



Ostrich Media

Response to ICSTIS' Call TV Quiz Services Review: Analysis and Consultation Document

March 2007

Introduction

This document sets out Ostrich Media's views and comments on the consultation issues paper entitled "ICSTIS' Call TV Quiz Services Review: Analysis and Consultation Document (the "Issues Paper").

Ostrich Media is the UK's leading independent producer of quiz TV programming, primarily under the 'Quiz Call' brand. Launched in August 2005 on its own dedicated channel and as programming for other broadcasters, Quiz Call was one of the first quiz TV channels in the UK.

Since the 15th January 2007, Quiz Call can be viewed on five, five US and five life.

As the producers of Quiz Call, Ostrich Media welcomes the opportunity to take part in a constructive debate about the nature of Call TV and how it should be regulated.

Ostrich Media seeks to operate to the highest standards in every area of its business and it has always endeavoured to work, and will continue to work, with ICSTIS and Ofcom to ensure it meets the terms of those regulations that apply to it. In addition, Ostrich Media has recommended to ICSTIS a series of best practice techniques that we believe should be adopted by the industry as a whole.

At Ostrich Media, we believe our high level of satisfied customers demonstrates that consumers both want and understand quiz TV services and that all such services can be delivered in a fair and appropriate way.

Q1 Do you agree that the provisions for pricing transparency should be strengthened in the way described above and as set out in the revised Statement of Expectations on pages 27-29?

Ostrich Media agrees that the provisions for pricing transparency should be strengthened as set out in the revised Statement of Expectations.

QuizCall already operates a policy of verbal warnings on pricing by presenters at intervals of no more than 10 minutes.

These verbal warnings make clear that the cost will apply regardless of whether the entrant is successful in getting through to the studio or not. This has been implemented already and updated from the usual "five to fifteen minutes" as laid out in the original Statement of Expectations.

The Quiz Call team complete a checklist while we are live on air, detailing that this information has been conveyed to the audience.

These cost warnings are replicated on a permanent scrolling bar at the bottom of the screen.

Furthermore, we regularly carry out compliance audits of recordings to monitor broadcast behaviour and this verbal warning policy, among many others, is one element that we are specifically on the look-out for.

Pricing information is again repeated at the beginning of every call.

We look forward to all of the above requirements on pricing transparency which Quiz Call already carries out being mandated across all Quiz TV services.

Q2 Do you agree with our assessment of Option 1?

Ostrich Media agree with ICSTIS' assessment that doing nothing in respect of Quiz TV services is not a viable option. Ostrich Media is committed to developing a stable, long-term business and the maintenance of consumer confidence in the product is central to this.

Q3 Do you agree with our assessment of Option 2?

We agree with ICSTIS' assessment of Option 2, that it is not objectively justifiable and proportionate.

We have considered a range of ways in which the "odds" or "chance" of a person being successful in getting through to the studio could be made clear on-screen.

There are practical difficulties in achieving the display of odds in real time. The rapid fluctuations in caller numbers and the inevitable delay between measurement and display on screen would make the information displayed at best confusing and at worst unintentionally inaccurate as the odds depend on call volumes and the throughput of callers to the studio. It is not technically achievable to have the two variables (calls and participation in the studio) computed in real time.

Q4 We would welcome views, especially but not exclusively from providers, as to the best technical means and media through which this principle could be delivered and promoted with minimum disruption to the service quality and potential for consumer information overload. We would be willing to assist in this process by facilitating a working party to consider the various options.

We believe there is already a high degree of transparency on Quiz Call and that other Call TV services need to catch up with our procedure. It is in the long-term interests of the industry as a whole that consumers have a clear understanding of how the service operates and that must be driven by the industry and the regulators.

As outlined above in response to question 3 the real time display of odds creates a number of technical and display issues. We have therefore been considering a number of other ways in which the odds of getting through to the studio could be communicated on-screen. These include:

- i) featuring the number of players in the last minute,
 - ii) the number of callers in the last 5 minutes and
 - iii) the number of callers this round
- (i.e. since the last call through to the studio)

We have concluded that the most practicable and meaningful information which can be published on-screen would be statistics showing the number of people participating in the last minute. This could be transmitted concisely and clearly within a 1 minute time frame, displayed at regular intervals, giving consumers a clear understanding of the size of the audience they are competing against.

Q5 If you do not agree with any of our assessments presented in Options 1, 2, or 3 above, what alternatives would you suggest?

We do not disagree with these assessments for the reasons outlined above. Based on our experience of the technology and our customer base we believe that simple, on-screen information giving people a clear and easily understood idea of how many participants they are playing against offers the best means of increasing transparency for consumers

Q6 Do you agree with our proposal for call warnings and are there any other suggestions as to how the possibility of excessive use by consumers may be minimised?

In principle, we concur with the idea of call warnings to ensure regular callers are aware of how much they are spending but we believe we need to get this issue in proportion.

Our figures clearly demonstrate that 98.5% of participants spend less than £10 a month on our service and we believe that this is due to already having a number of measures in place to minimise excessive use.

On top of ICSTIS and our own strict codes of conduct, these include a requirement that (after our regular audits have identified them), as a matter of course, repeat high-volume callers must provide evidence they have been able to pay their phone bill.

If they cannot provide this evidence we exclude their entry to the competition.

We have already discussed with ICSTIS the technical difficulties in enforcing call caps, and we do believe that our recommended daily limit is effective in minimising the vast majority of high end users.

It is this tiny percentage of high-end users that the press have picked up on and stories of bill shock are something we endeavour to eliminate as they are damaging the reputation of the industry and the enjoyment of thousands of sensible players.

So, on top of all of our existing self-regulation we agree with and have implemented ICSTIS' proposal for the provision of cumulative call warnings at no more than each £10 spent by a consumer each day.