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Centre for Consumer Studies,
IIPA , New Delhi

HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ **Unethical Charging of fees by PSU**
- ◆ **Telemarketing Calls**
- ◆ **4th Training Programme**

SCHKRMP Project

The Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India in partnership with the Centre for Consumer Studies, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi has set up a National Nodal Agency known as the State Consumer Helpline Knowledge Resource Management Portal (SCHKRMP). The Knowledge Resource Management Portal will coordinate and monitor the activities of state consumer helplines' (SCH), provide solutions and advisory services to these helplines, maintain knowledge and database, build capacity of the SCHs' personnel and provide for integration and convergence. The purpose of monitoring is to ensure that all activities of the project are implemented; the IT platform is properly used; complaints are handled appropriately; campaign themes are aligned to the overall objectives; and SCHs are equipped with necessary resources. The Knowledge Resource Management Portal will work in close coordination with the various state governments and other stakeholders.



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Infrastructure setup

In order to fulfil the aims and objectives of the PORTAL and also to resolve the problems and queries of the consumers through state consumer helpline, IT based Knowledge Resource Management Portal has been setup in IIPA. The Portal has got two separate high end servers for application and database, PCs, Printers, fax machine, laptop etc. The application which has been got developed by Govt. of India is being deployed on the Application Server at IIPA, the access to which shall be available to all state consumer helplines through high speed internet. Similarly, the centralised knowledgebase database shall be hosted on IIPA Database Server.



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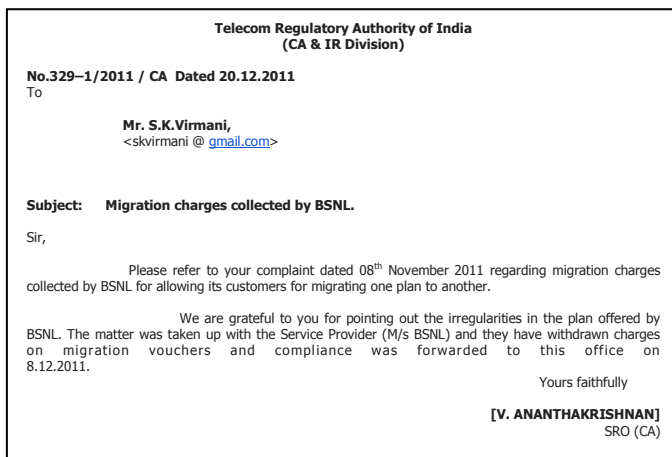
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Unethical charging of migration fee by PSU

As per telecom regulations, the telecom service providers are to offer their subscribers migration from one tariff plan to another without charging any migration fee. It was noticed from the web-site of BSNL, a PSU telecom service provider, that the company was charging migration fee ranging from Re.1/- to Rs. 5/- per migration request.

The matter was first brought to the notice of BSNL that did not pay any attention. The matter was further referred to TRAI for their intervention who understood the issue and advised BSNL to withdraw the same. TRAI ensured compliance of the regulations by BSNL and further confirmed us vide their letter No. **No.329 -1/2011 / CA dtd 20.12.2011**, the content of which are quoted below.



“Please refer to your complaint dated 08th November 2011 regarding migration charges collected by BSNL for allowing its customers for migrating one plan to another.

We are grateful to you for pointing out the irregularities in the plan offered by BSNL. The matter was taken up with the Service Provider (M/s BSNL) and they have withdrawn charges on migration vouchers and compliance was forwarded to this office on 8.12.2011.”

The validity of cheque/ drafts/ pay orders/ bankers cheques now stands for 3 months w.e.f 1st April 2012.



Reserve Bank of India vide notification No. RBI/2011-12/251 dtd. 04/11/2011 has directed that w.e.f 1st April 2012, banks should not make payment of cheques/drafts/pay orders/banker's cheques if they are presented beyond the period of three months from the date of such instruments.

Project Manager, SCHKRMP at Jaipur with Rajasthan State Consumer Helpline



एमएलएम कंपनियों की उपभोक्ता कानून के दायरे में

जयपुर मल्टी लेवल मार्केटिंग कंपनियों उपभोक्ता संरक्षण दायरे में आती है। इनके द्वारा दिए नुकसान की क्षतिपूर्ति उपभोक्ता कानून के तहत की जा सकती है। कंप्यूमर्स एक्शन एण्ड नेटवर्क सोसायटी के पदाधिकारियों एवं उपभोक्ता हेल्पलाइन कमियों के सशक्तिकरण प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रम में रविवार को भारतीय उपभोक्ता परिषद के राष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष डॉ. अनन्त शर्मा ने ये विचार व्यक्त किए। भारतीय लोक प्रशासन संस्थान के परियोजना प्रबंधक एस.के.विस्मान ने उपभोक्ताओं को सशक्त बनाने की आवश्यकता जताई।

Amount deducted by Airtel for no service

A complaint pertaining to VAS was received from one of Airtel's subscriber from Rajasthan through Rajasthan State Consumer Helpline on 23rd January 2012 complaining deduction of amount of Rs. 83/- from his prepaid No. 9829524528 on two occasions on 16/01/2012 for downloading games while the subscriber refused to have downloaded any game. We escalated the customer complaint to Airtel Head office and the amount was refunded back to the subscriber on 24th January 2012.



Consumer Advocacy

Complaint :

"Having a prepaid Airtel connection, I purchased a SMS Pack RC 62 in February that gives the subscriber 1000 Local/National SMS for a period of 30 days. I had never requested for auto-renewal of this SMS Pack for the coming month, thus, I was surprised to receive a SMS from Airtel that stated "Your SMS service @Rs.62 will be auto-renewed in next 72 hours. If you wish to deactivate dial *777*0#". When I have neither requested, nor consented to auto-renew my SMS Pack in the first place, where is the question of deactivating auto-renewal? Airtel, as usual, refused to register my complaint saying that it is their internal protocol to force auto-renewal upon their subscribers, which was when I approached the consumer helpline Portal,IIPA. They agreed that such an action by Airtel was unwarranted and advised me on how to escalate the issue further. Though it took more than a month, but my amount was refunded and I was compensated for unlawful deduction of balance from my account. I would like to thank IIPA for helping me in the resolution of my complaint. I'm sure there would be many more customers like me who are being duped by these service providers. So, I would request IIPA to take up the matter at policy level so as to ensure that such policies of unethical business practices by telecom service providers are scrapped.

--Dr. Nitish/9717966096

As part of business strategies like any other industry, Telecom companies also have been announcing certain special tariff Packages which could be beneficial for the telecom subscribers. However, such packages may not be suitable for all categories of subscribers. Hence the subscribers are advised to analyse their requirement with respect to the benefits as built up in such tariff packages. As an example a student would be interested in subscribing to a special tariff which offers him/her SMSes which are either free or having the lowest tariff charges. It may also be possible that such packages may not be beneficial for the subscribers all the time. It has been further noticed that the special packages are put on Auto-renewal without a subscriber's consent so that when the validity of the package gets expired, the charges for such renewals are deducted from their pre-paid balance.



We are of the view that the packages should not be put on auto-renewal without consent and that the renewal should carry explicit consent of the subscriber. We had received a complaint from one of Airtel customer whose special tariff package which was subscribed for a month only, was automatically renewed and the company deducted Rs. 62/- from his prepaid balance. While we have ensured that the complainant got refund of the amount so deducted on auto-renewal in a case where subscriber was not interested in renewing the package, we have also drawn attention of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India and requested for an issue of advisory to all telecom companies to ensure that no added value service or special tariff package is put on "Auto-renewal" and money deducted unless it is requested/authorised by the subscriber. TRAI is yet to agree to our view point of treating "auto renewal without consent" as a kind of unethical business practice that needs to be checked through an explicit consent of the telecom subscribers. The telecom companies should seek consent as to whether they would like to get it auto renewed with an option of Yes/ No instead of asking customers to deactivate if they desire so and ask for refund of the amount so deducted. Meanwhile, if any of the subscriber is aggrieved of "Auto-renewal" of Value Added Service/Special Tariff Voucher or activation of unsubscribed value added services, may send their complaints to schkrmp.iipa@gmail.com

The telecom subscribers who are not registered with NCPR can also ensure not to get disturbed due to telemarketing calls while they are in meeting, driving or in roaming etc.

The regulations on The Telecom Commercial Communications 2011 as announced by TRAI have become effective from 27th September 2011.



The regulations stipulate that:

1. All telemarketers are required to register with TRAI for the purpose of telemarketing calls.
2. All telemarketing calls have to originate from a number starting with 140 series as per DOT numbering plan. Hence any call bearing number 140 xx xx xxx will be a telemarketing call.
3. All telemarketing SMS are to be issued from a 9 alpha-numeric identifier code. All telemarketing calls are to be carried out between 9.00 AM to 9.00 PM only.
4. While, telemarketers cannot make any commercial call to the subscribers registered with NCPR, the unregistered subscribers will also be able to opt the call to be attended or not as he /she will be able to identify whether the call is of commercial nature.
5. Any commercial call not originated from 140 series number is a violation of TRAI regulations on Unsolicited Commercial Communication. In case any of the subscriber who is not registered with NCPR, gets a commercial call from a number other than 140 series, he may complain to the terminating service provider and TRAI so that the telemarketing industry is disciplined to adhere to the TRAI regulations for Unsolicited Commercial Communications. Our advisors in consumer helpline across the states would offer their services in assisting/ guiding you to escalate your consumer issues.

Forthcoming training programme

IIPA has scheduled its 4th Training programme for the coordinators and advisors of State Consumer Helplines during 23rd to 27th April 2012 at New Delhi. Nominations have been invited from the States of Chattisgarh, Tripura, Utrakkhand, Karnataka, Puducherry, Assam etc. The training shall be able to build up the capacity of the advisors in advise giving process and facilitate consumer empowerment in the States.

CONSUMER HELPLINES

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