



**Friday, 13 June 2014 -  
The end of 084/087 numbers?**

## **Government cuts off costly calls**

On 13 December 2013, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills gave six months notice of the introduction of a series of new consumer protection measures under the headline "[Government cuts off costly calls](#)". These come into force on **Friday 13 June 2014**. Other measures provide some useful tidying up, but it is the requirement for telephone contact numbers to be at the "basic rate" (i.e. beginning 01/02/03) that has grabbed the headlines.

Whilst some traders are hanging on until the last minute and some may not comply, we are delighted that most are now ceasing their use of 0845, 0844 and 0871 numbers for complaints and enquiries from customers, as demanded by the new regulations. Even some of those not directly covered by the regulations, e.g. banks, are doing the same. **This is a quiet revolution**, as few have been ready to make a fuss over the fact that they have stopped ripping off their customers.

The **fair telecoms campaign** is proud to have played a significant part in ensuring that these provisions, arising from an EU Directive, have been properly and fully implemented in the UK. Alongside government Guidance for the public sector, and further regulations to be introduced by Ofcom next year, we now see the rip-off from misused 084 and 087 numbers coming to an end.

## **080 is not yet freephone**

We regret the fact that some have been misled into retaining, or even switching to, 0800 numbers. These will not become "freephone" until June 2015 and currently represent very costly calls for mobile users (up to 40p per minute). Most calls to 03 numbers are made at no cost to the caller, so 0800 numbers are not only more expensive to operate, they are currently of little benefit - other than ensuring income to the telephone companies from every call! Apart from some exceptional situations, we see 03 numbers as being the best for those needing a UK-wide number.

Those who are happy to bear the higher cost of 0800 numbers from June 2015, must offer mobile callers a "basic rate" 01/02/03 alternative for now (unless special arrangements have been made).

## **Many are being ripped off on their ordinary calls**

The overwhelming majority of telephone users should not be paying call charges on calls to "basic rate" 01/02/03 numbers. The most economic way to pay for these calls, even for relatively light users, is by choosing the appropriate bundle or calling plan to suit the times when they make calls, or the number of calls they make. Penalty charges for calling outside the chosen plan or bundle are typically excessive (indeed penal), but many fail to recognise this, or falsely believe that inclusive plans are some kind of additional feature, for heavy users only.

Anyone who finds that they are paying to call a "basic rate" number should look closely at their choice of calling plan. Penalty charges should not be quoted as if they were the "normal" call cost.

## **Premiums to be declared from June 2015**

With effect from June 2015, those who continue to use 084 and 087 numbers will have to declare the premium "Service Charge" (of up to 13p per minute) from which they benefit. We see this as fair, but only where such a charge can be justified for some form of special service provided, over and above normal telephone contact.

