

**Australian Communications  
Consumer Action Network**



***“Campaigning for a Better Deal for  
Communications Consumers”***

**THREE-YEAR REPORT CARD**

# A New Direction



# Setting up an organisation

## Taking ACCAN from concept to reality

### 2008

- May – Consumer Representation Working Committee appointed
- July – ACCAN model for a new consumer peak body proposed
- October – ACCAN incorporated.
- December – Interim Board meets first time

### 2009

- March – CEO appointed
- May – Federal government allocates funding for ACCAN from an industry levy with a four-year contract at \$2 million per annum to commence from 1 July 2009.
- June – ACCAN office opens in Ultimo, Sydney
- July – six staff transferred from CTN & TEDICORE after they close their doors

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**Supported by  
consumers**



# Representative

## Ensuring diverse consumer voices can be heard

- In August 2008, 32 organisations and 25 individuals came together as an alliance and supported the proposal to establish ACCAN and agreeing to be the founding members.
- Three years on, ACCAN has 107 organisational members and 84 individual members.
- ACCAN's membership base is currently expanding even further.
- The members feel a strong sense of ownership of ACCAN – many participating in development of ACCAN's first Strategic Plan, including the mission, values and scope of the organisation's work.
- We enjoy very high participation rates – with every call for volunteers or nominations we receive more applications than we have vacancies.
- The diversity of membership base ranges from general consumer organisations like Choice but also consumers such as pensioners, indigenous communities, parents' groups, rural and remote consumers, organisations representing and working with people with disabilities, social justice groups, small businesses, academics, internet-user groups and people from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- It will be an ongoing challenge to ensure ACCAN is fully representative and we have an active engaged membership.

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# Active Participation



# An engaged Board & Committees

## Ensuring our constituents can participate

- The ACCAN Board met for the first time in December 2008 and have held 15 meetings since then. There has now been three elections.
- A Standing Advisory Committee for Consumer Affairs (SACCA) and a Standing Advisory Committee for Disability Issues (SACDI) each with eight consumer representatives have been appointed. The role of these bodies is to provide advice to ACCAN on issues for communications consumers.
- Issues and campaigns worked on by SACCA include the Review of the Communications Alliance Telecommunications Consumer Protection (TCP) Code; Broadband; advertising practices; the cost of calling 1800 and 1300 numbers on mobile phones and the ACMA Customer Service Inquiry. SACCA have also supported the ACCAN Campaigns including the pay-to-pay – hidden charges Christmas Card campaign and Do Not Call Register changes.
- Issues and campaigns worked on by SACDI include accessibility issues and the Digital switchover; the Independent Equipment Program Review; Public procurement and also the National Disability Strategy.
- Over 50 different groups have participated in our Fair Call Campaign led by our superhero Number Woman. Many have endorsed ACCAN submissions such as those made to the ACMA's Reconnecting the Customer inquiry.

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# High Profile Campaigns





# Activating Consumers

## ACCAN's campaigning activities

- ACCAN's first campaign was launched in the beginning of July 2009, criticising Telstra for introducing a \$2.20 surcharge for customers who pay their bills at Australia Post or Telstra stores – the outcome was that Telstra withdrew their charge and refunded consumers.
- The Hidden Fees and Charges campaign launched in December 2009 targeted every telecommunications provider. CEOs received ACCAN Christmas cards from their customers asking for a special Christmas gift – for hidden charges to be dropped.
- Campaigns that have mobilised our membership and got results since then have included successfully lobbying for changes to the Do Not Call Register and working with other peak organisations to get a Government commitment for an SMS emergency service.
- Current ACCAN priorities include Time's up Telcos, with a focus on customer service; Our Broadband Future, looking at consumer protections in the NBN; and Inclusive Communications, aiming to deliver functional equivalence in disability telecommunications services.
- This year we have launched the Fair Calls For All campaign, with Number Woman, which looks at the cost of calling 13/1800 numbers from mobiles.

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# **Strong Advocacy**



# A united consumer voice

## Ensuring clearly articulated positions

- ACCAN has contributed to many inquiries and calls for comment making nearly 60 submissions since establishment.
- Key policy areas have been the Digital TV Switchover; the review of the ACMA's Numbering Plan; Mobile Roaming; Emergency Call Determination; the implementation of new consumer protection mechanisms for mobile premium services, new Universal Service Arrangements, convergence review, review of services for people with disabilities and older Australians.
- Our media strategies are now well advanced and the profile of ACCAN has grown to the extent that we are now the organisation that the media approach for comment on communication issues affecting consumers.

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# Research Portfolio



# An evidence-based approach

## Establishing recognised research credentials

- Flagship research reports: *Future Consumer*, *Customer Service* and *Informed Consent* were published in September 2009 and informed our Strategic Plan.
- The topic of developing an evidence base was debated by senior staff of the ACMA, ACCC, PC and ASIC at our Responsive Regulation Seminar in 2009.
- ACCAN has now completed 14 research projects in partnership with other organisations and by commissioning external experts.
- Australia Research Council has funded ACCAN Grants recipients Swinburne Uni, CAT, Central Land Council (Home Internet Use in Remote Indigenous Communities) for a further three year project on which ACCAN is an industry linkage partner.
- Current Research Activity Plan includes work in the area of affordability and also a national survey to be conducted in 2012.
- We have appropriate governance arrangements in place such as an Ethics Committee to oversee research activities.
- We have developed mini-site dedicated to communications research with Australian Policy Online [www.apo.org.au/creative-economy](http://www.apo.org.au/creative-economy).

# Representation



# Advocating on behalf of consumers

## Working with stakeholders to get better outcomes

- ACCAN now has representation on 16 Government and industry committees and the TIO Council.
- Representation in the Communications Alliance Forums developing codes of practice can evolve further to ensure less time wastage and more outcomes.
- We provided advice to ACMA about the restructure of their Consumer Consultative Forum.
- Our Disability Policy Adviser is now consumer co-chair for the Optus Consumer Liaison Forum.
- Relationships with industry are at a high level with regular meetings with Google, Telstra, Optus, iiNet, Voda Hutchison and Amaysim – many of these were initiated by the providers. This indicates both providers consider ACCAN has a significant role to play in the current and future communications policy context in Australia.
- We hope to expand our work in the area of Standards Australia especially in regards to new and emerging technologies like cloud computing services.
- ACCAN has also approached NBN Co to set up a formal consumer consultation group and we hope to progress this proposal soon.

# Leaps forward for consumers

## ... that ACCAN has contributed to

- Accessible digital set-top boxes trial in the Household Assistance Scheme.
- ACCAN's submissions and member endorsements influenced all six recommendations made in the ACMA *Reconnecting the Customer* Draft Report.
- Announcements about Free Call and Local Rate Numbers from the ACMA.
- Changes to the Do Not Call Register.
- Senate Inquiry into Online Privacy highlights ACCAN Grants Project recommendations.
- Increase in TV caption quotas to 18 hours per day on all free-to-air networks and the inclusion of quality standards for captions in the Broadcasting Services Act.
- Held Vodafone to account for network issues that led to major customer service and complaint handling problems.
- Played a critical communications role when the Queensland flood disaster disrupted the National Relay Service, and ensured that information was available to the Deaf community in Auslan.



# Building Capacity



# Providing a forum for engagement

## Developing understanding on both sides

- ACCAN has facilitated several roundtables with consumers, Government and industry stakeholders. We held two roundtables at Parliament House; one linking into the Gov 2.0 Taskforce and the other during CyberSecurity Week both highlighting accessibility and the needs of people with disabilities.
- We also jointly facilitated with the DBCDE an Emergency Call Smartphone Access Seminar for people with disability.
- We have held two national conferences one in Sydney and one in Melbourne. The most recent event was attended by over 200 people and was sponsored by nine industry partners.
- ACMA has assisted ACCAN to run one seminar on Responsive Regulation and one Summit on the Reconnecting the Customer inquiry. These were attended by over 80 people and were webcast.
- ACCAN participated in and provided sponsorship for the ATUG Regional Roadshows in 2010. ATUG has since folded and we are currently reviewing how we will continue our regional engagement strategy.

# **Independent Grants Scheme**



# Supporting innovative ideas

## Distributing funds for broader representation & research

- ACCAN has set up our Grants Scheme based on Commonwealth and best practice guidelines. We are continually improving how we run the Scheme to get the best outcomes in line with ACCAN's work for consumers.
- ACCAN has now run three rounds of Grants.
- Ten final reports from the 2009 and 2010 Rounds are available online.
- Brotherhood of St Laurence *Youth Advocates* project involved over 100 VCAL students researching and advocating their issues and opinions.
- The Newell Network is a web 2.0 approach to sharing information about communications solutions for people with disabilities.
- In the 2011 Round we received over 70 applications. Six funded projects will be completed by 30 June 2012.
- Applications for the 2012 Round will be called for in the first quarter of 2012.
- ACCAN's Grants Scheme now has the governance and capacity to manage other funds if they become available, such as for Cybersecurity week.

# **Consumer Awareness Strategies**



# Empowering Consumers

## Developing tools that enable consumers

- ACCAN has a weekly WebNews email bulletin which now goes to over 700 consumers, industry and other interested parties.
- Created the quarterly ACCAN Magazine for members with 2 editions so far.
- We relaunched our website this year and we have over 5000 visitors per month.
- ACCAN has 15 Tip Sheets for consumers available on our website and also promoted in the media as much as possible.
- We published an *NBN: Guide for Consumers* and this is one of our most popular initiatives yet.
- We have a well-developed social media strategy including the use of Twitter, YouTube and Tumblr. We have over 800 followers on Twitter.
- ACCAN now does upwards of 60 interviews in the media every month.

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# Adequately Resourced



# Building an Expert Team

## Establishing a culture of good governance

- Following the Federal Government decision to fund ACCAN, DBCDE & ACCAN negotiated a multi-year contract for the delivery of consumer representation and research from 2009-2013.
- We are currently going through our mid term contract review – DBCDE have received over 20 submissions.
- Our governance Board meet every quarter and we report to them and also to our funders against specific KPIs.
- ACCAN has built up its management team and now employs a team of 17 people (14.8 FTEs).
- ACCAN depends on volunteers and its membership base to raise issues and give us views about their concerns and share their expertise.
- We have looked into alternate sources of funding however it is important that ACCAN is not gagged by the receipt of any funding and makes this clear in all sponsorships for events or projects.
- ACCAN aims to model best practice in inclusiveness and we have now implemented a Disability Action Plan and we are working towards a Reconciliation Action Plan.



# Ready for Future Challenges



# What does the future hold?

## Challenges for ACCAN – next two years

- Keeping our membership active as well as ensuring we continue to be representative and engage the next generation of consumers.
- Delivering significant telco reforms with Stage Two of *Reconnecting the Customer*.
- Continuing to build our research base and link this into our advocacy work.
- Launching our Reconciliation Action Plan & an Indigenous Program.
- Building a better dialogue with small business groups.
- Developing a regional engagement strategy on a limited budget.
- Expanding our consultative mechanisms on the same budget.
- Improving our engagement with industry both in self regulatory processes as well as through direct consultation.
- Developing members understanding on emerging issues such as internet fair use policies, privacy and security, broadcasting and convergence issues and sustainability.
- Ensuring ACCAN represents ongoing value to members and continues to get funding after June 2013.

# Questions



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## **Contacting ACCAN**

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