

Further Assessment of Information Connection and/or Signposting Services

Response from Numbers Plus Ltd.

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Numbers Plus 



Q1: Do you agree with our assessment in relation to the six objections that were raised to applying a prior permission regime to ICSS? If not, why not?

A1: The assessment of objections seems to be well considered. Some providers are clearly more diligent than others and a standard regulatory framework should bring the less diligent in line with acceptable practices. There is competition in the market and this is the driving force behind the way in which advertising is conducted and how the information is presented. There is a cost to the Service Provider for marketing which needs to be covered by the service being used (number being dialled). It seems that the majority choose to follow the current guidelines and will continue to operate in a compliant manner should new guidelines be brought in. The issues may become moot as Google have clamped down on the advertising of these types of service.

Q2: In light of this, do you agree with our conclusion to apply a prior permission regime to ICSS, but not to full national directory enquiry (118) services? If not, why not?

A2: Prior Permission may have a positive effect as full compliance will be assessed before a service is set live but I do not feel that this would be a necessity. I agree that there is a difference in the way the services are accessed and promoted.

Q3 – Do you agree with our altered definition of Information, Connection and/or Signposting Services (ICSS)? If not, what alternative would you propose?

A3: Yes

Q4 – Do you agree with our proposals to remove the exemption for charities which we had previously proposed, but waive the requirement to pay a prior permission fee? If not, why not?

A4: Yes. All providers should be treated equally in terms of guidelines and conduct, however not charging a registered charity is a fair exemption.

Q5 - Do you agree with this assessment and PhonepayPlus' changes to proposed conditions around SEM? If not, why not and do you have an alternative to propose that meet our objective?

A5 – Yes, although it seems that Google's own policies are preventing most services from being marketed via this method through their Adwords service. It is likely other search engines will follow suit.

Q6 – Do you agree with this assessment and PhonepayPlus' changes to proposed conditions around promotion of ICSS? If not, why not?

A6: Yes

Q7 - Do you agree with this assessment and PhonepayPlus' changes to proposed conditions once a consumer has dialled an ICSS? If not, why not?

A7: It is standard compliance practice that call costs and service provider information are given at the start of the call. Most of these services that are well run already offer this information although normally in a slightly different format than that suggested.

Q8 - Do you agree with this assessment and PhonepayPlus' changes to proposed conditions where an ICSS collects personal and/or confidential data from consumers? If not, why not?

A8: I would not endorse any service that collects personal data in this way and could not recommend a service that requests such information however used. Any service that requires a password should not be revealed to third party. Where less contentious details such as name and address or customer reference are all that is required, then the proposals cover this adequately.

Q9 – Do you agree with the additional condition c) in respect of a requirement to only collect information necessary for the provision of the service? If not, why not?

A9: Yes

Q10 - Do you have any further evidence on whether a bond is necessary? If so please provide it.

A10: I do not believe a bond would be required. The SP should have a suitable refund policy and this should be determined at compliance and due diligence from the outset. The majority of calls are likely to be short and as such customer harm should be minimal.

Q11 – Do you agree with our proposal to alter the list of current exemptions from prior permission, so that 'connection services' are removed? If not, why not?

A11: From the list of proposals it seems that Prior Permission is going to be required and as such removal from exemptions seems to be a given

Q12: Do you have any evidence of significant cost which ICSS providers will incur as a result of a requirement to state "premium rate connection service" or "premium rate assistance service" in SEM descriptions? If so please provide it.

A12: The margin that these services generate is based on a simple ratio of advertising costs to call revenue. If the advertisements are not clicked because of the description then the service will not be used but equally will have no cost. It is clear that there will be losses if the wording prevents the caller from using the service. Again the recent intervention of Google has stopped the majority of ICSS services from advertising at all.

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