

Ms Kelly Bayer Rosmarin
Depuy Chief Executive
Office Consumer
Singtel Optus Pty Limited
1 Lyonspark Road, Macquarie Park Sydney NSW 2113 and
PO Box 306 South Australia 5106

3 December 2019

cc By email: Optus customer service

Dear Ms Kelly Bayer Rosmarin

Re: Optus: Small Business and Residential Customers Speak Up

We are writing to you, as the Deputy Chief Executive, at Singtel Optus Pty Limited (Optus), which is a leading provider of telecommunications services in Australia, so we can work together to manage consumer expectations and consumer disappointment in Telco customer service.

Issue.watch is an independent organisation dedicated to raising awareness on significant issues that matter to the Australian public, and we are concerned about the high level of consumer complaints related to;

- Internet disruptions; and
- Poor customer service.

The facts show that there are a high percentage of Australians, that are continuing to complain about internet disruptions and customer complaint handling by the major telecommunications corporations. These disruptions greatly impact the large number of small businesses and residential customers that rely on consistent internet service.

Please see the attachment to this letter, supporting the fact that Australians continue to complain in large numbers about poor services and lack of Telco support - in fact there were 32,000 residential and small business complaints to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman in the three month period to 21 September 2019.

There are many Optus customers that want to know how Optus as a corporation will respond to improve confidence in Telecommunications delivery, and they want a public answer to the following questions;

Q1: The Telco consumers, including Optus customers in suburban and regional locations in Australia that suffer from consistent internet disruptions want to know;



- a. Why do many Australian (Optus and non Optus customers) experience intermittent but consistent internet disruptions?
- b. Customers complain that the reasons given for internet disruptions are often not supported by the facts: eg they are told there is an outage in the area, but this is not supported by relevant searches: how can you satisfy customers that there are genuine reasons for internet disruptions?
- c. What support, financial or otherwise, does Optus and the Telco industry require to deliver consistent internet services to Australians?
- d. Customers that experience internet disruptions want some compensation, as they are paying for the services they are not receiving, how does Optus plan to compensate these customers?

Q4: There have been many complaints that the Optus Customer Service staff do not understand customer complaints and Optus is not meeting the service obligations listed on their website;

- a. How is Optus addressing the complaints about unreliable customer service complaint handling?
- b. What support from Government or industry is required to support better customer service?
- c. How will Optus measure success in customer service handling and will they make this information public ?
- d. Will Optus provide, on a quarterly basis, the number of complaints on Optus customer complaint handling on their website? If not, why not and what alternative method of public disclosure will be provided to show their support for improved customer service.

Optus customers are telling us they cannot continue to pay for poor services and put up with ineffective customer service.

Optus, this is your opportunity to provide some answers, be accountable in a public forum, and improve customer confidence in your brand and in the Telco industry.





The Optus response to this letter will be posted in full on the <https://issue.watch> website, if you require further time to respond please contact us, as we will be advising our followers of any non responses after 28 days from the date of this letter.

Please provide your response by email info@issue.watch and please use this email for any further enquiries.

Regards
Anna Willis
Founder, CEO
issue.watch

cc. Attachment



**Attachment to Optus: Small Business and Residential Clients Speak Up
WHITE PAPER: TELCOS BY ISSUE.WATCH**

**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 where 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 contracts 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, on making Telcos accountable. We will publish these letters and any responses on the 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.

Issue.watch Mission Statement

The vision of issue.watch is to create a safe, free and anonymous public platform where consumers can submit their issues. These issues are then amalgamated to identify trends in consumer complaints, so organisations are forced to acknowledge significant consumer issues and improve products and services.

[1] ABS Bureau of Statistics.

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

[3] Telecommunications complaints -handling 2018-19 report, Australian Communications and Media Authority. <https://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/telecommunications-complaints-handling-2018-to-2019>.

[4] Telecommunications Consumers Protections Code. Telecommunications (Consumer Complaints Handling) industry Standard 2019.

