: slow broadband connection is frustrating and damaging to my business. It is difficult to explain to clients in China why we have slower broadband than them in the UK!

**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?:**

There are no opportunities for communications suppliers while BT holds its monopoly over laying the cables for high speed broadband. There are any number of technologies that can be harnessed via high speed broadband, which are all inaccessible to me because BT will not do its job.

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

Please see my reply to questions 3 and 4 regarding broadband

I have been well served by my mobile provider Vodafone which has very well tailored products and services for the SME market.

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

Please see my reply to questions 3 and 4

**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?:**

**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?:**

**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)?:**

**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?:**

**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?:**

Please see my comments on BT above. This is a serious issue which is damaging to the UK in terms of productivity and also in the view that other countries have of our nation. Can't supply high speed broadband? We look backward and poorly prepared for business in the 21st century.

**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?:**

Ensure that the BT's monopoly on the 'wires' side of communications in this country is broken. Allow others to lay cables and earn money for doing so. I know people who work within BT and the organisation has no intention of working quickly on this project while it can earn money from desperate developers and local councils. It is scandalous behaviour that should not be tolerated.