



COMMUNICATIONS
ALLIANCE LTD

The Year in Review

Over the past year we have achieved significant milestones and have placed Communications Alliance on course for continued success in 2007.



Although the undoubted highlight of 2006 was the creation of Communications Alliance, this achievement was accompanied by a range of important initiatives across the board.

In the process of merging the Service Providers Association Inc (SPAN) and the Australian Voice over IP Association (AVOIPA) with ACIF to form our new industry association, we have taken a fresh look at our role and strategic direction. As a result, Communications Alliance goes into the new year as a more proactive organization geared to the needs of our rapidly changing industry.

Along with the energetic identification of difficult issues and a determination to resolve them, we are realigning our expertise and resources to focus on the future development of our industry as it enters the next stage of its growth. These new priorities were demonstrated during 2006 by the number of activities designed to bring together the broad spectrum of industry views in consultative forums and collaborative programs aimed at planning the transition to next generation networks.

At the same time, we have stepped up the amount of information being made available to service providers and consumers so that all participants in the industry can be more aware of the issues and the challenges we need to confront. In tandem with this activity, we have placed more emphasis on education and compliance.

Highlights of the Year



- Formation of Communications Alliance on 1 September 2006. Election of Communications Alliance Board of Directors on 17 November 2006.
- ACIF Chairman Neville Stevens was awarded the Charles Todd Medal (Communicator of the Year) at the 2006 Australian Telecommunications Users Group (ATUG) Conference. ATUG's highest award is given to the person whom ATUG considers has made the most significant contribution in terms of promoting telecommunications as an essential element in national industry growth, the enabling of healthy competition, and raising the awareness of end users of the value of world's best practice telecommunications.
- A series of "Future Forums" was held during the year to explore the main issues that will need to be tackled in the NGN transition. Each forum focused on a particular access technology – fibre, wireless and mobile. The Future Forums provided Communications Alliance with broad industry input to the process of identifying and prioritizing the key issues as part of the NGN strategic framework.
- The third annual VoIP Forum in December 2006 continues our groundbreaking activities in bringing the industry together to discuss the issues relating to the rollout of NGN voice services. Each of these events identified priority issues that have formed the basis of major initiatives over the ensuing year.
- A discussion paper on VoIP Quality of Service (QoS) and interconnectivity issues was released for public comment in March 2006. Submissions were then examined by the VoIP Working Group to identify the steps needed to be taken by the industry to address QoS issues as a means of improving the VoIP user experience.
- Ovum Consulting was retained to conduct a review of the organisation's structure. Ovum's task was to provide the Communications Alliance with recommendations on how it could best organise itself to meet the impending challenges of the Next Generation Network (NGN) and convergent environments.
- Australia's world-leading Mobile Number Portability (MNP) Scheme celebrated its fifth anniversary in September 2006. Communications Alliance administers the scheme, which has been responsible for over five million successful ports (mobile number transfers) since its inception, with a monthly average of 85,000 ports.
- An alliance was formed with NetAlert Limited to promote to children and parents the safe and responsible use of new generation networks, services and applications.
- A revised Credit Management Industry Code was registered in April 2006. The revised code includes the introduction of comprehensive financial hardship programs designed to assist customers experiencing difficulties in paying their phone bills. An updated Financial Hardship Guide was also published, providing guidance to service providers in complying with code requirements and better supporting customers experiencing financial difficulties.

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- An industry code supporting 'cooling off' periods in instances where telecommunications providers use telemarketing to encourage consumers to switch phone providers on their landline phones was registered. The code also provides greater flexibility in the movement of local numbers within larger geographical areas.
- Workshops were conducted in Sydney and Melbourne on the Credit Management and Customer Transfer Codes. The workshops were held to educate carriers and carriage service providers on the new code provisions so they would be better equipped to meet the needs of their customers.
- Following a review of our Consumer Council, a Consumer Interests Register was established. Consumer groups were asked to nominate themselves for the Register, which provides a list of consumer organisations we can invite to take part in forums and seminars or to participate in advisory and working groups.
- Two Compliance Manuals – one for all service providers and one containing a special chapter for VoIP providers – were made available to assist members with their code compliance activities. The manual is targeted particularly at organisations that are new to the regulatory environment and have yet to understand their obligations.
- Publication of a VoIP security fact sheet highlighting issues that VoIP providers and Internet service providers (ISPs) need to address including some of the ways VoIP calls, networks and systems can be vulnerable to malicious or criminal attack.
- Four facts sheets addressing complaints processes and consumers' rights to information about telecommunications services were developed during the year. Two of the fact sheets are aimed at CSPs and VoIP providers, promoting best practice behaviour in relation to the way they handle customer complaints. The third explains details of the Complaint Handling Code, while the fourth fact sheet is aimed at consumers.
- Higher speed broadband Internet services have been rolled out to Australian customers in 2006 following the work of Communications Alliance in revising the codes and equipment standards for DSL deployments. The end result is higher speed services for users of ADSL, ADSL2 and ADSL2+ technology whilst minimising interference to other services in the carriers' networks.
- Two standards on customer cabling – our most referenced documents – were updated during the year. The standards assist equipment suppliers and installers of cabling products in overcoming technical issues, as well as specifying the correct installation and repair of cabling and cabling products.
- An industry guideline to ensure that payphones are accessible for people with disabilities was developed jointly with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). The guideline sets benchmarks for payphone providers in the design, siting and installation of payphones.
- An industry code designed to ensure that people with special needs have access to information about the key features of telephone handsets was registered in November 2006. The code ensures customer equipment manufacturers and importers provide information to carriage service providers on key features for telephone handsets for use in connection with a standard fixed or mobile phone service.
- The way that life threatening and unwelcome calls are handled by carriage service providers was clarified in a code registered in September 2006. The code gives carriage service providers greater power to take action in relation to life threatening or unwelcome calls, including SMS and email communications.
- Mobile phone users who access premium services are better protected following the approval of the Mobile Premium Services Self-Regulatory Scheme by the Australian Communications and Media Authority. Communications Alliance is the body nominated by the Scheme to undertake the role and functions of Scheme Custodian.
- A basic guide to VoIP technical terms and issues was published. This guide seeks to offer a base set of terms that can be consistently used across the industry and is designed to assist providers of VoIP services in supplying information to their prospective customers.
- VoIP providers in Sydney and Melbourne attended a series of Communications Alliance "VoIP Breakfasts" where they were given the opportunity to share their views and contribute to our blueprint for VoIP development.



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The Year Ahead

Among the activities underway or planned for 2007 are:

- Offering industry leadership and coordination of the drive towards rolling out the next generation of IP-based networks and services. By capitalizing on our unique position as the most broadly representative voice in the industry, we will identify consensus views on the issues that need to be resolved and work to develop the strategies for achieving the necessary outcomes.
- Compliance will continue to be high on the agenda for Communications Alliance in 2007. Building on the achievements of 2006, we intend to develop more compliance training programs and to actively market compliance initiatives throughout the industry. We have identified a particular demand for this type of assistance among the newer and smaller service providers which do not have the experience or in-house expertise of the larger players.
- The Productivity Commission is developing benchmarks to measure the impact of regulation on Australian industry. Communications Alliance is providing input to the process in line with our commitment to improving the efficiency of our industry by minimizing the amount of unnecessary regulatory restrictions. We are also working with the Australian Services Roundtable, which has a similar commitment to improving competitiveness of services industries.
- Over the years a number of codes have been developed to address issues concerning consumers of communications products and services. In order to simplify compliance and make it easier for consumers to understand their rights, Communications Alliance has given a high priority to the task of creating a

single consumer code. A steering group has been working on this extremely complex task for some time and we expect to produce a draft code by mid 2007.

- A VoIP Customer Fact Sheet is being developed to equip residential and SMB customers with the information they need when shopping for a VoIP service.
- Communications Alliance has been commissioned by Industry Number Management Services (INMS) to design the detailed rules and processes to enable the sending of short messages to freephone and local rate numbers ie 1800/13/1300 numbers.
- The Priority Assistance for Life Threatening Medical Conditions Industry Code is expected to be published in early 2007. The draft code, released for public comment in late 2006, specifies the minimum requirements for the provision of the highest level of service practically available to customers who suffer from a diagnosed life threatening medical condition.
- Communications Alliance was officially launched by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, the Hon Helen Coonan, after presenting the 2006 SPAN CommsDay Awards at the industry's annual dinner. In 2007 Communications Alliance will continue to host the annual dinner and support the awards in recognition of the outstanding achievers in Australian communications.

We will identify consensus views on the issues that need to be resolved and work to develop the strategies for achieving the necessary outcomes.

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