

Government and industry partnership initiative to raise consumer rights awareness

Quick Summary

The Know Your Consumer Rights Campaign was led by BIS in partnership with the Office of Fair Trading and Consumer Focus. It worked in partnership with the retail industry to edu-

cate consumers about their legal retail rights, directing them to Consumer Direct (the UK's national consumer rights advice agency) for information needed to take action when required.

What was the context?

The Policy Challenge

Macro context: It was estimated that around a third (34 per cent) of consumers of the British adult population experience at least one problem related to consumer rights in a year. 26.5 million problems are estimated to have been experienced in the UK over the last 12 months, amounting to £6.6 billion in value. Whilst many complaints are resolved satisfactorily, BIS Consumer Law Review found that there was still significant consumer detriment left unresolved.

The challenge: To identify ways to reduce consumer detriment without excessively increasing regulatory burdens on business, most of which were acting responsibly.

Why was taking no action not an option?

As described earlier, consumer detriment was significant, and consultation indicated something had to be done.

Why was a regulation not chosen as an option?

BIS reviewed the consumer protection regime in the UK and found that its protection was on a par with the best in the world. There were many support facilities available for those who were seeking to resolve complaints.

Why was a partnership awareness campaign preferred as an alternative?

Research commissioned by BIS found many people were unaware of support facilities available to them, and that they were making purchase decisions based on wrong understanding of their rights. This was leading to conflicts between consumers and businesses even in cases when they had been fully compliant with the law. As well as being a source of frustration for both parties, this was imposing substantial cost to businesses in complaints handling and compensation.

Further research identified that the most effective place to communicate to consumers about their rights was in a retail environment.

It was felt that a successful consumer campaign would benefit:

- Consumers—who would make informed purchase decisions and receive support to resolve disputes if necessary; and
- Businesses—who could educate their staff to better understand consumer law, reduce complaints handling costs, and improve corporate image.

What was delivered (mechanism)?

Know Your Consumer Rights Campaign

The campaign was led by BIS in partnership with the Office of Fair Trading and Consumer Focus and worked with retailers as well as Trading Standards. Three delivery phases were: September and Christmas 2009, and Spring 2010.

What we did

BIS signed up 11 major retail partners covering a range of sectors from home improvements to women's clothing – TK Maxx, Asda, B&Q, Wickes, Blockbuster, Gray & Osborne, Asos.com, figleaves.com, whatafind.com, homesense.com and koodos.com.

Just under 1.3m co-branded leaflets and posters were distributed in three phases by retail partners direct to their shoppers. The leaflets reminded shoppers of their basic legal rights, signposting to Consumer Direct for more information.

The campaign logo and messages featured on partner websites, e-zines, catalogues and some partner Twitter / Facebook pages.

BIS also worked with stakeholders including Connexions (the advice body for young people), Citizen's Advice and local Trading Standards services to disseminate messages to consumers.

The campaign was supported by bursts of national and regional PR in print, TV and online media.

Top line results

Post-launch campaign evaluation showed 30% of adults interviewed recalled the campaign.

Daily website traffic to Consumer Direct increased by ten per cent during the life of the campaign.

43% of consumers interviewed said they were more likely to exercise their rights in the future, after seeing the campaign.

The research showed increased recall of one of the three key messages - goods must be fit for purpose - from 11% to 20%.

All this was possible, even with a relatively small budget, as it utilised retailers' existing channels to distribute the messages.



How did we make this happen?

The Development Process

- Used **partnership marketing agency** to connect with **key retailers** to encourage them to distribute the campaign materials and messages, in store and online.
- Helped **small medium enterprises (SMEs)** educate their employees about consumer rights, so that they in turn could inform consumers:
 - held forums with SMEs to discuss training materials
 - produced an education toolkit to be distributed by SME trade associations to their members.
- Brought on board **enforcement community** - Office of Fair Trading, Trading Standards, Trading Standards Institute, Local Government Regulation (formerly LACORS) - and staged an exhibition at the Trading Standards Institute Annual Conference 2009 to cascade through their connections.
- Worked closely with **Consumer organisations**— Consumer Focus, Citizens Advice, Connexions.
- The Consumer Minister launched the campaign during National Consumer Week at Bluewater Shopping Centre.



Lessons learnt

- **Have the core audience in mind** when developing campaign materials and selecting partner organisations. The consumer research identified consumer rights awareness to be lowest amongst people with poorer, less well-educated backgrounds (C2DE demographic) and among 16-24 year olds. The BIS team therefore worked closely with organisations that had strong links with these segments, such as retailers whose customer base included high numbers from the C2DE demographic, and key stakeholders, e.g. Connexions (advice group among 16-24 year olds)
- **Good business stakeholder intelligence** is essential in recruiting businesses to act as partners and distribute materials. Evidence of previous successful work and relationships with business organisations is critical in “opening doors” and bringing businesses on board.
- **Be creative.** A low-cost radio advert was produced and offered as a ‘filler’ for un-sold radio air time. The advert has had 5,508 plays and achieved free airplay worth £156,227 – a very strong result.



■ Goods and services must fit the description given
■ Goods and services should be of satisfactory quality
■ Goods and services must be suitable for purpose

For clear practical advice call Consumer Direct



The Team / Further information

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Want to know more about alternatives?

- Contact the BRE: alternatives@bis.gsi.gov.uk

