

# The Year in Review

## 2007 marks the culmination of a decade of unprecedented change in Australian communications.



As communications have become ubiquitous – with services targeting everyone from schoolkids to global businesses – the industry itself has undergone a spectacular transformation.

No longer is it the preserve of a few large providers of traditional telecommunications services that evolved progressively over a long period. Today we have a multi-faceted industry with offerings based on rapidly emerging technologies that spawn continuously mutating services.

Consequently the task of representing this fast paced and constantly evolving industry continues to generate new challenges and opportunities.

Since its formation in September 2006, Communications Alliance has actively championed the importance of a collective approach by all sections of our industry and its customers in responding to the changes that confront us.

In the year ahead you will see further initiatives that support our strategy of bringing the industry together, exploring the issues, promoting best practice and developing collaborative plans for the future.

Moreover, we will take greater responsibility for articulating the vision of how Australia can accelerate its growth on the back of innovative communications services.

## Highlights of the year

- Communications Alliance was officially launched by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, the Hon Helen Coonan, at the industry's annual dinner and formally commenced operations the following day, 1 September 2006. After election of a Board of Directors, Neville Stevens was selected as its independent non-executive chairman.
- A major project throughout the past year has been the development of the Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code, bringing together all of the existing registered consumer codes in a single framework. The huge challenge presented by this project was the need to simplify compliance and remove duplication while maintaining the strong protections afforded by the individual codes.
- In August 2007 Communications Alliance and ACMA combined to present the inaugural Communications Consumer Dialogue. Using an interactive format with an external moderator, the event gave consumers and their representatives the opportunity to discuss the benefits of new and emerging technologies with industry experts.
- In July 2007 the inaugural Communications Alliance Annual Dinner was the setting for the ACOMM Awards, a joint initiative of Communications Alliance and Communications Day to honour the companies and individuals who made the greatest contribution to the industry over the preceding year. The event, attended by over 400 people, is already firmly established as the pre-eminent annual awards function for the Australian communications community.
- As a consequence of our industry consultation, Communications Alliance drafted an Industry Innovation Workplan defining the steps we will take over the next few years to facilitate the migration to the emerging world of IP-based services. It focused on the industry-led strategy for that migration, including identification of the hard issues which will require collaborative industry attention and resolution. The draft plan was discussed and subsequently endorsed by DCITA, ACMA and the ACCC.
- Building on our alliance with NetAlert Limited to promote the safe and responsible use of new generation networks, services and applications, Communications Alliance was involved with the ScamWatch campaign. This four-week program coordinated by the Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce alerted the community to the dangers of a variety of scams and advised consumers about how to avoid being trapped by them.
- Our annual VoIP Forums have continued our groundbreaking activities in bringing the industry together to discuss the issues relating to the rollout of NGN voice services. Coupled with our series of Future Forums that explored NGN access technologies, these events have identified priority issues that have formed the basis of major initiatives over the past few years. The increased tempo of VoIP adoption and NGN planning in 2007 was facilitated by the success of these initiatives.
- As well as providing information to the public and the industry, Communications Alliance has launched a half-yearly survey seeking feedback from the industry on a range of issues. The Industry Pulse survey conducted with KPMG asked senior decision makers about their perceptions and sentiments regarding various subjects including market outlook, regulation and technology.
- Higher speed broadband Internet services have been rolled out to Australian customers 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. We are now preparing for the next generation of DSL technology – VDSL and VDSL2 – by starting the process of developing the technical standards to allow future deployment of these services.

- Communications Alliance became custodian of the new Mobile Premium Services Self-Regulatory Scheme which ensures mobile phone users who access premium services are better protected. In support of this role we have developed special web pages containing information about Mobile Premium Services for industry members and consumers. The industry can access details about the scheme and how to become a scheme member, while customers can find out more about such services as well as other resources, useful links and safety information.
- 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 six million successful ports (mobile number transfers) since its inception, with a monthly average of about 85,000 ports.
- The provision of better information for people considering switching to a VoIP service was a consistent theme to emerge from our various forums. Consequently we published a comprehensive booklet to assist consumers and small businesses who are considering a VoIP service for their home or office. This was followed by a companion guide aimed at VoIP service providers to assist them in answering customer questions.
- A number of industry codes and guidelines were developed or revised during the year. 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). 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 late 2006. Customers with a life-threatening medical condition can also benefit because of new priority arrangements enshrined in a revised industry code. A revised Calling Number Display Code was also registered following its development by Communications Alliance during the year. The main changes to the code make the information provision requirements less prescriptive while preserving the ability of consumers to maintain their privacy. Stronger protection for consumers against the unauthorised transfer of phone services between providers has been afforded by a revised Customer Transfer Code.
- Two Compliance Manuals – one for all service providers and one containing a special chapter for VoIP providers – have been made available to assist members with their code compliance activities. The manuals are targeted particularly at organisations that are new to the regulatory environment and have yet to understand their obligations.
- As Australia's broadband rollout took centre stage in the public debate about the nation's future, Communications Alliance has been proactive during 2007 in offering opportunities for our industry to have a constructive input. Special Communications Alliance events have focused on topics such as Fibre to the Node (FTTN), VoIP, broadband Internet speeds, the Fixed Services Review and the Universal Service Obligation (USO). In addition to hosting these industry roundtables and briefings about the future operating environment, Communications Alliance has taken full advantage of its position as the unified voice of the industry to give input to the various broadband blueprints.
- Facts sheets educating the industry and consumers about important issues have become an increasingly useful resource produced by Communications Alliance. Among the most recent are four facts sheets addressing complaints processes and consumers' rights to information about telecommunications services. 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.

## The Year Ahead

### Among the activities underway or planned for the year ahead :

- We have established a Steering Group to facilitate industry consultation for the Expert Taskforce overseeing the broadband network tender evaluation and will continue to provide input to that process. Once the Expert Taskforce has completed its work we intend to offer ongoing assistance by providing a conduit between industry and government for the broadband rollout.
- The review of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) has the potential to create significant changes to the structure and economics of Australia's telecommunications industry. By helping to shape the outcome of that review, Communications Alliance can offer its members a valuable service by protecting their business interests and supporting the future growth of the industry. Therefore we are seeking expert assistance to help us develop a cogent industry position that takes into account the interests of customers and service providers.
- Defining the vision for Australia's broadband future is the overriding priority for Communications Alliance. We will continue to drive strategies that encourage maximum industry input into the planning and deployment of Australia's future communications infrastructure. By seeking every opportunity for collaboration in achieving the broadband vision for Australia, Communications Alliance will cement its position as the focal point of collective industry thinking and policy development.
- Once the Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code is registered we will undertake a campaign to raise awareness of the code with service providers, advocate sign-up and promote compliance. In parallel with that campaign will be a program of activities targeted at customers so they are also aware of the code and its significance to them.
- Promoting industry best practice will remain a high priority. A key focus of our strategy for enhancing customer service is promoting the commercial benefits of providing good customer service rather than its characterisation as a regulatory issue of compliance with code provisions. In pursuit of that objective, we will work with the industry and the TIO to improve complaint handling and other important aspects of customer service. As well as its focus on industry best practice, the strategy contains a number of elements designed to improve compliance and to educate consumers.

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