ITSPA launches VoIP Code of Practice

Submitted by: Wide PR
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~ "It's a fair CoP", says the Internet Telephony Service Providers' Association ~

With more and more VoIP services launching every week, how do UK consumers know which services to trust? Is there someone they can complain to if they are not happy? Can they make 999 calls from their VoIP phone? To help improve consumer information and awareness and to give consumers confidence that they are getting a service from a reputable provider with proper consumer protection in place, ITSPA, the Internet Telephony Services Providers' Association, has launched version 1.0 of its consumer Code of Practice (CoP). ITSPA Members who adhere to the Code of Practice will have the right to display the ITSPA logo on their website. ITSPA hopes that consumers will come to recognise the logo as a badge of excellence for VoIP providers, giving them the confidence to try VoIP services from its members.

The ITSPA Code of Practice (CoP) is the fruit of many months of discussion and consultation. All ITSPA members providing services to consumers must abide by this Code and inform their customers of the differences between VoIP services and traditional telephony services. Consumers can trust the ITSPA logo to represent VoIP providers offering a high standard of consumer information awareness. Eli Katz, XConnect and ITSPA Council member, explained, "This is a world first, and vital to ensure the rapid uptake by the mass-market of this new generation of services. We believe that this is a 'Fair CoP'; and we intend, as ITSPA, to act efficiently in administering and enforcing it".

Kim Thesiger, Gossiptel and ITSPA Council member, stressed that ITSPA's work has only just begun: "We will of course continue to work closely with Ofcom and Industry Groups to ensure consumers are fully informed about VoIP services, but we felt it was prudent to launch the Code now, as services are being offered today and consumers must be protected". Claire Robinson, Centrica Communications (the company behind Onetel) and chair of the ITSPA Code of Practice working group added, "The code is still a living document, but we hope that at this stage we have most of the substance needed for a robust and workable code to protect consumers' interests".

The DTI and Ofcom have also welcomed ITSPA's initiative. Claire Hobson, Head of Telecoms Policy at the DTI, said, "ITSPA's launch is a good step towards putting the interests of consumers at the forefront of the Voice-over Internet Protocol industry. We'll certainly be working closely with the new Association in our work to encourage the development of VoIP in the UK".

Allan Howes, CEO of Bon.net and ITSPA Council Member pointed out the importance of the ITSPA CoP on a practical level, "The Plain Old Telephone is changing: new services, including bon.net's Babble service, are likely to be so much more than just making a 'phone call. As consumers, we all need organisations like ITSPA to ensure that all service providers maintain consistent standards, and that we have a readily identifiable marque that provides peace-of-mind when selecting that provider".

Ends

Notes to editors follows

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Andrew Heaney's (Ofcom director of Competition Policy) speech at the event launching the ITSPA CoP v.1.0 can be found here: http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media_office/speeches_presentations/itspa

About VoIP

Internet Telephony is the ability to make voice calls over any Internet connection, particularly broadband, using Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). Internet Telephony Service Providers can provide regular and enhanced phone line services – at reduced cost – with calls to other Internet phones often free of charge.

About ITSPA
ITSPA exists to:

·   Encourage the innovation and development of the VoIP industry through the promotion of self-regulation and competition;

·   Lobby Ofcom, the UK Government and the European institutions to ensure the UK and Europe remain the most favourable environment in which to run a VoIP business and in which to be a VoIP customer;

·   Respond to UK Government and European regulators on behalf of its members;

·   Investigate solutions for industry, including fraud black lists, peering and interoperability;

·   Reassure Consumers that any product or service bought from a company displaying the ITSPA logo comes with a high standard of consumer protection, which is properly enforced and includes a dispute resolution procedure.

ITSPA believes in:

·   The benefits of self-regulation to promote the growing VoIP sector;

·   The need to foster a truly competitive and innovative market where VoIP providers can compete with existing telecoms providers on a level playing field;

·   The facilitation of the provision of "naked DSL" (i.e. the provision of broadband access without needing to also pay for telephone line rental);

·   Open, non-discriminatory access through all Broadband ISPs (i.e. ISPs should not block/hinder customers from using third party VoIP providers);

·   The promotion of best efforts provision of access to emergency services and the

provision of accurate information to the consumer about the level of access to emergency services available to them;

·   Effective and competitively priced Local Loop Unbundling;

·   The use of geographic numbers for VoIP providers;

·   Efficient and competitively priced number portability (i.e. the ability to transfer/retain your phone number when you change service provider).

About the ITSPA Code of Practice:

The ITSPA Code of Practice version 1.0 can be viewed on our website here: http://www.itspa.org.uk/cop.htm

About Ofcom

Ofcom is the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries, with responsibilities across television, radio, telecommunications and wireless communications services.

For further details please visit www.ofcom.org.uk.