

18th March 2008

Sarah Evans
Ofcom
Riverside House,
2A Southwark Bridge Road,
London SE1 9HA.

Dear Sarah Evans,

I am writing to you regarding the levying of non direct debit charges by BT as part of your consultation process. When the telephone services were run by the Post Office it was normal to pay one's bills by cash or cheque at the local post office. These are traditional ways of payment, cash being the most basic way of paying for an item or a service. Direct debits are a relatively recent way of paying for services. In the specific case of paying for telephone bills, it means that if some computer error charges you for calls you haven't made, you pay for them automatically via direct debit and then find you are in dispute with your service provider, and have to try to get the money refunded. I would prefer to be presented with a bill to pay, which I can dispute if necessary before departing with any money. BT are notoriously difficult to communicate with their circular computerised answering system, and do not reply to letters sent to them in writing. I have written more than once in the past to them regarding their dial up internet service and they failed to write back to me.

I have read the information on your website regarding non direct debit charges and can appreciate the arguments for them, but I feel that they are presented in a very negative way. There should not be a need to penalise customers who pay cash for their telephone services, and do not use direct debit. The whole thing should be presented positively, by making it clear that a discount is given for direct debit and not a penalty for paying cash, which is the most basic and traditional way of paying a bill. It would be very easy for BT to employ someone called an accountant who would do some arithmetic calculations which would adjust all the prices for different services so that the direct debit customers still pay the same, and get a discount for paying that way and the non-direct customers pay the same, ie a bit more, and do not get a payment charge added onto their bill.

It is all a matter of positive spin. At the moment it is negative spin. Your web site says that it matters not how it is presented by the service provider, as long as non-direct debit customers pay more, and direct debit pay less. I disagree. It should be advertised as a discount, not an extra charge..... AND the discount should be a true reflection of what it actually costs to process the cash. I do not believe that £4.50, in the case of BT, is a fair "discount" BT are market leaders and as such should be an example to the industry. Amongst the people I know who use their services there are many complaints. Bring back the Post Office!!!!

Yours sincerely

C J Chelu