consumer direct

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clear, practical consumer advice
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CONSUMER DIRECT REVEALS TOP 10 COMPLAINTS IN 2009

Complaints about second hand cars bought from independent dealers topped the list of complaints recorded by advice service Consumer Direct for the fourth year running.

Consumer Direct advisors answered more than 1.5 million calls and emails in calendar year 2009, down four per cent on the previous year, and recorded almost 850,000 complaints against traders, down three per cent.

In total, Consumer Direct received 50,790 complaints about second hand cars bought from independent dealers, up by eight per cent on the previous year. Complaints about TVs came second, up nine per cent and complaints about mobile phone service agreements came third, down 29 per cent.

Among the top ten, complaints about laptops recorded the highest rise, from 12,395 in 2008 to 17,611 in 2009, up 42 per cent.

More than half of all complaints concerned goods and services bought at the traders' premises, 13 per cent resulted from internet purchases, and 10 per cent were about telephone transactions.

Consumer Direct is an OFT-managed telephone and online service providing information on consumer rights and advice on resolving disputes with shops and traders. In many cases, the help provided by Consumer Direct allows consumers to resolve problems themselves. If further help is needed, such as specialist

advice or face-to-face assistance, Consumer Direct will refer callers to local authority Trading Standards Services or to the organisation best placed to help.

The data collected by Consumer Direct is used to help the OFT, local authority Trading Standards Services and other enforcement bodies to build intelligence, determine priorities and focus resources.

The high level of used car complaints was a factor in the OFT's decision to launch a market study into second hand car sales in May 2009. The final report is due to be published in Spring this year.

David Fisher, Director of Consumer Direct said:

'While total complaint levels dropped slightly in 2009, complaints about some goods such as laptops and TVs rose significantly. In some cases, this may reflect growing sales for particular products rather than a higher percentage of faulty goods or services.

'Overall demand for consumer advice remains high, and our national service helps consumers to assert their rights and get the refunds, repairs and replacements they deserve.'

Information and advice on resolving consumer complaints is available at www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

Complaints to Consumer Direct in calendar years 2008 and 2009

Goods and Services	2008	2009	% increase/ decrease
Second hand cars purchased from independent dealers	47,026	50,790	+8.0%
TVs	20,314	22,184	+9.2%
Mobile Phones (service agreements)	31,269	22,172	-29.1%
Mobile Phones (hardware)	20,160	18,470	-8.4%
Lap-tops, notebooks and tablet PCs	12,395	17,611	+42.1%
Car repairs and servicing from independent garages	16,181	16,387	+1.3%

Second hand cars purchased from franchise dealers	15,236	14,693	-3.6%
Upholstered furniture	14,532	14,457	-0.5%
Women's clothing	14,391	14,201	-1.3%
Telephone services (land line)	12,290	11,631	-5.4%
Total of all complaints to Consumer Direct	**874,307**	**849,827**	**-2.8%**

NB: Information captured by Consumer Direct is provided as given by the consumer. No opinion on the truth or verification of facts has been made by the Consumer Direct service.

Editor's Notes

- In calendar year 2009, Consumer Direct answered 1,457,247 phone calls and 57,013 emails – a total of 1,514,260 contacts. The Consumer Direct website welcomed 1.4 million unique visitors and registered 9.3 million page views.

- Advisors logged 1,136,318 cases on the Consumer Direct central database. The disparity between contact volumes (calls and emails) and case volumes is largely as a result of repeat phone calls or emails on the same issue. Of the 1,136,318 cases recorded, 849,827 involved complaints about traders.

- Each case recorded by Consumer Direct is logged using one of 451 product or service codes, enabling the service to build a picture of the areas causing most concern to consumers. This and other data is then used to inform and focus the resources and work of local authority Trading Standards Services and the Office of Fair Trading.

- The above data does not include complaints and enquiries made to Consumer Direct about energy and postal services. In 2009, Consumer Direct answered 189,961 energy-related calls and 5,963 emails and letters, as well as 23,867 post-related calls and 1,491 emails and letters.

- Consumer Direct is a telephone and online consumer advice service managed by the Office of Fair Trading. It operates in partnership with local authority Trading Standards Services to offer consumers clear, practical and impartial advice and information.

- Consumer Direct has around 300 trained advisors in 12 contact centres across England, Wales and Scotland.

- The information and advice helpline is available on a single national telephone number - 08454 04 05 06 from 0800 – 1830 Monday to Friday, and 0900 – 1300 Saturday, excluding bank holidays and public holidays.

- A Welsh-speaking Consumer Direct service is available on 08454 04 05 05. Minicom users should call 08451 28 13 84.

- Calls to the Consumer Direct 0845 numbers are charged at no more than four pence per minute from a BT landline and may be free depending on your call plan. Call charges from other landline providers or mobile phones may vary. Please check the rate with your phone service provider.

- Northern Ireland has its own service called ConsumerLine (available on 08456 00 62 62) which is similar to Consumer Direct.

MEDIA enquiries: Kate Cook on 01209 720285