

# Mobiles grow in popularity as billing becomes more complicated

Mobile phones continue to leap ahead as the main communications service for Australians but the vast majority of consumers have a patchy understanding of billing and call price information.

*Numbering: Implications of research into consumer issues*, the ACMA's fourth consultation paper in its numbering work program, shows that nearly half of all Australians (47 per cent) now identify mobiles as their main service, compared with 33 per cent who primarily use a fixed landline.

The research provides important evidence of how Australians are using and thinking about their communications services, which will be invaluable as government and regulators consider how to manage the transition to a more converged world.

'There have been profound changes in the range of telecommunications services available, and the way consumers purchase and use them,' said ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman.

'These changes have significant implications for regulatory arrangements, particularly those protections that rely on consumers understanding the structure of telephone numbers.'

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There has also been a sea change in the way communications services are purchased. Bundled plans have become very popular, with three in five mobile phone users and two in five home phone users on a usage plan. Those with a plan for only one service make a higher proportion of calls from that service compared to the service without a cap or deal.

'Both of these trends are major factors contributing to a decline in consumer understanding of the price and location information embedded in traditional fixed-line telephone numbers, meaning that embedding this information may no longer be an effective mechanism to fulfil consumer protection needs,' said Mr Chapman.

Consumers also have low understanding of less frequently called number types, such as 13/1300 and 1800 numbers, with three in five unaware of the cost of a fixed-line call to a local-rate (13/1300) number.

While a majority of Australians continue to keep and use a hard copy directory, all except those aged over 65 years are just as likely to use an electronic version. Directories and directory assistance services are used twice as often to find a business number as a residential number, indicating that the traditional role of directories—to encourage call connections between people—may be declining.

The ACMA is seeking feedback on the implications of these findings, including how regulatory arrangements might be adjusted over time to reflect and allow changes in consumer communication use. A major question is whether telephone numbers remain the most effective way to provide price information.

The first consultation paper, *Structure of Australia's telephone Numbering Plan*, raised a number of consumer issues, with these changing patterns of consumer use further confirming the challenges outlined in the second paper, *Customer location information and numbering data*. The third paper, *Allocation and charging of numbers*, examines whether managing telephone numbers as a scarce resource remains efficient in the long term. ☎

## Submissions

Submissions and comments in response to the paper close on **Friday 1 July 2011**.

Submissions should be sent by email to [numbering.project@acma.gov.au](mailto:numbering.project@acma.gov.au) or by mail to:

Manager  
Numbering Project  
Australian Communications  
and Media Authority  
PO Box 13112  
Law Courts  
Melbourne Vic 8010

All the consultation papers are available on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) (go to For licensees & industry: Licensing & regulation > Telecommunications: Telecommunications regulation > Numbering > Numbering Plan Consultation).

