

## Your Which?



Our new series looks at the work done behind the scenes by Which? staff to bring you the most up-to-date consumer information



Melissa makes sure calls are handled properly

As training and development manager for our customer services centre, Melissa Challinor helps cultivate the skills of more than 100 staff who answer your calls, emails and letters every day. Her previous experience – most recently overseeing the set-up of an overseas call centre – has prepared her well for a wide-ranging role at Which?.

But customer service here, says Melissa, is much more about people than systems, as every communication with each member is crucial. 'Our customers are demanding, and their needs change each day,' she explains. 'From dealing with responses to a media mention of a campaign to technical queries about a product report – our advisers must be equipped to handle these efficiently and know everything that's happening in the organisation.'

This means continuous and innovative training. To

keep staff up to date with a new product, campaign or controversial Which? article, Melissa may hold 'buzz' sessions, where teams get to know a topic and discuss how best to approach it with members who contact us.

In 2007, Melissa oversaw 17 staff induction weeks, four modules on writing for the correspondence team, 12 courses on telephone skills, eight sessions on knowing customers and their diverse needs, ten courses on data protection, and numerous sessions listening in on calls and rating handling – not to mention specific training.

Her next challenge is to tailor City & Guilds training in contact centre skills for all advisers, which they'll take three years to complete. Melissa says: 'Members will benefit from increased call handling, excellent customer service skills and staff who are even more knowledgeable.'

### Phone promises that ring hollow



**Which? Chief Executive Peter Vicary-Smith on mobile phone cashback deals**

If you want to ring in the new year with a mobile phone cashback deal, think again.

The idea of signing up to a contract and then claiming much or all of the line rental fee back from the retailer is appealing. But to help maximise a shop's profit, it will make it as difficult as possible for you to claim your money back (see 'Too good to be true', p12).

A retailer may put lots of details in the terms and conditions to try to trip you up. Failure to follow these precisely means that you won't get any cash back – and the retailer will laugh all the way to the bank.

Even worse, some customers face the prospect of retailers unable to honour such offers going bust, leaving them out of pocket, but locked into a deal with a network. And if you're expecting networks to protect you, don't bet on it. Despite the networks signing up to an Ofcom-endorsed code to watch over these deals, people across the country are owed hundreds of pounds from cashback deals that can't be honoured.

We think that these deals should be banned. In the meantime, don't touch them with a bargepole. If you're looking for a cheap mobile phone deal, do some research and go with a reputable company.

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