

Here to help



**Which?
secures
refund
on high
call
charges**

Sometimes the numbers just don't add up. Take T-Mobile customer Rajesh Javeri (pictured), who assumed that calling a UK mobile number would lead to UK charges but instead was charged international rates.

Rajesh was shocked to receive a £200 bill for calling a friend who lives in the UK but has a contract with a mobile phone company based on the Isle of Man, only 60 miles off the Lancashire coastline.

He asked T-Mobile for a refund, as the number called was a UK-based mobile number, which didn't need an international prefix of 00.

Manx Telecom told us that T-Mobile is the only network that charges customers international rates when calling the company's mobile numbers. It has repeatedly tried to get T-Mobile to change its policy after fielding calls from angry customers who assume that the Isle of Man is charging more for calls.

Within minutes of us calling T-Mobile, it had refunded Rajesh but refused to change its policy.

A spokeswoman said: 'We charge international rates as the Isle of Man is a separate country. It is not part of the UK, and its charges are published in our international charges.'

She added: 'We have spoken to the customer, who was unaware of our call charges to the Isle of Man, and have ensured he is familiar with these now. As a gesture of goodwill, we have refunded him the call charges that he incurred.'

Member needs surgery after treating 2mm crack on his finger **Cuts treatment under scrutiny**

HEALTH

Concerns have been raised over the use of a treatment for cuts after a pensioner almost died and was scarred for life.

Tom Warburton had to undergo surgery and lost part of his forefinger when septicaemia cellulitis and gangrene set in after using Germolene New Skin on a 2mm cut. He was later told that the Germolene treatment could have sealed in an infection.

Problems occurred several days after Tom applied the liquid to the cut on his finger: he woke in the middle of the night with convulsions and was rushed to Yeovil Hospital and then transferred for surgery.

Tom said: 'I am left with an embarrassing finger and it's difficult to hold a cup of tea or bunch of keys, or fasten a shirt.'

Manufacturer Bayer Healthcare told Tom it was satisfied that the box's instructions clearly state when the product shouldn't be used. The treatment, which claims to provide a waterproof and germproof barrier to minor skin damage, is not suitable for 'injuries that appear infected or inflamed' but Tom argues that there was no sign of disease when applying the treatment and has been asking Bayer for further answers for 18 months.



Tom Warburton was hospitalised after using New Skin

Dr Mark Enright, who specialises in infectious diseases at Imperial College London, told us: 'You would be unfortunate for this to happen to you, but you do change a wound's nature by sealing bacteria inside without oxygen. Advising not to apply the product when an infection's present is good but bacteria are always in and on skin and you can start infections by using products.'

A Bayer spokeswoman said the company had not 'received any other medically validated reports like that of Mr Warburton'. She added: 'Bayer believes it has dealt with his correspondence in a professional manner. For reasons of confidentiality, we're unable to provide any specifics on the case.'

**'It's difficult
to hold a
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Hope for legal rights overhaul

CONSUMER RIGHTS

Britain's competition watchdog says Scotland's legal system should be radically overhauled to give consumers greater choice.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) was responding to a super complaint by Which? about current restrictions, including those that prevent consumers from instructing advocates (barristers) directly.

Also, advocates can't work with each other or with solicitors, and all lawyers are prevented from working alongside other professionals to offer comprehensive services.

But deregulation would allow

them to join – for example, with conveyancers, mortgage advisers, surveyors and estate agents – to deliver packages of legal and other services, which would result in greater convenience and less cost to consumers.

Julia Clarke, Scottish affairs lead for Which?, said: 'This is the first stage on the road to reforming the way legal services are provided in Scotland. This will benefit consumers and those lawyers who are prepared to offer the high levels of service that people have come to expect from other professions.'



Working together should be easier

She added: 'We'll keep an eye on whether the new Scottish Executive really represents the interests of consumers – the people who elected them – or those lawyers who resist change but often shout the loudest.'

Measures to stop doorstep fraudsters are under threat

Cold calling alarm

CONSUMER RIGHTS



Glen (fourth from left) and neighbours in Shalford, Guildford, join forces against cold-call crime

A scheme that has succeeded in stamping down on doorstep conmen could be under threat, Which? has learnt.

Hailed by trading standards chiefs as the most successful public protection programme they've ever undertaken, 'no cold-calling zones' help combat doorstep crime. This includes criminals using cold calling to find easy-distraction burglary targets, where homes are burgled by one person while their accomplice calls at the door.

These zones have become popular among householders; it's estimated there will be about 1,000, covering 100,000 households, in Britain by the end of 2007.

But the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) does not support such zones and is looking into the legality of them. A spokesman said: 'In some cases these zones may deflect from legitimate traders. OFT is working with key stakeholders to find a solution that balances the need to protect the vulnerable while ensuring honest businesses are not penalised. We are seeking legal advice on no cold-calling zones.'

Surrey is one magnet for uninvited traders peddling overpriced and bad quality services. But since setting up one of the largest no cold-calling zones in the UK, covering 11,000 homes in Guildford, distraction burglary figures have dropped by 17 per cent. Assistant County Trading Standards Officer Steve Ruddy said: 'There's a reduced fear of crime and residents feel more empowered.'

Glen Armstrong, a Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator in Guildford, said: 'We used to have visits from people selling goods or services we didn't need. While some were legitimate others were distinctly dodgy. Now that our Neighbourhood Watch group has a sign at the end of our road and we have stickers on our front doors, visits have diminished and it's much easier for residents, particularly the elderly, to tell those who ignore the sign to go away.'

Cambridgeshire was the first council to have a zone. Trading Standards Officer David Broughton said: 'We had a lot of people who felt nervous in their own homes. Now we get more requests for zones than we can cope with, so we get the communities to run them, which empowers them. The zones aren't expensive to set up, with signs costing as little as £15.'

But Richard Berry, Director of the Direct Selling Association, said: 'These zones have no legal authority and serve only to alarm and worry legitimate traders who call, like Avon ladies. These are totally unfair restrictions on human rights.'

'Visits have diminished and it's easier to tell those who ignore signs to go away'

TAKE ACTION!

Under the Doorstep Selling Regulations you usually have the right to a seven-day cooling-off period during which you can cancel an agreement to buy goods or services worth more than £35 from a trader whose visit was unannounced. However, if you book an appointment with a seller, you don't have the right to a cooling-off period.



Reforms of the housing industry must be stronger

Which? Chief Executive Peter Vicary-Smith says it should be easier to move into a new home

Another Which? campaign came to a successful conclusion in July with the Consumers, Estate Agents and Redress Act becoming law. This makes it compulsory for estate agents to join a redress scheme, which will help consumers who are treated badly by estate agents.

While this is an important step, it is only the first stage in making the process of buying and selling more efficient and work better for consumers' interests.

A home is the most important purchase most of us make, yet it operates in slow, complicated and expensive ways that are geared to the interests of mortgage lenders and professions, not those of the ordinary buyer and seller.

Home information packs are coming in, but Which? believes they're a missed opportunity and will not deliver the changes needed. We'll be monitoring their impact closely and challenging the government and industry to introduce real reforms that will have a profound and lasting effect.

We also want the government to look at other issues that impact on different groups of consumers, such as the lettings market. This is an oft-overlooked market with a myriad of issues that often affect vulnerable consumers, be they people at the start of their working life or those who cannot afford to get on the housing ladder.

We have already begun discussions with the government and industry about what changes could be introduced here, too – as part of our desire to work on behalf of all consumers.