

# [inside story]

Consumer stories that make a difference



The only card you can use to buy World Cup tickets in the UK is MasterCard

## Some things money can't buy: World Cup tickets

Football fans outside Germany are being forced to use a MasterCard to buy World Cup tickets, or pay up to 140 per cent extra.

We've made an official complaint to the European Commission (EC) to try to force Fifa, football's worldwide governing body, to change the way tickets are being sold.

Phil Evans, principal policy adviser for Which?, said: 'We think the way that Fifa is selling tickets for the World Cup breaches European competition law. It condemned a similar ticket sales system for the 1998 World Cup.'

MasterCard, one of the companies sponsoring the World Cup being held in Germany next year, says it's the 'official method of payment'. This means that, if you want to buy tickets, no other credit card will be accepted.

But this arrangement is unfair and discriminates against football fans across the globe. In the UK, for example, there are almost twice as many Visa cards as MasterCards.

People who live in Germany and don't have a MasterCard can set up a debit from a German bank account to pay for tickets. But for everyone outside Germany who doesn't have a MasterCard or a German bank account it's not so straightforward.

To buy tickets you'll either have to take out a MasterCard or transfer money from your bank

account. UK banks typically charge £20 to £35 to transfer money abroad in this way.

With tickets for group stage matches on sale for about £25, the face value plus an electronic transfer fee of up to £35 bumps up the cost of the ticket by 140 per cent.

In 1998 the EC condemned similar arrangements for the World Cup in France, and called on future organisers to ensure that ticketing policies complied with EC competition rules. It promised to take action if not.

**It discriminates against**

**football fans across the globe**

Fifa said in a statement: 'There are genuine, fair and internationally accepted alternative payment methods available, and no-one will have a lesser chance of acquiring a ticket if they do not have a MasterCard. Fees for banking transactions are set not by Fifa but by the individual banks.'

We've urged the EC to investigate before fans start paying for tickets on 31 March, so a decision is likely after we've gone to press.

## Food hygiene checks

Industry watchdog, the Food Standards Agency (FSA), has delayed a decision on whether all food premises should have their hygiene checked before opening their doors to the public.

It says it wants more information before it takes a final decision on the need to beef up the existing system of checks.

One possibility is an FSA pilot scheme with local authorities, looking at the need for a scheme and whether the existing laws on registering food premises should be reinforced.

A recent Which? survey revealed that 99 per cent of people are behind the checks.

Our chief policy adviser Sue Davies says: 'We're disappointed that the FSA has failed to implement the necessary hygiene checks straight away.'

'It's an unpalatable prospect that food outlets have not been checked for cleanliness or food safety before they are opened to the public.'

'The FSA has suggested a pilot scheme to test this initiative. We want to see a plan of action on this issue as soon as possible.'

## round-up

### NEW BODY

As we went to press, Gordon Brown announced the creation of a new agency to co-ordinate the work of four existing consumer and trading standards bodies. We welcome its creation and will be working with the government to develop its structure. But we also want to make sure the Chancellor's move, which is aimed at reducing the cost of regulation, doesn't undo the progress made in consumer protection over the years.

### GAS BOILERS

From this month all new gas boilers fitted in homes in England and Wales must be high-efficiency condensing boilers (called Seddbuk category A or B). The government says this will cut UK CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 1.3 million tonnes a year.

### RYANAIR AD RULING

No-frills airline Ryanair was fined £24,000 last month because it hadn't made it clear in some of the headline prices on its website that the fares excluded taxes and charges. Ryanair can continue to display prices excluding taxes and charges, as long as they're clear. Essex County Council, which took up the case, told us: 'We've tested the law and found it wanting'.



# Bite Back: survey results

Four out of five people think foods high in fat, salt and sugar should not be promoted on TV during children's viewing time.

That's just one of the key findings from our consumer consultation Bite Back, the largest ever of its kind to be carried out in Britain.

It's also a clear message to the broadcasting regulator, Ofcom, which is currently reviewing restrictions on advertising to children.

## Quality of hospital services is

## more important than choice

Which? food policy adviser Sue Davies said: 'Advertising is clearly a barrier for many parents trying to balance their children's diets. We'll be lobbying and keeping up pressure on Ofcom to restrict advertising of unhealthy foods to kids.'

Ofcom should also take note of the 42 per cent of people who told us they weren't prepared for the switchover from analogue to digital TV, which could start in three years' time in some regions.

We're now going to use these and the other Bite Back results to help shape our future campaigns.

When the consultation finished at the end of January, a staggering 135,750 people had taken part over five months. The goal was to find out the problems you face and the changes you want in eight key areas, from health to food and shoppers' rights.

Our consultation on health revealed an overwhelming 93 per cent thought the quality of hospital services was more important than having a choice of hospitals.

Half of those we asked thought switching bank current accounts was easy, although 37 per cent thought this wasn't the case, while 49 per cent thought the price of music downloads was too high.

Reassuringly, three quarters of consumers told us they knew their rights under the Sale of Goods Act when making purchases, while just over half said they'd be happy to pay a bit more if a company had sound ethical policies. Along the same lines, 66 per cent believe that consumers can influence companies' environmental and ethical behaviour.

Finally, 53 per cent of those we questioned said that parents often can't get their children into the school of their choice.

## Next steps

'Understanding what matters to you is key in identifying the issues we campaign on.'

Bite Back highlighted a number of areas of real concern, including food, health and personal finance.

We run a number of campaigns in these areas and your feedback is important

in making campaigns successful. Our current Stop the Rot campaign,



Louise Hanson: Head of Which? Campaigns

for example, shows there is concern about access to NHS dentistry. Your stories reveal the real impact of shortages in provision, and put pressure directly on political leaders ahead of the election.'

Watch out for new initiatives each month in 'Campaigning with you', p58.

## OUR RESEARCH

Based on interviews with close to 46,000 adults aged 16+, carried out face to face, online and by phone in January 2005, as part of our Bite Back national consultation. Sample sizes for individual questions ranged from 3,824 to 8,044.

## 10-year ban for cancer conman

A man who used fear tactics and misleading advertising to sell vulnerable people a 'cure' for prostate cancer has been disqualified from acting as a company director for ten years.

The ban follows our investigation in which we found David Lee was running a dangerous cancer 'helpline' which acted as a cover for selling dubious herbal pills ('Cancer helpline is "dangerous"', November 2003, p5).

As director of Blue Water Partnerships Ltd, which also traded under the name The British Prostate Association, he used adverts to scare people into buying treatments.

When people called the advertised helpline, they were sold a herbal medicine called Prostectalin by sales consultants, even if they had never been diagnosed with prostate cancer by a qualified doctor.

The consultants convinced clients they were at risk of developing cancer and claimed that there was a large death rate associated with the disease. They discredited NHS-prescribed medicines as ineffective.

The consultants had paid £6,800 to Blue Water for the right to sell the product, in return for commission on each bottle.

The Prostate Cancer Charity welcomed the ten-year ban, saying: 'No man should be misled and manipulated because he has prostate cancer, or because he fears getting it.'



## BT turns back on scam victims

BT has refused to waive the bills of customers who fall victim to internet call scams.

Sam Cox had his dial-up internet connection diverted to Tuvalu by a rogue dialler. BT alerted him to the calls to the South Pacific island – but only after a £346 bill was racked up.

Sam Cox said: 'Since then BT has verbally shrugged its shoulders. It says it's not its concern how customers run up bills. I find BT's response disgusting.'

In a similar case BT has instructed debt collectors to claim £463 from Herefordshire couple Roger and Gill Walker for internet calls to Chile they didn't make. Gill said: 'Every part of the telecoms industry we have talked to admits this is a problem, but they all say: "Nothing to do with me – talk to someone else".'

BT says it's warned customers about the



scam in its customer magazine and will reimburse some of the cost as a goodwill gesture when it feels it hasn't handled the complaint satisfactorily.

It says it's not obliged to waive bills and blames internet service providers (ISPs) for failing to protect users with software that warns of changes to dialler settings. BT said: 'ISPs are happy for phone companies to take the flak.'

Phone firm Kingston Communications, in

Hull, has blocked direct dialling to 15 countries, including Tuvalu, to try to stop users being hit by this fraud. BT says it can't take this approach.

Telecoms regulator Ofcom is keen to see new technology being used to monitor spikes in bills. Work is under way but a widespread roll-out is a while off.

### ACTION POINT

Install firewall and anti-virus software and keep it up to date. At [www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com) you can check your recent calls.



## [fighting your corner]

Which?'s Simon Spruce takes on big companies for you

Advertising slogans, like the sight of a girlfriend coming at you with a frying pan, tend to linger.

Who can forget 'Go to work on an egg' or 'Do the Shake 'n' Vac and put the freshness back'? One of Britain's largest

electrical retailers boasts of its 'Comet sense' but that wasn't how Ian Billson from Cambridgeshire saw it when he bought a £199 Sharp combination oven last November, and soon discovered its turntable wasn't working.

When he rang Comet's Cambridge branch, it said his model had been discontinued and he could have a refund. So

he took it back, but to different branch, where he was told it was past the 28-day refund period so he'd have to get it repaired.

While in Ipswich, he noticed his discontinued



model on sale at Comet. He checked again with Cambridge. Staff assured him he could swap his oven for a new one. But when he arrived staff repeated that he'd have to get it repaired.

Not 'Comet sense' – unless your definition of sense is going in circles.

'I bought a new oven and it didn't work,' said Ian. 'I didn't see why I should have it repaired.'

Under the Sale of Goods Act you can reject a faulty product and claim a full refund. If you find a problem within six months, the law assumes the fault existed when you bought it, unless the shop can prove it didn't.

I contacted Comet and it has given Ian a full refund. Now that does make sense.





## It pays not to pay

Fifteen mortgage providers we've contacted will cut endowment mis-selling compensation if a customer takes the initiative and pays off some of their mortgage to avoid a shortfall.

A loophole in the regulations means that providers are allowed to give customers less compensation if they have used their own savings to pay off some of their mortgage.

The 15 companies include Axa, Friends Provident, Norwich Union, Reliance Mutual and Scottish Widows.

Many customers who received a letter warning that their endowment probably wouldn't pay off their mortgage took action to reduce the debt.

Last September we reported how reader Paul Gatens used savings to pay a lump sum of just under £14,000 off his mortgage. He later discovered that Friends Provident had reduced his compensation as a result, effectively punishing him for acting responsibly.

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) sent a letter to endowment providers in December as part of its 'treating customers fairly' campaign. It expressed concern that companies were still 'failing to meet the required standards' in handling endowment complaints. But the letter confirmed in the small print that companies could cut compensation in this manner.

The FSA said: 'Under our regulations firms must show they have acted fairly and responsibly and investigated each case on its merits. Consumers are free to challenge a firm's decision and refer a complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service.'

Louise Hanson, Head of Which? Campaigns, commented: 'Just because the regulations allow companies to do this doesn't mean they have to. We think it's grossly unfair that the very companies that mis-sold these policies penalise their customers for reducing their debt.'

On the plus side, Ecclesiastical, NFU Mutual, the Royal London Group, Wesleyan and Winterthur Life don't do this. Wesleyan also

**"The companies that mis-sold penalise customers for reducing their debt Louise Hanson"**

guarantees that policies maturing up to 31 December 2010 will repay the original mortgage and Liverpool Victoria guarantees that its endowments will pay at least the policy death benefit (typically the same as the mortgage).

Scottish Widows: one company that cuts pay-outs if customers use savings to pay off some of their endowment shortfall

## Egg customer finally cracks

Phone calls from recorded messages are a real nuisance for consumers. Yet this is the method that credit card company Egg used to contact one customer when it thought her card

an important message from Egg. The message told her to press any key to continue.

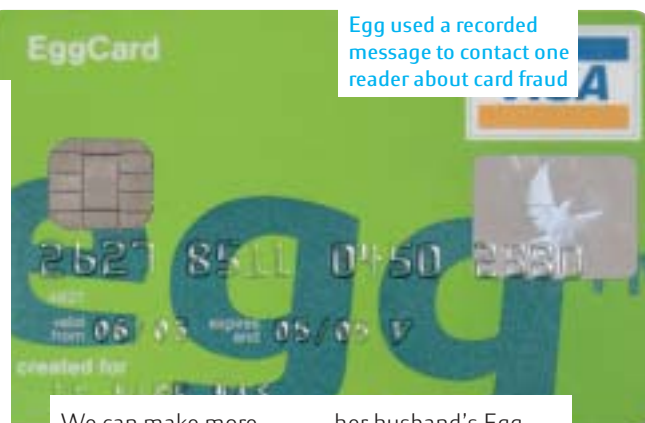
Barbara said: 'We get so many cold calls I assumed this was another and just hung up. I assumed that if

voicemail at work, that she decided to contact the company out of pure frustration, to ask why its automated machine kept calling her.

'Imagine my shock to discover that it was genuinely an important call concerning misuse of our Egg credit card,' she said.

We contacted Egg. It said it hasn't had any other complaints about the contact method it introduced last year.

'These phone calls are generated automatically by our fraud systems if we think that there may be a chance of misuse.



Egg used a recorded message to contact one reader about card fraud

**"We get so many cold calls, I just hung up Barbara Harvey"**

had been used fraudulently.

Which? reader Barbara Harvey from Aldbury, Hertfordshire, was bombarded with phone calls one Friday in January from a recording claiming to be

Egg had something truly important to say to me it would call me in person'.

It wasn't until after the weekend, when another automated message was left on Barbara's

We can make more calls more quickly,' the company said.

It added that if Barbara hadn't got in touch, a person would have contacted her, and if that failed, Egg would have sent her a letter.

Barbara wasn't impressed and has now cancelled her and

her husband's Egg cards: 'I am appalled Egg would adopt such techniques to contact customers on a genuinely serious matter.'

Egg said that its customers can choose to opt out of being contacted by a recorded message if they wish.

# Which? helps Warmroof customers



Michael Watts received a refund

A roofing company has vigorously defended itself after its sales practices were criticised.

Since July 1993 our legal service has received 12 complaints about Warmroof Systems. But the Bournemouth-based company has

'Warmroof took £1,500 from my credit card and wrote saying it required a further £1,200 for materials,' said Michael. 'It said I couldn't back out and that I had signed a legal document.'

Michael contacted Which? Legal Service, which helped him

period, even though the survey was carried out after that,' she said.

Which? Legal Service advised Carol that Warmroof did not have a case if she had been misled over the loft. 'Warmroof should also have sent us a second financial agreement. Because it never did the contract was not binding,' Carol said.

Warmroof told us it refunded Michael when it realised he wasn't happy. It also said Carol had not been misled and had cancelled only a day before work was due to start. It has since refunded Carol her £250 deposit.

## ACTION POINT

If you sign a credit agreement at home you must be sent a second copy. Then there's a seven-day cooling-off period. Only once it has been signed by both parties is the contract legally binding.

“ Warmroof said that I couldn't back out Michael Watts ”

responded by maintaining that it is 'honest and ethical' in all its business dealings.

One angry customer was Michael Watts. He was given a quote by Warmroof for roof alterations at his London home. Michael is blind and signed the forms on the proviso that he would ring to give final confirmation. Four days later he rang to put the work on hold.

receive a refund because the contract hadn't been confirmed.

Last year Warmroof told Carol Dummett, from Devon, it could make her loft a usable space for £4,000.

But she says that a structural survey by the company found otherwise, forcing her to pull out. 'We had signed the credit agreement and Warmroof said we were out of the cooling-off

## THE PUBLIC'S VIEW

The government has proposed a ban on smoking in enclosed public places, except for pubs and bars which don't serve food. We asked whether the government should ban smoking in all enclosed public places: 80 per cent of non-smokers said yes. For all adults the results were:



## And finally... Eye spy



The promise of clearer vision both near and far for just £19.95 plus postage encouraged one reader to order these pinhole glasses.

Anne Richardson from Oswestry thought the glasses were worth that – 'for entertainment value only'.

We agreed in the office but showed them

to an optician, in case we were short-sighted in spotting the benefits.

Her advice? 'Try punching holes in black card with a darning needle...the effect of the specs without the need to splash out £19.95!' She said the reduction in light to the eye may even make it harder for some people to see.

Send your examples of daft or misleading products or promotions to us at: Dept LE, PO Box 44, Hertford X, SG14 1SH

## contact inside story

If there's something you'd like us to investigate, leave a message on the Inside Story Hotline on 0800 252088 (calls are free) or email [insidestory@which.co.uk](mailto:insidestory@which.co.uk). We're sorry but we can't reply individually.