

CONSUMER CARE SOCIETY®
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Sri S K Gupta, Advisor (QoS)
Telecom Regulatory Authority of India
New Delhi
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Date 29th August 2010

Dear Sir,
Subject: Comments on TRAI No. CP 10/2010 date 2nd August 2010

1. We are happy that a well written Consultation Paper, recapitulating all the previous efforts of TRAI on this very important issue as well as providing a summary of the current practices adopted by a large number of countries to serve as guidance has been put out by TRAI. It was indeed time such a review was due and the CP has come at the appropriate time.
2. That there is a need for a total overhaul of the entire spectrum of consumer grievance redressal processes, whether it is tariff issues, or guaranteed performance of service quality or other issues, there is no doubt. The importance placed on this aspect by the service providers as felt by the customers is totally inadequate. Perhaps for every call received at the call centre crying for help, there could be as many as a hundred unable to get through to the CC for various technical and other reasons. Call Centre (CC) performance is therefore the first and has a very critical role.
3. What is not understood is why service providers did not initiate really substantial efforts in this direction during all these long years and compelled TRAI and CAGs to continuously express their concerns. We have reached some 700 million subscribers in mobiles in a short span of about 15 years, an indeed scorching rate of increase year after year. We are absolutely sure that if the service providers had taken serious note and action for improving the service quality and worked for creating a model of delivering “service delight” to each of the service user, the picture would have been totally different and a substantial bottom line as well. It is necessary for the service provider to realize that “quality” is in fact not costly at all, as lack of quality is “expensive” due to frustration, lost opportunity, bad publicity, loss of client, in fructuous employment of equipment and personnel in temporary fixes of issues, so on. This is truth and well understood all the world over, whether it is manufacture or services sector. At least now we hope these issues will be addressed holistically. Apparently either growth was underestimated and so the additions for infrastructure, equipment enhancements and human resources or the numbers were too big a challenge to cope with. India could have been a model in tackling such a huge growth successfully, sending its own message across the world. Any way better now at least than never.

4 We are enclosing here our comments on the various issues brought out in the CP and hope it will be of use in formulating TRAI's Recommendations.

Regards

G S Gundu Rao, CCS, Bangalore

Enclosure: SUMMARY OF ISSUES FOR CONSULTATION and our views:

5.1. What should be the benchmark for the parameter –Provision of a landline Telephone after registration of demand□? (Reference Para 2.11)

Answer: The benchmark for monitoring purposes can continue to be –provisioning of telephone within 7 days (subject to technical feasibility) from the date of registration for new telephone connection. We feel that there must be an outer limit for provision of any facility, hence this can remain. The service providers can give a firm commitment of the date by which this will be provided, when accepting the booking and if they fail, then the SP should immediately pay up compensation to the customer with no conditions (within 7 days by a Bank Draft, whether or not customer agrees to wait further.

5.2. Do you agree that parameter –Provision of a landline Telephone after registration of demand□ may be removed from the list of parameters requiring mandatory compliance to the Authority? (Reference Para 2.11)

Answer: No advantage by removing. On the other hand, the SPs will work diligently for meeting this target. If none, nothing to worry about! Hence let it remain.

5.3. Do you suggest any changes to the benchmark for the parameter for landline fault repair, including rent rebate for delay in rectification of fault? If so, please provide details. (Reference Para 2.16)

A: No

5.4. What framework do you suggest to ensure payment/adjustment of rebate for prolonged landline phone fault as per QoS regulations? (Reference Para 2.16)

A: A Pay Order or Bank Draft by Registered Post with Acknowledgement Due for this amount should be issued within seven days to the registered address of customer which can be cashed

5.5. How do you propose to ensure its effectiveness? (Reference Para 2.16)

A: No comments

5.6. Do you propose any changes to the existing provisions relating to shift of a landline telephone connection? (Reference Para 2.18)

A: No

5.7. Do you suggest any change in existing provisions to ensure timely termination of service/closure? If so, please provide details. (Reference Para 2.22)

A; No.

5.8. Do you agree with the suggestions for seeking explicit consent of the customer, in writing or SMS or e-mail or FAX, to continue with the service, once a request has been made for termination of service? (Reference Para 2.22)

A: Definitely YES

5.9. Do you agree with the time period of four weeks provided for resolution of billing/ charging complaints? If not, please suggest alternatives. (Reference Para 2.25)

A: Yes, If SP unable to resolve within this period, compensation to be paid for period beyond at 18% PA and a minimum amount of say Rs. Fifty again by DD or PO

5.10. Do you agree with present provisions regarding period of one week for applying credit/waiver/adjustment to customer's account upon resolution of billing complaint?(Reference Para 2.28)

A: Yes.

5.11. What should be the time period and terms and conditions for refund of deposits after closure/termination of service? (Reference Para 2.32)

A; No comments

5.12. What steps do you suggest for timely refund of deposits after closure/ termination of service? (Reference Para 2.32)

A; No comments

5.13. Do you suggest any changes to the present benchmark of 15 days for the parameter –Service provisioning/ Activation Time□? (Reference Para 2.34)

A; No.

5.14. How the present provisions can be effectively implemented? (Reference Para 2.34)

A; At the time of acceptance and acknowledgement of booking, the SP must indicate the “ready by date” and also “customers premises requirement to be ready by date”. Delays beyond this due to customer's delays cannot be to the account of SP

5.15. Do you suggest any changes to present benchmark for the parameter –Fault Repair/ Restoration Time□ and provision for rebates? (Reference Para 2.36)

A: No

5.16. Do you propose any change in the existing system of selection of tariff plans for the audit of metering and billing system of service providers to make whole exercise more effective? (Reference Para 2.40)

A; TRAI has the experience and views of the auditor and can best decide

5.17. What method of alert do you prefer for premium service calls (Call rates higher than normal local call charges rates) before such calls are put through? (Reference Para 2.42)

A; A suggestion: Announce in local language : “next call costs you xxxx per second. If you want to continue press “AAAA”. If no signal to continue is recorded, then automatically terminate the premium call.

5.18. What information in your view should be provided to prepaid subscribers immediately on completion of every call to facilitate him understand his usages and verify correctness of the deductions? (Reference Para 2.44)

A: No frills info in the following format and order suggested:

- Last call duration in seconds
- Last call charge xxx Rupees
- Balance amount in credit xxx Rs
- Date of expiry for credit amount xx

TRAI to strictly ban additional info such as promos or distractions.

5.19. What information do you feel is necessary after recharging a prepaid connection to ensure complete value for money immediately after recharging/top up? (Reference Para 2.46)

A: Administrative charge is expensive for small recharges and works better for large recharges, frankly do not know how customers for small recharges can be assisted.

5.20. In your opinion, what should be done to increase the awareness about the call centre? (Reference Para 3.46)

A: A suggestion: soon after the service provider’s logo, display call centre access numbers, repeated frequently has a better recall chance.

5.21. How can we enhance accessibility of call centers for booking the complaints? (Reference Para 3.53)

A: We see an urgent need for a round the clock thorough analysis of all the network segments where the call centers are operating to provide detailed info on dimensioning of all elements, number analysis to focus on vulnerable sections of the network. This study should show up causes for poor efficiency and reasons for not being able to meet the requirements for failing to meet the QoS specifications. Once the problem is diagnosed the solutions can also be worked out and implemented by stages. This is a basic requirement and has to be undertaken, if not yet done. If it is already completed then an audit of results and implementation will be the next step.

We presume at both the national and regional network operating and monitoring centers there would be alarms to show up segments where performances are below a specified threshold level. This should provide the necessary data to start corrective actions, both at the overall and at the micro level.

5.22. What are your suggestions about the location of the menu option for talking to a customer care agent/executive in the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system of the Call Centre/ customer care number, for facilitating easy access to the call centre agent/executive? Should it be the first sub-menu at the third layer, the first layer being the choice of language and the second layer being service menu? (Reference Para 3.53)

A: Services of specialized visual advertisement companies may offer clear clues regarding (if) background sounds, order, colors, size, type of fonts and so on, which might be based on sampling and analysis of data.

5.23. Should TRAI mandate all service providers to provide complaint booking number accessible from other telecom networks also for complaint booking in case of service disruption? Should such call centre numbers also be toll free? (Reference Para 3.53)

A: Yes.

5.24. Do you agree that docket numbers should also be sent to subscribers' through SMS who is booking complaint? (Reference Para 3.56)

A: Yes definitely.

5.25. Will sending of docket number of complaints to subscribers through SMS help them to pursue their complaints and increase effectiveness of consumer grievance redressal system? (Reference Para 3.56)

A: Yes definitely

5.26. Do you feel that unique format for docket numbers across the service providers will increase monitoring and speedy redressal of subscriber complaints? (Reference Para 3.56)

A: Yes, a suggestion: usually there will be a string of common digits unique to the serving call centre for and followed by another unique complaint serial number (again prefixed by operator or desk identity). Hence to follow on the complaint, it is essential only to repeat these last digits. If this presumption is correct, then only these could appear in a distinct color and font for drawing subscriber's attention.

5.27. Do you agree that customers need to be informed about redressal of their complaints before closure of the docket? If so, will it be desirable to inform the subscriber about status of the complaints through SMS before closure of the docket number? (Reference Para 3.61)

A: Yes.

5.28. What parameters should be considered to determine the effectiveness of complaint redressal at call centre level? How could effectiveness of complaint redressal at call centre level be measured? (Reference Para 3.66)

A: No comments.

5.29. In your views, will it be feasible to indicate tentative time frame for redressal of consumer grievance? Will it increase subscriber satisfaction level? (Reference Para 3.69)

A: Very definitely "Yes". This prepares the Customer to wait. However SP must realize, if these are not met or bettered, progressively it will result in loss of faith.

5.30. What are your suggestions for using complaints received at call centre for improvement in QoS and processes adopted by a service provider? Do you perceive any need for TRAI to oversee such analysis and monitor corrective actions? (Reference Para 3.74)

A: There is ample information available in the public domain mostly paid reference books and Journal dealing with the topic of extraction of actionable intelligence from a large set of data in telecom networks . These need to be studied thoroughly and then applied with caution in the case of Indian telecom sector .

Hence suggest commissioning a study project on this issue with Members of deep interest rather than for namesake. Rewards are going to be definitely mind-stimulating with certainly commercial benefits. This deserves serious attention of the industry and TRAI.

If it is felt desirable, then our Society, if invited gladly cooperate in such study.

5.31. In your opinion, what should be done to create awareness about the Nodal Officer? (Reference Para 3.77)

“ TCPRG regulations 2007 already mandates the service provider to publish the details of Nodal Officer through a public notice in Hindi/ English language and in an Indian language in circulation in the service area at least once in 12 months and also through telephone bills issued to the consumers. For creating further awareness about the Nodal Officer, it is being argued that service providers may be mandated to send contact details of nodal officer through SMS or the same can be saved in the SIM card of existing users using Over the Air transfer facility. SIM can also be pre-configured giving the details of call centre, Nodal Officer and Appellate Authority.”

A: This has failed is no surprise, who can recall a piece of information received once a year, unless he is a wizard?, So also information on SIM card will not be recallable as it goes inside the hand instrument.

However another suggestion in the CP namely “ Another way of creating awareness about the Nodal Officer is by way of introducing a uniform number across all service providers, separately for basic telephone service, cellular mobile telephone service and Broadband service. Common number can either be identified by the industry or can be allocated by DoT.”

A: This will have a better success.

5.32. What should be the maximum permissible time in which nodal officer must acknowledge the receipt of the grievance and indicate a unique number for future reference? (Reference Para 3.80)

A: No comments. Naturally the customer expects this nominal action not to take too much time or better this be an automatic process.

5.33. Do you suggest that the nodal officer give an indicative time for redressal of grievance while communicating receipt of grievance? Will it boost the confidence of the subscriber? (Reference Para 3.80)

A: Very definitely “Yes” and this duration should be positively less than CC as the CC would have completed all the work and located the problem area. This

info will prepare the Customer to wait. However the nodal officer must realize if these are not met or bettered, progressively it will result in loss of faith.

5.34. Will it be feasible to communicate the tentative time for redressal of the grievances and ensure redressal within prescribed timeframe? (Reference Para 3.80)

A: Very definitely “Yes”

5.35. What framework do you propose for timely disposal of consumer grievances and feedback on status of grievance redressal before disposal? (Reference Para 3.82)

Probably for good reason of freedom to SPs TRAI “had refrained from specifying any geographical coverage for Nodal Officer and it was left to the service providers to appoint as many Nodal Officers as per their requirements subject to a minimum of one nodal officer per service area.”

A: Now we expect the SPs to have a system of allotment of Nodal Officers among the CC locations or other criteria, hence the NOs can and should contact the customers and acknowledge the complaint thru the CC and leave his contact info.

5.36. In your opinion, what should be done to improve the accessibility of nodal officers? (Reference Para 3.87)

A: See the answer to 5.35. Also the CC staff when they transfer the complaint to NOs they must give the contact of the concerned NO dealing with this issue to the customer.

5.37. How would effectiveness of Nodal Officer be monitored? (Reference Para 3.87)

A: If any method is in practice for measuring the CC performance, then same can be adopted for NOs also.

5.38. What should be the parameters and framework to judge the effectiveness of the nodal officers? (Reference Para 3.87)

A: No comments.

5.39. In your opinion, what should be the time frame for redressal of grievances by the Nodal Officer? (Reference Para 3.89)

A: Very definitely this duration should be positively less than CC as the CC centre would have completed all the prelim work and located the problem area. This info will prepare the Customer to wait. However the nodal officer must realize if these are not met or bettered, progressively it will result in loss of faith.

5.40. What should be done to ensure redressal of consumer grievances within prescribed timeframe?(Reference Para 3.89)

A: No comments.

5.41. What framework do you perceive for regular analysis of consumer grievances at Nodal officer level to identify systemic failures and to initiate

necessary actions? Do you perceive the need to mandate such provisions? (Reference Para 3.91)

A: First part: No comments as it depends on many specific network parameters. Second part: Definitely less. If no goal to reach is known, any thing is OK!

5.42. What are your views regarding charging of nodal officer Number especially in view of the fact that nodal officer is part of consumer grievance redressal mechanism? Elaborate your response. (Reference Para 3.94)

A: All calls to any one in the Service Provider's Organization irrespective of rank or position on a matter of service complaint should be totally free. Instead of sympathizing the sufferer, it is shocking to think of punishing him by charging for a call and adding to the revenue!

5.43. What should be done to enhance awareness about Appellate Authority to ensure effective redressal of consumer grievances? (Reference Para 3.97)

A: A well designed Mimic Drawing in local and one other popularly spoken language, displayed at all the SPs outlets showing the location and detailed functions of the three levels of grievance redressal chain can make a difference. It will be interesting to know, if at all and how many awareness programs have been conducted in each Telecom Region by various SPs, so far and last year and future annual plans. Except one SP we have not come across such initiatives in Bangalore Telecom District.

5.44. What framework to you suggest for filing of the appeal to Appellate Authority for redressal of consumer grievances by subscribers? How can it be made easy and user friendly? (Reference Para 3.99)

A: A simple pre-stamped printed bilingual form with fewer items may get a better response. Should also include a tear off acknowledgement. The Form on page 120-123 of CP including an affidavit kind of declaration would make any ordinary citizen shun away from this. If SP has a customer ID having all the personal details that should do the job.

5.45. In your view, what should be the time frame for acknowledgement of the appeal by Appellate Authority? (Reference Para 3.103)

A: If submitted at any of SPs outlets or via web or email the acknowledgement should be on line. Or else the postal duration.

5.46. Would it be feasible and desirable to convey the tentative time for disposal of the appeal by Appellate Authority to improve subscriber confidence? (Reference Para 3.103)

A: Definitely yes.

5.47. How feedback at the time of disposal of appeal can be made more transparent, self speaking and impartial? Is there a need to institutionalize feedback mechanism at appellate authority level of service provider to improve effectiveness of the processes? (Reference Para 3.105)

A: By implementing a progress flow chart in the MIMIC Drawing and displaying before the customer or giving /emailing a print out

5.48. What should be the framework to improve the effectiveness and acceptability of the Appellate authority as an independent and impartial body? Provide details of the proposed framework. (Reference Para 3.107)

A: If AAs' are paid by SPs this may happen. Only AAs' out of pocket bill to be paid by SP no doubt. The Order of the SP has to be a speaking order just like the Orders of District Consumer Forums . Feasibility of randomly subjecting the decisions of AA by TRAI or its auditors can be another option, TRAI can also prescribe certain guidelines for appointing AAs

5.49. In your opinion, what should be the maximum time period for deciding an appeal by the Appellate Authority? (Reference Para 3.109)

A: Consumer Courts on different kinds of issues decide in about three months. One month seems optimum for AAs. Can be reviewed periodically.

5.50. What should be the time limit within which the information about itemized usage charges should be provided on request from a pre-paid customer? (Reference Para 3.112)

A: Thirty days from receiving request seems reasonable.

5.51. Can you suggest further measures to effectively control provision of value added services without explicit consent of the subscriber? Kindly provide details of proposed framework. (Reference Para 4.7)

A: No comments.

5.52. In your opinion, what more should be done to increase effectiveness of consumer education? (Reference Para 4.9)

A: Notwithstanding the sentiments expressed by SPs for conducting consumer education workshops, nothing is seen yet in the pipeline. Only after they implement these promised events can we make some suggestions. However the SPs can display at all their sales outlets and recharge points, a mimic drawing showing clearly the locations of Call Centers, Nodal Officers and Appellate Authorities, their contact details, duration for remedy, compensation payable in the event these are not met. Also details of performance achieved etc. Invitation to SPs consumer meetings will be useful.

5.53. How effectiveness of web based Consumer grievance redressal mechanism can be increased? (Reference Para 4.12)

A: We see no logic in "TRAI is in the process of implementing a web-based online Grievance Monitoring System, which could be interfaced with service providers grievance redressal network".

Are the expenses reimbursed to TRAI? Moreover we do not think it is TRAI's responsibility to undertake such a work, each SP's system will be unique and the job of TRAI integrating the Web-based Consumer grievance redressal mechanism will be complicated.

We oppose if TRAI is thinking of undertaking on itself this additional work. If TRAI has already spent some efforts on this work, we would like to know the correct position

Issues for consultation mentioned in the Chapter 4 of the Consultation Paper but not in Chapter 5 of the CP

4.12. Issues for consultation:

How effectiveness of web based Consumer grievance redressal mechanism can be increased?

A: Going by the experience such friendly facility in the Speed-post, Courier tracking, Railway booking etc. we expect a well designed one to become very popular, useful and reducing the load on call centers, provided the information is correctly input and the system popularized by campaigns via Consumer Bills, Banners and Ads etc.

D. Number of Billing Plans and transparency in tariff

4.13. Stakeholders have raised the issue of transparency in tariff and large number of tariff plan during pre-consultation process. TRAI is examining various issues and separate consultation process is under contemplation covering issues related with transparency in tariff plans and tariff related issues.

A: This is a classic example of too many choices confusing the customer. At any one time not more than ten plans should be on the offer to chose from. If need felt to add more, then correspondingly some have to be withdrawn making sure that those customers who had opted for them are not disadvantaged.

We strongly recommend that each service provider provides a facility of a **Tariff Template**, as it were, in all his outlets and website, so that by filling the necessary data to reflecting the usage pattern, it displays the optimum tariff plan. If usage pattern changes then may be another plan suits better and so on.
