

Just my personal comments as a consumer on 0871 numbers for your pre-consultation exercise.

0871 numbers are being used to generate revenue for the person (or company) being called which in effect, makes it a premium rate number.

The main problems with 0871 are:

- 1) There is no regulation (unlike 09 numbers);
- 2) You can be kept in a queueing system for ages (and pay handsomely) then mysteriously get cut off.
- 3) "Premium rate number blocking" services provided by phone companies do not block 0871.
- 4) Anyone can get an 0871 number, no questions asked.
- 5) 0871 numbers can be published as main numbers in phone books and CLI.

While there is a place for value added services using 0871, they are being used and abused by business (and personal users) as 'normal' telephone numbers.

A number of national companies advertise on TV with an 0871 number as their only contact telephone number. No mention that it costs 10p a minute (from a BT landline) and is a covert premium rate number. Many, ticket agencies have 0871 box office telephone lines and have the nerve to charge a whopping 'booking fee' on top of the 15 to 30 minute phone call it takes to get through the queueing system and actually book a ticket. Several internet retailers have 0871 sales lines and even their sales reps have the 0871 number on their business cards. Some even say that their 0871 number is charged at the national rate.

In an ideal world, 0871 would become non-revenue generating and would be charged as a normal phone call. Those who want the micro-payments facility currently offered by 0871, should migrate to 09 numbers which is what they are there for. However, Ofcom has decided this would be too hard on businesses who use 0871 (funny, it wasn't that hard for them to switch to 0871 from normal phone numbers) and that 0871 should become premium rate numbers.

This is a kind of half way house but it can work provided:-

- 1) You can only be charged when connected to an operator. i.e. You cannot be charged for navigating menus or listening to music on hold (or adverts).
- 2) Premium rate number blocking services offered by telcos include 0871.
- 3) Those who get 0871 numbers are checked out and are accountable to help reduce fraud.
- 4) 0871 numbers cannot be published as the main telephone number in phone books.
- 5) 0871 numbers used in advertising must show they are premium rate charged at 10p (or whatever) a minute.

I also think that taking 18 months is way too long and it should all be done and dusted by the end of 2006 at the latest. In fact, it should never have happened at all. No new 0871 numbers should be issued until the consultation is complete and the future role for 0871 has been decided.

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