

Response From Mr Ian Eckersley

OFCOM

I understand OFCOM are currently reviewing the UK telephone numbering scheme and I would welcome the chance for my comments to be taken into account.

I have had a bone of contention for sometime resulting from businesses offering non-geographic numbers where as a result of their revenue share the caller pays a premium charge.

Firstly non-geographic numbers are useful - not to a caller but to the business having them. In fact they are a hindrance to the caller who has no idea where they will be connected too. For that business to then charge (by stealth) the caller (in terms of a premium over and above the standard STD charge from the caller's provider) is not acceptable. I am also concerned that the longer they keep you waiting on these numbers the more they earn? - Hardly an incentive to be efficient!

Secondly these numbers i.e. 0870 should not be advertised as 'national rate' or 0845 as 'local rate'. This is misleading as although this maybe theoretically 'once upon a time' BTs standard national or local rate this is always many times higher than the customer's standard rate for a national or local call and is therefore intentionally misleading - 0870 is clearly a premium number benefiting the business called and this should be made very clear. 0845 is similar although to a lesser degree.

If 'premium' 0870/0845' numbers are retained then there must be a method for those callers who are concerned to translate the non geographic number to the appropriate fixed line number so that they can then enjoy the call charges they have been able to negotiate. The cost of this service should be born by the providers of the premium charge numbers.

I think also that non geographic numbers should provide an announcement when they are being routed internationally. The proliferation of foreign call centres makes this a necessity so that you will at least be advised to expect a low level of service from that point on. Also it is sometimes necessary to know for the purpose of audit - which office you actually spoke too.

It seems to me that the supposed benefit of lower call charges now available is negated as most companies use premium numbers which are outside the discounted call rates and perhaps most importantly the packages. It is easy to offer cheap calls to numbers that no body can call because they are not published!

If a premium service is being offered then a premium call charge is appropriate and a useful way of funding the provider of that service. Day to day contact to place orders or make a sales enquiry is not a premium service. Companies should not be allowed to hide behind the regulations. If they are ripping their callers off this should be absolutely clear to the caller before they make the call. The caller can then decide whether a premium cost is due.

Most people in the UK probably do not even realise this issue. Maybe OFTEL should run a simple mass information project to advise the general public. Then see how many 0870s will revert.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide my views,

Ian Eckersley.