



# *Our Customers*

**Better World – Our Commitment to Society**

## Customers

In the UK, BT serves 21 million customers with more than 28 million exchange lines. Some eight million of these are business lines and lines for other service providers; the remainder are for residential customers.

In 2002 Chief Executive Officer BT Group, Ben Verwaayen, stated a commitment to make customer satisfaction the company's number one priority. The Group was set a target to outperform competitors consistently and reduce the number of dissatisfied customers by 25 per cent each year.

We regularly canvass the views of our customers so that we can improve the quality of our service. In March 2002 we launched a survey of our residential customers – one of the largest of a commercial customer base.

We provide a number of services for elderly and disabled customers and those on low incomes to enable them to get the most from communications. Some of these are a condition of our licence, but we often provide additional levels of service that go beyond these requirements.

### More information:

- Customer satisfaction
- Customer communications
- Customers with special needs
- Special services for customers
- Services for customers – voluntary or mandatory?

## Customer satisfaction

The extent to which a company takes its social responsibilities seriously has an impact on most people's consumer decisions. And the number of people who consider this an important factor in such decisions is rising; 89 per cent of people surveyed by MORI in 2001 felt it was either very or fairly important.

***Table showing the importance of a company's social responsibility as a determinant for purchasing a product or service.***

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Very important	24	28	41	41	46
Fairly important	46	49	41	44	43
Not very important	15	14	11	11	8
Not at all important	9	6	5	3	2

The quality of the service we provide, and our customers' satisfaction with that service, is fundamental to our business. Delivering customer satisfaction is the cornerstone of BT's strategy and our key objective is to provide customers with a significantly better experience than any of our main competitors by March 2003.

In a recent presentation to analysts and journalists, Ben Verwaayen, Chief Executive Officer BT Group, publicly committed the BT Group to improving its customer satisfaction by setting the following challenge

“To outperform competitors consistently and reduce the number of dissatisfied customers by 25 per cent each year”.

To help achieve this goal, we undertake a significant programme of customer research each year. We regularly talk to both our consumer and business customers to gather their views about BT, the service we provide and our range of products, so we can continue to make improvements.

### See also:

- Enlightened values

## Customer satisfaction measures

Our customers' views about the service we provide and our range of products is important to us, allowing us to continue to make improvements.

We conduct face-to-face interviews with an average of 3,600 residential customers per month about their overall perceptions of BT and quality of service.

The perceptions and views of our business customers is surveyed by an independent agency on our behalf with an average of 1,500 Small and Medium Sized Enterprise (SME) customers and 1,000 corporate/government customers interviewed every month by telephone.

A customer's view of their direct experience of BT is also canvassed. This can include such things as the provision or restoration of a service by the company or how a complaint made to BT has been handled. These surveys are again conducted on our behalf by an independent agency on a monthly basis with approximately 17,350 business and residential customers interviewed. These customer satisfaction and quality of service measures are published every six months.

Our research has shown that consumers expect constant improvement in customer care and quality of service and their expectations are continuously increasing.

Tables showing overall business and residential customer satisfaction with BT

### Residential customers

	BT	Competition
1999/2000	86%	
2000/2001	80%	
2001/2002	77%	76%*

Source: BMRB International  
Sample: Approximately 42,000

### SME customers

	BT	Competition
1999/2000	82%	
2000/2001	79%	
2001/2002	64%	62%*

Source: NOP (from September 2000) prior to that Market Insights  
Sample: Approximately 21,000

\* Accumulated average for the last three months of the year

In line with our new targets to reduce customer dissatisfaction by at least 25% every year and to outperform our competitors in relation to levels of customer satisfaction, we will be changing the way we report some of our data.

For example we intend to report the percentage of customers who are satisfied with BT against those of the competition. We also intend to publish dissatisfaction figures for each of our customer groups: consumers, SMEs and major businesses both inside and outside the UK.

Our research shows that, in each market sector, service drives about 25% of the total impact on satisfaction. We carry out detailed surveys of satisfaction with different aspects of service and use the percentage of customers who are satisfied overall with the provision of service or service repair as a measure. The results for the last three months of the 2001/2 financial year are shown below:

	Consumer satisfaction with provision	Business satisfaction with provision	Consumer satisfaction with repair	Business satisfaction with repair
2000/2001	87.6%	83.1%	75.4%	82.4%
2001/2002	92.3%	83.5%	78.6%	84.2%

Due to its importance to BT we will also track closely our customers’ perceptions of the BT Broadband product and publish these.

## ***Comparable Performance Indicators***

We are a founder member of the UK telecommunications industry’s initiative on publishing Comparable Performance Indicators (CPI).

CPI is a voluntary, cross industry initiative, involving consumer representatives, Oftel and telecom companies. It has been running now for six years, with information published by participating operators on their performance in key activities – provision, repair, network faults, complaints and billing accuracy.

The data is collected by the telecom companies using agreed procedures. It is checked initially by independent auditors and then by an independent body, the British Approvals Board for Telecommunications, to ensure a sufficient level of comparability in the application of the audit process.

The information published highlights both the operators’ internally measured performance and customer satisfaction with the specific service or activity.

BT's customer satisfaction in the area of service provision achieved 90 per cent – the strongest performance of all participating operators. Our business customers are amongst the most satisfied with our performance in providing service, complaint handling and billing.

Residential customers can take advantage of a similar performance analysis applied to their phone bills. The phone bill website compares prices as well as quality between BT and six other companies.

### **See also:**

- Comparable Performance Indicators [www.cpi.org.uk](http://www.cpi.org.uk)
- Phone bills <http://www.phonebills.org.uk>

## *Initiatives to improve customer satisfaction*

Customer satisfaction depends not only on price but on level of service. A key strategic objective for BT is to provide customers with a significantly better service experience than any of our main competitors by March 2003.

The financial year 2002 saw sustained improvement in several areas. These were underpinned by a number of new initiatives:

- reducing repeat faults
- keeping customers better informed – giving them a clear commitment when a job starts and updating them until the job is completed to their satisfaction.
- Contingency planning to cope with peaks of activity caused by bad weather and other surges in demand
- The launch of new services such as BT Answer 1571, a free answering service for all our residential customers. More than five million customers had signed up for this service by 31 March 2002.

We are also introducing further initiatives to enhance customer service. These include:

- ensuring a high level of service, whatever the size of the fault.
- keeping in touch with customers during repair work via SMS texting.
- offering call diversion to a mobile – the customer's own or one lent by BT in the event of a fault.

## ***Customer Communications***

As well as undertaking regular surveys of our customers, we have a number of initiatives in place to help us understand customer concerns and issues which are important to them.

We also provide facilities for customers to bring issues, including complaints, to our attention.

### **Consultation**

As well as conducting customer satisfaction surveys, we also undertake more in-depth consultation to understand our customers' needs and concerns.

### **Consumer liaison panels**

We run a number of customer liaison panels. These consist of 12-15 consumers with a broad range of experience and usage of communications technology.

Feedback from panel members provides valuable insight into consumer thinking and informs the policy-making process within BT.

The panels have discussed a range of issues including customer service, mobile telephony, payphones, billing and the provision of services for customers with disabilities. They are recruited and chaired by external specialists.

Alongside the general consumer liaison panels, two specialist interest panels have been set up to explore the views of particular groups of customers – for example small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), broadband users and young people.

### **Telecommunications Advisory Committee**

We are also involved with the Telecommunications Advisory Committees (TACs), which operate on a local level and comprise people with an interest in telecommunications.

Before 2001, BT was obliged to listen to the TAC network's representations. This is no longer a statutory requirement, but BT continues to work with the network in a number of ways, including sending representatives to TAC meetings and publishing a regular newsletter for TAC members.

### **See also:**

- [Comments to BT](#)



## Complaints

We are committed to providing the best telecommunications service in the world. However, sometimes things go wrong, and when they do, we want to put them right as quickly as possible. We have comprehensive complaint handling procedures, developed in consultation with the Office of Telecommunications (Ofcom).

When a customer calls BT, an adviser will try to solve the problem as quickly as possible, preferably during the phone call and, if this is not possible, will agree a course of action. Billing queries are more complex and may take a little longer to resolve.

If a customer is not happy with the response they receive they can ask for the matter to be referred to the appropriate senior manager. If the complaint still cannot be resolved, the case can be taken to the BT Complaint Review Service. The Service will review all aspects of the case and strive to resolve the matter to the customer's satisfaction.

More information on BT's complaints procedure is provided in the Service Guide 'Complaints about our Service'.

- [http://www.bt.com/customerservices/cust\\_details.jsp?parentcat=cs\\_complaint\\_service&childcat=linkcs\\_complaint\\_service\\_complaint\\_procedure](http://www.bt.com/customerservices/cust_details.jsp?parentcat=cs_complaint_service&childcat=linkcs_complaint_service_complaint_procedure)

Ofcom, the regulator for the UK telecoms industry, also publishes advice about how to make a complaint to a telecoms company and also publishes the number and type of complaints it has received.

### See also:

- BT's Consumer Code of Practice  
<http://www.groupbt.com/Corporateinformation/Regulatory/Codeofpractice/ConsumerCodeofPractice.htm>
- Complaints about our Service  
[http://www.bt.com/customerservices/cust\\_details.jsp?parentcat=cs\\_complaint\\_service&childcat=linkcs\\_complaint\\_service\\_complaint\\_procedure](http://www.bt.com/customerservices/cust_details.jsp?parentcat=cs_complaint_service&childcat=linkcs_complaint_service_complaint_procedure)
- Customer Service  
[http://www.bt.com/customerservices/cust\\_details.jsp?BV\\_SessionID=@@@@0347550122.1024489987@@@&BV\\_EngineID=cccfadcfhkklhcflgcefkdfndfnk.0&parentcat=cs\\_cs\\_guarantee&childcat=linkcs\\_cs\\_guarantee\\_our\\_guarantee](http://www.bt.com/customerservices/cust_details.jsp?BV_SessionID=@@@@0347550122.1024489987@@@&BV_EngineID=cccfadcfhkklhcflgcefkdfndfnk.0&parentcat=cs_cs_guarantee&childcat=linkcs_cs_guarantee_our_guarantee)
- Ofcom advice about complaints <http://www.ofcom.gov.uk/consumer/index.htm>

## ***Customers with special needs***

BT offers a range of services and products for elderly and disabled customers to enable them to make the most of communications.

### **Typetalk and BT TextDirect**

One of our major commitments is Typetalk – a national telephone relay service. Funded by BT since it started in 1990, and run by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, the service enables textphone users who may be deaf, deaf blind, hard of hearing or speech impaired to make and receive calls to and from hearing people.

In July 2001 we launched BT TextDirect. This service automates and simplifies the making and receiving of text calls to and from voice or other textphone users. BT TextDirect received the Innovative Access award from the International Coalition of Access Engineers and Specialists.

### **Payphones**

All our existing payphones have inductive couplers that improve the clarity and audibility of incoming speech for people wearing suitably equipped hearing aids. We have also introduced a new type of text payphone in the UK to enable customers to send e-mails and SMS messages.

### **Billing**

For customers who are visually impaired, billing information can be provided in other formats – in Braille or large print; on computer disk; or through our “talking” telephone bill service. Many BT publications and user guides are also available in non-print formats.

Vulnerable customers can nominate a third party with whom BT can get in touch, in the event of a bill not being paid.

### **Directory enquiries**

We run a free directory enquiry service for customers who cannot use a phone book because of a disability.

bt.com now offers its users an accessible version of the on-line directory enquiries service which has been designed to give all users, including people with disabilities, easier access. It also allows people to set their own preferences, such as colour, from the homepage. This is part of a broader commitment to make the bt.com website fully accessible.

### **Telephone products**

BT has a variety of telephones, both corded and cordless, which have special features such as large buttons, voice amplification, headset sockets and pre-compose dialling. Pre-compose dialling allows a person to enter the telephone number before making the call. This is ideally suited for people who may have motor control problems or need a little extra time to dial out.

Our In Touch range of telephones include a button that can be activated to alert friends, families or carers in an emergency. A version of the unit is also available for caring control centres.

## Training

We have trained a number of our engineers in disability awareness so that when working at the premises of customers with special needs they can offer advice on services to help the customer.

We have also given around 44,000 of our customer-facing people training on the Disability Discrimination Act.

### See also:

- BT Age and Disability Action Site [www.bt.com/aged\\_disabled/index.jsp](http://www.bt.com/aged_disabled/index.jsp)
- Typetalk [www.typetalk.org](http://www.typetalk.org)

## *Services for customers*

We provide a number of special services to customers to enable those on low incomes to benefit from communications technology. We have also introduced services to make payment easier and help prevent disconnection.

We have developed technology to help prevent nuisance calls and we run a network of Nuisance Calls Bureaux that provide specialist help and support to customers.

### **More information:**

- Services for low income users
- Payments
- Nuisance Calls Bureaux

## Payments

BT customers can pay their telephone bills in a number of ways. These include

- a monthly payment plan
- quarterly or monthly direct debit
- the BT Payment Card
- debit card via the internet
- Bank Giro Credit
- BACs

We also operate a service called Call My Bill, which enables customers to check their call usage since their last bill and find out when the next one will be produced.

### Avoiding disconnection

We regard a disconnection as a failure and do a great deal to avoid it. Besides offering the flexible payment options mentioned above, which help customers budget for bill payment, we issue several million first and second reminders each year to our residential customers. If customers do have temporary payment difficulties, we are eager to work with them to avoid the need to disconnect. For example, we are willing to agree payment plans to help customers pay over a longer period than usual.

If we do not receive payment after issuing a second reminder or have not been able to agree a payment plan, we restrict that customer's service to incoming calls only (although calls to emergency numbers and BT are still possible). We only consider disconnecting the service if payment is still not forthcoming or we are unable to negotiate a realistic payment plan with the customer.

If a customer is temporarily disconnected because they have been unable to pay their bill, there is a reconnection fee (£32.80 exclusive of VAT) and if a customer's service is ceased for non-payment, BT require payment of a reprovision fee (£56.26 exclusive of VAT) as well as settlement of the outstanding debt. These charges reflect the credit management costs incurred by BT.

We have published a Bill Payment Code of Practice, which describes our procedures for requesting payment and the help customers can expect if they have problems paying.

### See also:

- Bill Payment Code Of Practice  
[http://www.bt.com/customerservices/cust\\_details.jsp?parentcat=cs\\_brcode\\_rescust&childcat=linkcs\\_brcode\\_rescust\\_code\\_of\\_practice](http://www.bt.com/customerservices/cust_details.jsp?parentcat=cs_brcode_rescust&childcat=linkcs_brcode_rescust_code_of_practice)
- Number of disconnections

### **Total number of disconnections\* (residential customers)**

Total number of disconnections	
1998/9	781,948
1999/0	1,067,972
2000/1	964,810
2001/2	1,061,036

***Total number of disconnections\* (business customers)***

Total number of disconnections	
1998/9	124,226
1999/0	182,651
2000/1	91,262
2001/2	292,432

\* This includes those who pay after disconnection and reconnect before their service is formally terminated.

## *Nuisance Calls Bureaux*

BT voluntarily operates a national network of Nuisance Calls Bureaux to help and support customers receiving nuisance calls.

The Bureaux were launched nationally in July 1992 following pilot trials in Canterbury and Blackburn.

Initial enquiries are answered by a dedicated team of advisers in the Londonderry Nuisance Call Advice Centre, who are trained to offer simple advice and solutions. The Centre is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The more complex cases, which may require police investigation or call tracing, are passed on to Nuisance Call Bureaux Specialists. These specialists are trained in police liaison and may appear in court as prosecution witnesses if necessary.

The Nuisance Call team can be contacted 24 hours a day on 0800 661 441.

## *Services for those on low incomes or who don't often use the telephone*

BT recognises that a phone service can act as a lifeline and so we have worked to provide a basic telephone service for all, including those on low incomes or who have trouble paying their bills.

**The Light User Scheme** is specifically designed to help those people who need to stay in touch but make few calls themselves. It is available to people whose quarterly call charges fall below £15.95 (excluding VAT) and who are not on any BT discount schemes or using indirect access. The scheme provides rebates of around 60 per cent on line rental.

**The In-Contact Plus Scheme** enables customers to receive incoming calls and make outgoing calls to the emergency services, for a joining fee and quarterly line rental charge of less than £10. Customers can make outgoing chargeable calls using Phonocard Plus.



## *Services for customers – voluntary or mandatory?*

BT takes pride in pioneering services for customers. Some of the special services we offer are neither a regulatory nor licence requirement – and some services that we have offered voluntarily are now a licence requirement. We often provide additional levels of service that go beyond mandatory requirements.

### **More information:**

- Services provided on a voluntary basis
- Services provided as a result of mandatory requirements

## ***Voluntary services***

### **Publication of comparable performance indicators (CPI)**

BT and other telecommunications companies provide Oftel with comparable quality of service results, which are published by them every six months. Most of the information currently available was already published by BT before the agreement.

### **Consumer liaison panels**

BT has been running these since 1984 to help us identify and understand consumer concerns.

### **Nuisance Calls Bureaux**

BT set up a network of these on a voluntary basis in 1992 to offer expert advice and practical action to help victims of malicious and nuisance calls.

### **Production of telephones for disabled customers**

BT is licensed as a network operator and no longer has any obligations to supply apparatus. In practice, however, we supply a much wider range of equipment for disabled people than was required in the past.

## ***Mandatory services***

### **Typetalk/TextDirect**

BT provided significant financial support to Typetalk voluntarily, before this became a licence condition.

BT's provision of the text users rebate scheme is a regulatory requirement.

### **Free priority fault repair service for some customers**

BT has always provided a degree of priority to customers considered at risk through disability, age or some other factor. It is a regulatory requirement to provide a priority fault repair service to disabled customers who have a bona fide need for an urgent repair. However, BT has always provided the service more widely.

### **Directory enquiry information for those unable to use a phone book.**

BT is obliged to provide a free directory enquiry service to disabled customers who cannot use a phone book.

### **Billing and general information for disabled customers in Braille, large print or on audiotape.**

BT has voluntarily provided bills and some of its publications in alternative media to disabled customers for many years. As a result of the Disability Discrimination Act, one of the conditions of BT's operating licence was amended in October 2000 to require contracts and bills to be provided, upon request, in an acceptable alternative format.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, BT also has wider obligations to provide any customer contact in alternative media.

### **Public payphones with inductive couplers**

BT has had a licence condition requiring inductive couplers in public payphones for a number of years.

### **Light User Scheme**

This scheme was designed to meet targets agreed with Oftel for reducing both the number of disconnections and the number of people without access to a telephone.

### **In-Contact Plus**

There is a general licence requirement that BT should provide a restricted service scheme in accordance with guidelines agreed with Oftel. The precise form of such schemes is subject to negotiation.

### **Provision of emergency services**

BT provides a free emergency assistance service that handles around 35 million calls a year. Whilst this is a condition of our licence, we aim to ensure a high quality of service by answering 95 per cent of calls within five seconds.