

Question time

BT bets on broadband

BT is now Britain's biggest broadband provider, but can it maintain a quality connection? We ask Chief Executive of BT Retail, Ian Livingston

Q Are you worried that in a recent Which? survey just 28 per cent of BT customers said they were very satisfied with their broadband service?

A We realise that broadband is a complex product and we can, and will, do better with it. But actually a number of the surveys that have come out – in *Reader's Digest*, for instance – said customers were most satisfied with BT. I think sometimes we get the blame even when we aren't the service provider because people just say: 'Oh, it must be BT's fault'.

Q Why do some rural areas of the country still have poor broadband access?

A The UK is really lucky that 99.8 per cent of the UK has broadband availability. That is better than any other major industrialised country. For the 0.2 per cent, we are chipping away but sometimes people are just too far away. Regrettably, 0.2 per cent of people when you've got 60 million in the country is still quite a lot and we'd like to improve on that.

Q What assurances can you give Waitrose and Global broadband customers that their service won't suffer now they've been swallowed up by BT?

A They're recognised to be really good services and we intend to make them better. With

PlusNet [an internet service provider], which we acquired recently, it was always a good service and it's seen a further improvement in customer service and satisfaction. We've taken the good things that it had and combined them with aspects with which we could help, in terms of our resources and technical innovation.

Q How do you respond to accusations that BT resorted to 'financial blackmail' by charging customers more for not paying their bills by direct debit?

A There's been a difference in pricing for many, many years. We've just made it clearer. We put it on the front of the bills and said here's the difference. We did increase the difference by 50p maximum and for some customers reduced it by 50p. Pretty much everyone else in the industry falls into one of two categories. Either they charge a lot more for the differential than BT does or they

don't offer an alternative. BT, because we came out and were very clear and put it on the front of the bill, has suffered the publicity because of it. So it's not blackmail in the slightest; it is clarity.

Q Do you believe that mis-selling in the telecoms market is still a problem?

A Unfortunately, yes. We started monitoring complaints a couple of years ago and since then 250,000 customers have reported instances of mis-selling. Two years on, we still have 8,000 or 9,000 complaints a month, which is way too many. I congratulate those in the industry who have made the changes and I call on the rest of the industry to stop mis-selling, to stop representing yourself as BT and really get your act together.

Q What innovations and developments can we expect to see from BT in the future?

A I think they will be around making broadband a part of everybody's life in pretty much everything they do – for instance, providing multiple lines over the broadband line so everyone can have their own individual line. You'll also see more and more wireless cities where you'll be able to get Wi-Fi access wherever you go in the city centre. We have a very simple mantra – can we make it simpler, better and cheaper for our customers? That's the innovation we're going to try over the next few years.



Ian Livingston: 'You'll see more and more wireless cities'