



Human Rights

Better World – Our Commitment to Society

Human Rights

BT is committed to protecting and enhancing the human dignity of everyone who works for the company and everyone who has dealings with it.

The human rights issues faced by any company can be either general or specific to an industry.

This section of the Better World site examines a range of these issues for BT, and by following the links you can find out how we manage them.

Principles

We use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to ensure our policies enhance human dignity. But new challenges and opportunities regularly arise and we don't rely on policy alone to make sure we handle them well.

All our employees are given access to the Universal Declaration and an outline of our approach is included in the support document for *The Way We Work*, our statement of business practice.

Many expert groups and information sources exist to help us maintain our commitment to human dignity and evolve our procedures if needed.

For example, we are a signatory to the UN's Global Compact, an initiative that strives to motivate business and industry around nine principles of environment, labour and human rights. BT was one of the first companies to submit a case study to the Global Compacts Learning Forum.

BT products and service

Our learning demonstrates that one of the best ways for us to fulfil our commitment to human dignity is to enhance the positive impact our products and services can have on human rights.

The internet, and communication technology in general, provides an extremely efficient, fast and mainly safe means of managing and communicating information. This capacity can be invaluable to organisations dedicated to human rights:

The use of the internet has enabled Amnesty International to spread its message around the world, to places and people it might never have reached using traditional media.
www.amnesty.org

We also recognise that violations of human rights often happen in an atmosphere of economic deprivation and lack of business and political transparency.

It is therefore hoped that the economic potential of e-commerce and the increased transparency brought about by new technologies should have a positive impact upon human rights.

However, we recognise that world-wide respect for human dignity is more than a click away. We think a major challenge for our industry is to ensure that our products and services have the greatest positive impact on human dignity.

This site examines BT's approach and activities in our supply and use chains, and the issues of privacy and freedom of expression.

Better World Links:

- BT Global Compact Case Study

See also:

- Amnesty International www.amnesty.org
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/index.htm>
- UN Global Compact <http://www.unglobalcompact.org>

Supply and Use Chains

When many of us think about the impact business has on people’s human rights, it is the supply chain that first occurs to us.

Businesses purchase a huge amount of very different things from all around the world, and BT is no exception. From high-tech components to engineers’ uniforms, someone has made all of these products.

Supply chain

We have established the aspiration that the working conditions in our supply chain meet standards based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labour Organisation Conventions. Details are available in the Suppliers section of this site.

Use chain

Recently we have also been discussing with other organisations the human rights impact of the ‘use chain’. The use chain is the human rights impact of our products and services after they are sold.

This includes the misuse of our products and services, for example by undertaking illegal activities on the internet. The privacy and freedom of expression sections of this site relate to other use-chain impacts of our products and services.

Use-chain impacts are different from supply-chain because they often relate to enhancing positive aspects. BT’s products and services can often increase the human dignity of those who use them by fostering learning and communication.

The concept of a use-chain for our products and services is new. We will continue to explore what it means for our company.

Better World Links:

- Ethical Trading

Privacy

Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor attacks upon his honour and reputation.

Privacy is not a new issue, but developments in information and communication technology have raised some new questions about it.

It may be, for example, that some abuses of privacy result as much from a misunderstanding of the way new technologies interact with the old rules, as from malicious intent.

Privacy is a human rights issue when seen in the context of the use-chain.

The internet in particular is prompting a lively discussion about the meaning of privacy.

Protecting online customers

If BT customers in the UK wish to use our website to manage their account, check their bill and buy various products or services, they have to register first – which involves the disclosure of certain personal information. We have a specific privacy policy covering this situation.

BT Openworld also has a detailed Acceptable Use Policy <http://www.btopenworld.com/helpnb/terms> which shows how we protect the privacy of approximately 1.3 million customers when using our on-line services (e-mail etc). It also concerns ‘defamation of character’ and states that defamatory material will be removed from our servers.

Customers’ preferences can be tracked on-line in order to offer them tailored services and special offers. However an ‘opt-out’ option is available for those who prefer.

Protecting all customers

We know that privacy is very important to all our customers, not just those online. BT complies with and is registered under the Data Protection Act in the UK, and we take all reasonable care to prevent any unauthorised access to personal data.

BT’s Caller Display and Call Return services in the UK can make customer numbers available to those who they telephone. Dialling 141 before calling can prevent this, and we are also able to withhold numbers permanently free of charge.

Customers are also able to screen out most direct marketing calls by registering with the UK Telephone Preference Service.

British Telecommunications plc (BT) operates under a licence granted by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, under section 7 of the UK Telecommunications Act. This means we only use personal details for the reason that they were entrusted to us and don’t pass them on to other parts of the business.

Sometimes personal details do have to be disclosed – for example in the prevention or detection of a criminal offence.

We also have several policies and codes relating to the use of BT telephones, e-mail and the internet by BT staff.

All staff have been made aware that e-mail and internet access may be monitored and that certain types of message and use of the internet are considered inappropriate while at work and using our system. This isn't an unusual policy and we are sensible about the use of personal e-mail for example. However, we are a business and have a responsibility to protect our system.

See also:

- Universal declaration of Human Rights
- BT Privacy Policy – its on bt.com home page
- BT Acceptable Use Policy <http://www.btopenworld.com/helpnb/terms>

Freedom of Expression

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states;

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a critical means of promoting human rights in general.

However, like many of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, new technological advances bring new challenges to and interpretations of free expression.

Protecting children

One of the key challenges is balancing the right to freedom of expression with the need to protect children online.

BT is a board member of the Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA) <http://www.icra.org>, which aims to “protect children from potentially harmful material; and, to protect free speech on the internet.”

They do this by asking web authors to give details of what is and isn't present on their site. From this they generate a content label (a short piece of computer code) which the author adds to the site. Parents can then set their internet browser to accept or reject access to certain types of content. The key point for freedom of expression is that ICRA does not itself rate internet content – the content providers do so if they wish to participate.

We have our own programme, BT Safe Surf, http://www.btsafersurfing.com/safe_surfing/index.html which gives detailed information for parents and also user friendly training for children http://www.groupbt.com/ict/kids_zone/safesurf/ themselves.

And, of course, we co-operate with legal authorities in issues of illegal content, such as child pornography, racism and anti-Semitism on the internet.

Online content

A new development for BT is our involvement in online content. This raises questions about what type of content we provide through our business partnerships. We now have brand guidelines which state that we will not endorse any activity which promotes the consumption of tobacco, alcohol, gambling or pornography.

We also react to complaints about content hosted on our servers. BT sits on the funding council of the Internet Watch Foundation, <http://www.iwf.org.uk/index.htm> who notify us of illegal content stored on our servers and webspace.

We have also contributed to the work of The Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS).

Part of ICSTIS' remit involves registering certain types of phone service in the UK, such as dating services, betting, fundraising and services of a sexual nature. This allows for free speech while ensuring protection of users, legality and quality.

The future

These are difficult waters. With so many different national approaches to censorship and access to information, companies such as BT have to balance our support for free expression with our commitment to abide by the law, wherever we operate.

But we believe that, ultimately, developments in information and communications technology will have a beneficial impact on this and other rights. And BT is determined to play a key part in the debate.

See also:

- Safe surfing for children http://www.groupbt.com/ict/kids_zone/safesurf/
- Internet Content Rating Association <http://www.icra.org>
- BT Safe Surf http://www.btsafesurfing.com/safe_surfing/index.html
- Internet Watch Foundation <http://www.iwf.org.uk/index.html>
- Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services