

**Guidelines on
Preparation of Customer Charters by
Fixed Telecommunications Network Services (“FTNS”) Operators
and Fixed Carriers**

25 November 2004

Introduction

Under the current regulatory framework, FTNS operators and fixed carriers are required, under General Condition (“GC”) 11 of the FTNS licence and GC 6 of the fixed carrier licence respectively, to prepare customer charters setting out the minimum standards of service to their customers.

2. The Telecommunications Authority (“TA”) realized that some fixed network operators do not provide in their customer charters sufficient information on the minimum standard of quality of services that they pledge to provide to customers. There is also a huge difference in the scope of pledges made by the fixed network operators. As such, the customer charters currently published by the operators may not be able to provide sufficient and comparable information for consumers to make informed choices. Some fixed network operators do not even publish their customer charters.

3. The purpose of this document is to assist the fixed network operators to gain an understanding of how the TA intends to administer the relevant licence conditions, and to provide guidelines to them on what type of information should at least be included in the customer charters. However, operators are always welcome to include in their customer charters additional pledges or information that are not proposed in this document.

Guidelines on Customer Charter for Retail Customers Who Do Not Have Bespoke Service Level Agreement (“SLA”) with Operators

4. Some local and external fixed network operators provide services on wholesale level only. Usually, customers in the wholesale market subscribe services in bulk (and thus have more bargaining power) and the service quality

is protected by the SLA signed between the parties. Furthermore, expectations and requirements may vary significantly from customer to customer in the wholesale market. A universal pledge on the minimum standard of service published in the operator's customer charter may not be very meaningful to customers in the wholesale market. Similarly, some end customers of the retail market which have bespoke SLAs with operators (e.g. large sized corporations or multinational corporations) might also find the service pledges in customer charters not very relevant.

5. On the other hand, some end customers of the retail market, particularly the residential customers as well as the small and medium sized enterprises ("SMEs"), may not have sufficient and comparable market information to make an informed choice. A customer charter with relatively detailed information on a number of comparable service indicators is therefore necessary for this group of consumers to make informed choice. **This document aims at providing guidelines to fixed network operators on preparing customer charters for retail customers who do not have bespoke SLAs with the operators.**

6. There may be different market segments among retail customers who do not have bespoke SLAs with operators (e.g. residential, SMEs, or other market segments). It is a decision for the fixed network operators to make as to whether to pledge different levels of service for different market segments, or simply pledge the same level of service for all market segments.

Information to be Included in Customer Charter

7. Fixed network operators should include in their customer charters the minimum standard for at least the following service indicators.

- (A) Service provisioning time
- (B) Restoration time
- (C) Complaint handling time
- (D) Enquiry call answering time

8. Each of the service indicators should be clearly defined in the customer charter such that consumers could fully understand the indicators and

make meaningful comparison among different network operators.

9. The minimum standard of the service indicators should be determined by the market.

(A) Service Provisioning Time

10. Fixed network operators are required to make a pledge, in their customer charters, on the minimum standard of service provisioning time, within which the orders for the provision of new services or for changes to existing services should be fulfilled. An order is defined as a commitment made to a customer to provide a product or service, or to effect a change to an existing service. Generally speaking, an order is deemed to be completed when all items are available for use by the customer.

11. Fixed network operators should clearly define the service indicator (e.g. to list out the applicable scenarios, those scenarios that do not fall within the definition of “an order”, as well as factors affecting the service indicator, etc.). Operators may also specify how the service provisioning time would be adjusted if the agreed time of the appointment is changed at the request of the customer or as a result of unavailability of the customer at the time of the scheduled appointment, etc.

(B) Service Restoration Time

12. Fixed network operators are required to make a pledge, in their customer charters, on the minimum standard of service restoration time, within which the service should be restored after a fault has been reported by a customer. Customer-reported fault is a customer’s report of the inability of an item to perform a required function resulting in an impaired service, excluding inability due to planned maintenance. Generally speaking, a customer-reported fault is deemed to be restored when all items reported faulty are again available for use by the customer.

13. Fixed network operators should clearly define the service indicator in the customer charter. For example, how the service restoration time is going to be measured, particularly for those fault reports where appointments with customers have to be made for site visits or equipment/network testing (i.e.

whether the measurement would commence on the date when the fault report is received or the date of the appointment). Furthermore, it is important to specify whether the restoration time is to be measured on the basis of actual or working hours, and what the defined working hours are. Operators should specify those scenarios that do not fall within the definition of fault reports as well as those scenarios under which the pledges on restoration time would not be applicable. If operators consider appropriate, they may pledge different levels of restoration time for different types of fault report or different scenarios. They may also specify how the service restoration time would be adjusted if the appointment is rescheduled to a later time at the customer's request.

(C) Complaint Handling Time

14. Fixed network operators are required to make a pledge, in their customer charters, on the minimum standard of complaint handling time, within which the complaint should be resolved. A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with the operator or the service provided, received from a user or a member of the public by the operator. Generally speaking, a complaint is deemed to be resolved when (i) the complainant agrees that all issues have been satisfactorily dealt with; (ii) the complaint is withdrawn; or (iii) the operator has completed all stages of its internal complaint handling procedures and has informed the complainant accordingly. Operators should clearly define, in the customer charters, the service indicator as well as the factors affecting the service indicator.

(D) Enquiry Call Answering Time

15. Fixed network operators are required to make a pledge, in their customer charters, on the minimum standard of enquiry call answering time, within which the enquiry call should be answered. Enquiry call covers the customer interface with the hotline operator on all issues.

16. Operators should clearly define, in the customer charters, the service indicator as well as the factors affecting the service indicator. If the operators operate an interactive voice response system for answering enquiry call, they should clearly define when the measurement of answering time should commence (e.g. when the customer chooses the option to talk to the hotline

operator, or when the customer hears the first ringing tone).

Publication of Customer Charter

17. Fixed network operators should publish the customer charters on their websites and provide the customer charters to any person who may request them. Fixed network operators should also provide the TA with a paper copy and the hyperlink to the web pages of their customer charters. The TA would establish hyperlinks to the customer charter of individual fixed network operators on its website.

18. Having published the customer charter, fixed network operators should regularly review the content of the customer charter and ensure that the customer charter reflects the most up-to-date pledges made by the operators to their customers.

Enquiries

19. This document can be downloaded from the official website of the TA (<http://www.ofta.gov.hk>). For enquiries regarding the guidelines, please contact:

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