Small businesses kept on hold by telecom customer service: ACCAN

While most small businesses say they're satisfied overall, nearly a third experience major problems.

Adam Bender (Computerworld) | **29 January, 2013 16:05**

Nearly a third of small business owners suffer from significant customer service issues with phone and broadband providers, according to a [Market Clarity report (PDF)](#)[1] released by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

Market Clarity interviewed 260 small businesses with less than 20 staff across 14 vertical industry segments. Many reported "significant customer service problems such as difficulty in contacting their provider, being on hold, getting a problem resolved or having to call multiple times".

Such problems were reported by 46 per cent of fixed services users, 29 per cent of VoIP users, 32 per cent of fixed broadband users, 33 per cent of mobile voice users, 21 per cent of mobile broadband users and 11 per cent of Eftpos users, the report said.

Still, most business customers said they were mostly satisfied with their telecom services, the report said. Satisfaction was reported by 88 per cent of fixed voice users, 90 per cent of VoIP users, 88 per cent of fixed broadband users, 88 per cent of mobile voice users, 89 per cent of mobile broadband users and 95 per cent of Eftpos users.

"However, study findings suggest that factors beyond service reliability feed into respondent's overall service satisfaction," the report said. "In a number of cases, respondents reported overall service satisfaction even where they experienced regular service faults (at least monthly), which would have the potential of a severe or catastrophic business impact if the outage lasted for a full day."

Also, the report found that half of the small businesses interviewed had no backup plan in the case of broadband outages, even though 32 per cent said that even a one-hour fixed broadband outage would have a "catastrophic" impact on business.

"This is clearly an area where education could reduce small business' risk exposure," said Market Clarity's chief executive, Shara Evans. "For instance, small businesses could buy a mobile broadband 'dongle', or consider getting a fixed broadband service from multiple providers, across diverse technologies."

ACCAN said the report highlights unacceptable customer service problems for telecom used by small business.

"While the majority of small businesses are satisfied with their telecommunications services, they are experiencing higher levels of faults than is ideal," ACCAN said in a foreword to the report.

"These outages — even if they are for a short duration — can have a catastrophic impact on a small business. Compounding these issues are the problems that some small business owners have in resolving faults when they arise, even though most are paying for business grade services."

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