

More specialist small business telco services needed

Last week, [Optus announced](#) that it had improved the experience for their small business consumers by offering more specialist team members and having a network of small business consumers.

ACCAN welcomes this announcement. These initiatives are a positive step in the right direction.

In December 2015, ACCAN released a research report "[Informing Small Business: Examining fixed phone and broadband products.](#)" Two of the key recommendations from the report were that:

- Service providers should ensure that business grade services are supported by specialist business teams, and clearly explain to small business customers that this is part of the service offer.
- Telco front of house staff should be better informed about small business plans so that they can accurately deal with small business customers; or direct small business customers to dedicated specialist teams.

Along with Optus's announcement, we are hearing some encouraging feedback from small businesses about [Telstra](#) and [Vodafone's](#) new initiatives which are being embraced and appreciated by small business consumers.

What is needed?

In light of this feedback, ACCAN is calling for the telcos to offer more specialist services for small businesses.

While we are seeing more of this, the small business websites of Telstra, Vodafone and Optus, do not clearly identify what they are offering as part of their new small business focus. Wide reaching statements like "premium support," multiple product offers and endorsements from celebrities are not effectively defining their place in the market. The telcos should clearly identify what these offerings are so that they are easily accessible to small business owners.

Optus has advised that there are now trained and dedicated business specialists available in selected stores across Australia to assist specifically with SMB customers' needs and queries. These customers can locate their closest specialist by visiting Optus' '[Find a Store](#)' page and clicking the 'Optus Business Specialists' box. This will filter the results so that only business specialist stores appear.

Whilst these initiatives are welcomed by ACCAN, we would also like to see two further recommendations from our research report being embraced by the telcos:

- Service providers should better differentiate the value of their business offers so that the small business market can understand what value for money they are getting in selecting a business plan.
- Service providers should offer real service level and performance guarantees to their small business customers.

We believe that the real value for Australian small businesses will come from strong proactive providers that offer consistent, reliable telecommunications solutions with support from dedicated business-

trained staff when things go wrong. The provision of an interim solution for when outages occur and fast, efficient service fault rectification would be a tangible step forward in acknowledging and responding to small business needs.

What should small businesses look for in a service?

In recent months small businesses have been affected by mobile and internet outages that may have caused them to lose money and business. Outages happen from time to time, but small businesses can reduce their losses by asking providers the following questions before choosing a service:

- What processes are in place to prioritise my faults and business needs?
- Do you offer alternative communication services if there is an outage/fault?
- Is this solution compatible with my office equipment? For example, alarms and EFTPOS services.
- Can I rely on only a 3G/4G mobile service?