CUSTOMERS WANT TO PAY FOR THE INTERNET SERVICE THEY RECEIVE NOT THE SERVICE THEY WERE HOPING TO RECEIVE

issue.watch, is an Australian, independent consumer advocacy organisation, and in 2019 we reached out to Australian internet consumers, to obtain feedback on their Telco customer experience.

Small businesses and households are disappointed with unreliable internet services and angry that Telcos appear uninterested in improving customer service, and resolving customer issues.

We have consolidated written feedback from over 200 Telco customers, in both metropolitan and regional centres around Australia, and;

62% said they experienced consistent internet disruptions.*

40% said customer service and complaint handling procedures by Telcos were dreadful, and*

13% complained about billing, poor products and infrastructure issues.*

*more than one issue.

In Summary Telco customers have said;

- They are fed up, with persistent internet disruptions that are having a major impact on running their business and in dealing with personal matters;
- That they have experienced internet disruptions ranging from hours, to days to weeks;
- Overall they receive little feedback on the cause of the internet disruptions, of any anticipated outages, or the length of internet disruptions. Where an explanation was given for an internet disruption, such as ‘outage’ there was no such information on the Telco website;
- Customer service waiting times are too long; call centre staff often do not understand the complaints related to internet disruptions; there is no follow up by call centre staff to complaints as agreed; and despite repeated calls to customer support, they feel ignored; and
Customers feel call centre staff do not understand their specific enquiry, that answers on the cause of internet disruptions are ‘scripted’, and they are losing faith in customer service handling procedures.

‘no internet, no landline, this is not fair, I feel trapped.’

‘3 days no internet no idea when it will be working.’

‘Not listening, tech support called many times, on line for 30 min whilst they test.’

‘5 days both home phone and internet down, lots of inconvenience to business.’

‘11 hours on phone mainly on hold, over a week, finally have internet. This is not how you run a business.’

‘Sick of paying so much money to a top Telco for years and having constant internet difficulties’.

‘Loyal customer 30 years. Sick of trying to talk to customer service people who do not understand the problem.’

‘Bounced around support 3 way calls bickering cant help with NBN.’

**TELCO CUSTOMERS NEED HELP**

The reliability of internet services is vital, for more than 2 million [1] small businesses in Australia, and for home based banking, business, and social day to day consumer activity.

The Federal Government has provided funding to numerous organisations [2], who have strongly promoted consumer issues in the telecommunications industry. Despite the public funding, numerous submissions and consultations, consumers continue to complain in high numbers. There were over 32,000 residential consumer and small business complaints to the Telecommunication Industry Ombudsman (TIO), over a THREE month period to 31 September 2019, and a significant number of complaints direct to retail carriers, for the year ending 30 June 2019.[3]

The Telco websites state that they are committed to customer service and they abide by the consumer protection obligations [4], to handle complaints efficiently and fairly - yet complaints on complaint handling procedures have not diminished.
DEMANDING BETTER TELCO SERVICES:
WHAT ISSUE.WATCH WILL DO

‘Consumers have a right to expect that complaints to their Telco provider will be heard and acknowledged’ Nerida O’ Loughlin ACMA Chair

Telcos, the Federal Government, Telco regulators, and small business advocates can do more;

- They need to be active to ensure consumers are receiving refunds, in circumstances were the Telco was at fault for not delivering a reliable internet service, as agreed;

- A minimum client service standard for Telcos, should be to provide a reasonable explanation for internet service disruption, and a breach of this condition should allow a customer to cancel their contract, and/or the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) should impose a penalty on the Telco (ACMA has the power to apply penalties when Telcos break certain rules).

- Telcos must meet minimum customer service standards, and whilst ACMA, has already issued warnings to some Telcos, we say Telcos need to inform consumers by putting any warning from ACMA on the front page of their website, and explaining the period of time required to rectify the problem. Where Telcos repeatedly breach customer service obligations, the customers must be able to cancel their contacts without incurring any exit fees.

issue.watch, will write to Telstra and Optus (as leading Telcos), ACMA, the Commonwealth Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, as well as other organisations, seeking the above solutions, and making Telcos accountable. We will publish these letters and any responses on the https://issue.watch website, and we will continue the campaign for reliable internet services and reasonable customer complaint handling for consumers.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

United in our experiences we have a louder voice, so share your experiences with poor internet service, and poor customer service, so we can work together, go to our website https://issue.watch or email us on info@issue.watch.
The vision of issue.watch is to create a safe, free and anonymous public platform where consumers can submit their issues. These issues are than amalgamated to identify trends in consumer complaints, so organisations are forced to acknowledge significant consumer issues and improve products and services.

[2] Australian Communications and Media Authority; Australian Competition & Consumer Commission; Australian Communications Action Network; Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.