

Your Which?

THE LATEST ON WHICH? AND OUR CAMPAIGNS

Reliability counts in an economic downturn



Which? chief executive Peter Vicary-Smith considers the importance of reliable products

A good brand reputation acts as a beacon for the companies with which you should be doing business. That trust is even more important when the economy is in a downturn.

When the credit crunch bites, you'll be more reluctant to spend your limited cash and be more choosy about which brands receive your business.

Those such as Miele, Bosch and Zanussi Electrolux are way out in front according to our product reliability survey (see p40), and deserve your consideration.

Companies that fared less well should recognise that brand trust becomes even more crucial to business survival when money is tight.

Buying products that have longevity also means that there's less of a need for costly extended warranties which, as our reliability investigation shows, are usually a waste of money. If you do ever want an extended warranty, you should be just as selective when buying it, and be aware of your rights,

to avoid pouring money down the drain – as our research has highlighted (see p30).

Companies should learn that a promise kept on brand performance can build a lifetime's loyalty, as well as creating customer evangelists who will spread the word about the brand. Superior products and services will win a faithful customer base for life.

Being able to build consumer loyalty is a key factor in developing a sustainable competitive advantage.

In an economic slowdown, companies should bridge any gaps between what they promise and what they deliver.

So, companies, take heed. Those that used to position themselves as innovative, smart and clever should consider repositioning themselves to focus on reliability, honesty and transparency – as brand reputation will be a key determinant of which emerge strongly from recession and which struggle to grow again.

Which? says



Banking reform

Almost 1,000 of you had emailed Chancellor Alistair Darling via our website www.weownthebanks.co.uk as went to press, to give your views on the continuing banking crisis.

Our banking reform campaign – launched after taxpayers bailed out banks with £37bn – has struck a chord with many of you. In order to get real changes in place, it's vital that we now show how the banking crisis is affecting individuals, so we need your stories.

They'll support our demands for a consumer bailout – so the government, regulators and banks ensure that mortgage, current account and savings customers are helped. For example, we want interest rate cuts passed on to mortgages and unauthorised overdraft fees reduced and refunded.

What are your experiences of the crisis? How has your mortgage rate been affected? Have you noticed your savings rates going down? Have you been treated unfairly by your bank? Go to www.which.co.uk/haveyoursay with your story.

The interests of high-street banking customers must be at the heart of banking reform. For too long, they've been short-changed with complex, badly designed and poorly sold financial products.

Now, more than ever, this is unacceptable – so send in your views. **Lucy Widenka, banking reform campaign project manager**

Which? campaign success

Hospital food has improved

We're pleased to report on the success of our latest investigation aimed at the raising standards of hospital food (see 'Potluck dinners', November 2008, p30). Edinburgh Royal Infirmary took immediate steps to improve its canteen food. Our report prompted an inspection from Consumer Focus Scotland, which runs a government-funded Healthyliving Award. An official said: 'The new catering manager had clearly taken the *Which?* report personally, and



taken steps to ensure that recipes met the award criteria and foods were appropriately labelled.' All Scottish hospitals with this award will now be inspected.