



## Ofcom Consumer Panel submission to the Convergence Think Tank

1. The Ofcom Consumer Panel welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the Convergence Think Tank convened by DCMS and BERR. We think that to achieve a convergence dividend for society the think tank will have to root convergence in an understanding of consumer needs.
2. The Consumer Panel commissioned research (soon to be published) which examines the attitudes of early adopters to converging technologies - focusing on current products and services. The research provides a wider insight into what makes convergence work for consumers and citizens, and why. The following is part of the research findings.

### Communications technology meets a set of timeless, universal needs

3. A technology's worth and success in the market is determined by how well it meets a set of timeless, universal personal needs and how important a need is to the individual. These needs can be broadly categorised into five overarching universal themes: family, friends and love; connection with the wider world; safety and security; entertainment; and self-expression. Some of the myriad ways technology meets these needs everyday are:

#### Family, friends & love

- Call the kids/wife/parents
- Text friends to organise meeting up
- Get in touch with old school friends on Facebook
- Watch television together as a family
- Find a date online

#### Safety & security

- Get in touch with the kids at any time
- Text to say got home safely
- Keep the television on as company
- Look up diagnoses on the internet
- Check Google Maps on a mobile phone if lost

## Entertainment

- Play games on a mobile phone when travelling
- Play multi-player games online through a console
- Record 'Lost' on 'Series Link'
- Find and watch a missed television episode on the internet

## Connection with the wider world

- Watch a popular drama on television
- Get 'Football 24/7' on a mobile phone
- Surf the internet
- Check out a new band's MySpace page

## Self-expression

- Research a hobby on the internet
- Take photos on a mobile phone whilst out and about
- Design a social networking page
- Upload a video to YouTube
- Choose a new mobile phone in pink

## Simplicity is a key to success

4. Before a product or service is taken-up consumers consider other factors, such as whether a service or device is too difficult to install, learn, or too time consuming. If so, consumers quickly lose interest in the product.

## A sense of permanence is key

5. People are aware that communications technologies can be quickly superseded by the 'next big thing'. Before investing time, money, or effort, consumers wish to know whether a device will last for a meaningful period of time – typically months and years, not days and weeks.

## Value is more important than cost

6. Consumers are astute in understanding what they are willing to pay for a communications service or product. The questions they ask are: Does a communications technology represent good value? How well does a service or device meet a need? How simple is it? Does it have a sense of permanence?

## The positives of communication technologies are personal

7. Consumers articulate the benefits of technology in terms of the small everyday effects it has on their lives e.g., texting a flatmate to pick up a pint of milk on their way home, or finding the lowest price for a holiday online.

### **The negatives of communications technology are seen as societal**

8. Consumers think the negatives technology brings are societal, for example: the loss of face-to-face communication; children don't play outside anymore or they have shorter attention spans.

### **In the end, positives outweigh negatives**

9. Consumers concentrate on the positives, paying little attention to the negatives. Their own lives and needs are more tangible and relevant than the effects on society as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

10. In closing we would like to restate that people interact and react to technology and communications services and devices based on personal 'needs' and the positive benefits that a service or product brings to their lives. They are not looking to purchase the 'next big thing', but for a sense of permanence in a product or service.
11. We believe the Convergence Think Tank should think about how technological convergence might bring consumer and citizen benefits that fit in with the way people live their lives, and may wish to do so in the future. One possibility is for the think tank to consider this as one of its seminar themes.