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8th October 2008

Lucy Wickstead
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Strategy & Market Developments
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Dear Ms Wickstead

Office of Communications (Ofcom) Review of Quality of Service Information. Phase 1: Information on quality of customer service

This letter sets out the initial response of the British Chambers of Commerce to the Ofcom Quality of Service information consultation. The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) is the national body for a powerful and influential network of Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK; a network that directly serves not only its member businesses but the wider business community. Representing over 100,000 businesses that together employ over 5 million people, the BCC is the Ultimate Business Network. As a national business organisation, companies within our network operate across all sectors and sizes. Our comments therefore largely focus on the issues raised in Section Five of the consultation (Questions 40-47) regarding the need for Quality of Service information for business customers.

BCC members across all sectors and sizes rely heavily on effective communications and technologies to operate, communicate, and deliver services for their customers. It is therefore of critical importance that these markets work in the most competitive manner to ensure the best deal for business consumers. This is particularly the case in broadband provision, where there is an increasing desire for faster services, higher bandwidths and more reliable, higher quality services from our members as more and more business is conducted online and global competition increases.

For our smaller business members, we believe that they could derive significant benefit from having access to clear, accessible information about service quality, particularly on broadband. Many smaller businesses simply do not have the time or in-house capacity to negotiate the kind of complicated deals with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) that larger businesses negotiate. They are particularly reliant on straightforward pricing arrangement packages in order to make the right choices for their companies.

When it comes to Quality of Service Information, in order to compete with larger businesses, SMEs need to be able to demonstrate that they can offer some sort of added value e.g. customer service or flexibility. Whether they are conducting sales online or relying on e-mail communication, smaller businesses need to know that they can rely on consistent, quality broadband service without the disruption that can create direct financial losses. Their primary concerns are therefore consistency and

reliability of service, how faults will be resolved, what alternatives might be provided if the service is disrupted and whether any compensation for any such downtime.

We understand that this sort of information may not be of value for larger companies, and if a practical way of reducing this burden upon them can be found that continues to provide comprehensive accurate information for smaller companies, we would support that. While there are a number of existing definitions of an SME that are broadly accepted by the business community, we would not want to see actions based on these definitions resulting in unnecessarily complex processes or unclear information.

While there are currently low levels of usage of the current information, we believe that this is more due to a lack of awareness that this information is available, rather than it not necessarily being of use. It would therefore seem sensible for the scheme to be more extensively promoted, for the information to be made available in the most accessible manner and for mechanisms to disseminate information. This could well best be done through consumer organisations and disseminated through business organisations and price comparison websites to achieve maximum impact with the greatest value for money.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hctor
Policy Adviser,
British Chambers of Commerce