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RESPONSE TO PROPOSALS ABOUT ADDITIONAL CHARGES

Dear Sir

I think Ofcom is being too soft on service providers.

1. Billing customers and collecting money from them – however these operations are performed – is a normal business overhead like heating and lighting, and should not be passed on to the customer in a differential way which discriminates against the poorer members of society, who may not have bank accounts or Internet access. Most companies in other sectors do not charge their customers for the privilege of giving them money: why should the communications industry be different?
2. It seems that many customers have been unaware of these charges – as I was – until they started appearing on bills. I feel the companies responsible ought to be penalised for such underhand methods of raising revenue, as a disincentive to repeating the same shoddy exercise in different forms in the future. Otherwise, the companies can find new ways to enjoy the profits of sharp practice while Ofcom takes nearly two years to give an opinion.
3. Ofcom ought to make it clear that it expects any such charges made in the past to be refunded. If they are illegal under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999, then they have been illegal since 1999. Although settling contract disputes may be the province of the court, consumers who have effectively been swindled should not be left to sue service providers individually to achieve restitution following an illegal act. A 'generic' expectation published by Ofcom would make companies aware that it would be cheaper to refund money to customers who complain rather than rely on inertia or the expense of legal action to protect them.

Yours faithfully,  
J H L Copus