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Clear Pricing by Telecoms companies and Directory Enquiry providers required by ComReg

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) today issued two decisions designed to ensure that users of telephone services have access to transparent and accurate pricing information. The decisions have been made following consultation with industry and consumers.

The first of these decisions relates to the provision of Directory Enquiry (DQ) services, including call completion services. Market research carried out on ComReg's behalf indicated a lack of consumer awareness about the cost of using DQ services. This arose, particularly, in cases where the caller was offered connection to the number sought. Many consumers did not know that the call would be charged at the higher rate for calling DQ rather than normal tariffs. In future, DQ providers will be required to inform users of the cost of using call completion services.

Given the multiplicity of charges which apply, depending on the network or service provider used, it is not practicable for a DQ provider to give details of all charges. Accordingly the specific price information that must be given is the price which normally applies when a caller is using a landline. However, the user must also be alerted to the fact that differing charges apply when using a mobile phone or other service providers.

In view of the necessary changes that will need to be implemented by DQ providers, this decision becomes effective from 1 October.

In the second decision, ComReg requires that all telephone companies adhere to a Code of Practice, which will ensure that tariff information is accurate, comprehensive and accessible.

In making the decision, ComReg Chairperson John Doherty said: “The recent incidents of errors concerning billing systems underlines the importance of ensuring that consumers are aware of the cost of using services. It is critical, therefore, that consumers can obtain information easily on the cost of services. It is imperative that such information is accurate, particularly where it makes comparisons with a competitor’s services, and that all relevant information is presented to consumers. Tariffs must not be inappropriately rounded, important information must be presented “up front” and not buried in footnotes, and tariff information must also be made available in writing to consumers where requested.”

The Code of Practice comes into effect from today and service providers will be required to provide a Statement of Compliance with the Code no later than 1 October.

ENDS

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