



Why Are We Voting?

Any potential voter still unaware of the Telecom/Optus ballot must have been overseas or in a coma for the last couple of months.

In addition to AUSTEL's campaign (part of the carrier agreement) to raise awareness of the ballot and to inform public choice, there has been massive expenditure on advertising by the carriers to promote both their corporate image and their services.

But in the end, how much do people really understand about what they're voting for and the consequences of their voting - or not voting?

The advertising agency which is carrying out much of the public education campaign on AUSTEL's behalf is also conducting market research to track the effectiveness of the campaign.

A summary of the research for Canberra (see table) shows that 99 per cent of those surveyed were aware of the ballot by the end of the campaign. But the research also raises questions about whether it is possible to equate awareness with an understanding of the choice people are being asked to make.

One of the main reasons for moving from the interim '1' access code to a four-digit override code is that the national numbering plan, being phased in over the next few years, provides access numbers for many new carriers and services and, in consequence, cannot accommodate a one-digit access code for carriers. Hence the need for four-digit override codes. Yet the Canberra results show that only 63

per cent of respondents were aware that the interim '1' access code will cease to be available after they have preselected their carrier.

The Canberra 'attitudes' results also give cause for concern. After almost a month long publicity campaign, 36 per cent of those surveyed still find that 'the whole Telecom/Optus issue is very confusing' and 37 per cent do not 'really understand why the ballot is being held'.

Consumer organisations are concerned for another reason: the market research may be leaving out particular segments of the population with special needs - for example, people who are not skilled in the English language, people with disabilities and older people, who may have difficulty in understanding and absorbing the Public Education Campaign messages.

The research uses focus groups and general marketing to track public awareness and understanding of the ballot. But to date the research has not specifically targeted groups with special information needs.

AUSTEL has now undertaken to have segmented research done in Canberra and Melbourne to see how effective the campaign is in reaching sectors with special information needs. If this shows lower levels of awareness and understanding, it can be expected that there will be better targeting of community groups in future. □

Holly Raiche

A Summary of Key Trends

Source: AUSTEL market research provided as part of public education campaign	Canberra				
	Benchmark 11-16/6 (300) %	Wave 1 27-28/6 (150) %	Wave 2 3-5/7 (152) %	Wave 3 9-11/7 (150) %	Wave 4 18-20/7 (153) %
Base = Total Sample					
AWARENESS					
Aware of a new system	43	59	66	67	71
Aware of a ballot	59	82	92	95	99
UNDERSTANDING OF PROCESS					
*Awareness of mail back process	30	47	59	55	88
UNDERSTANDING OF ISSUES					
* % giving correct (true or false) response for ...					
After this new arrangement is introduced the dial "1" for Optus system will disappear	32	40	49	45	63
Once you have selected a telephone company you must use that company for all of your long distance and overseas calls	32	49	64	65	75

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Canberra

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	Benchmark 11-16/6 (300) %	Wave 1 27-28/6 (150) %	Wave 2 3-5/7 (152) %	Wave 3 9-11/7 (150) %	Wave 4 18-20/7 (153) %
It will be compulsory for every telephone customer to make a choice	37	63	78	79	93
Even if you have selected a telephone company you can still access the other one by dialling a special code before the number you are dialling	39	55	64	68	86
The ballot is only concerned with long distance and overseas calls - Telecom will still carry all local calls	41	65	76	76	94
If you don't make a choice at the ballot all your long distance and overseas calls will be carried by Telecom - unless you dial a special Optus code	44	71	73	77	91
If the majority of people in this city select a certain telephone company we will all be connected to that company	45	59	67	74	88
Once you've made a choice of telephone company it can't be changed	46	60	75	79	91
All telephone customers will be asked to make a choice in the ballot	49	58	67	69	78
Even if you choose Optus you will still receive a telephone bill from Telecom to cover your local calls and line rental	50	75	82	81	93
HOTLINE * Prompted awareness	N/A	45	55	65	74
AUSTEL * Unaided awareness as ballot overseer Aided awareness of AUSTEL overall	14 66	31 75	36 78	38 78	64 86
ATTITUDES Find new system very or quite appealing Believe system will result in fairer competition	67 61	65 64	63 57	70 62	67 61
PERCENTAGE AGREE WITH ... It will make the long distance market more competitive and hence will benefit the consumer The whole Telecom/Optus issue is very confusing Things should be left as they are I don't really understand why the ballot is being held It won't affect me in any way I would like more information on how the ballot will be conducted	80 55 24 43 43 51	85 49 34 49 42 49	80 42 30 39 39 53	87 47 35 45 45 41	86 36 29 37 41 20
ADVERTISING RECALL * Unprompted recall of ... TV Radio Press Any Advertising * Aided Recall of TVC	N/A N/A N/A N/A N/A	28 7 14 41 34	29 7 16 47 60	28 6 14 42 61	31 9 18 52 Net: 59 Launch: 49 Follow-Up: 27
* Where questions were asked only to those aware of the ballot, percentages have been recalculated as a percentage of the total sample.					