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## Features Article

### ISPs should guarantee their advertised speeds

Like mobile phones, the internet is a 'need' for many ordinary consumers in today's modern technology-driven society. Internet service providers (ISPs) understand the demand and have tried to attract consumers with promotions highlighting how faster their speeds are or how generous they are with data.

The façade is that consumers are hooked on to their respective internet plans but often complain that they are not getting the speed promised to them by their ISPs.

Why are internet plans are based on speeds which ISPs cannot guarantee? Is this fair?

With the increase in internet use, the Consumer Council has also recorded an increase in queries/complaints from consumers raising concerns over the kind of service they receive from some ISPs in the country.

Many of these aggrieved consumers want the ISPs to experience the situation where someone is in the middle of a very important bank transaction, job interview, assignment discussion or simply a conversation, suddenly find a break in connectivity. Who should be responsible for this loss of not just money but the time, which is of great essence in today's busy and competitive world? Speed has become important to many internet users and some go through unnecessary mental stress when they are unable to complete their work on time due a slow internet connection

Some consumers have even expressed concern saying they are paying money to access internet but are unable to find the speed to download their reading material and as a result, are left with little choice but to go to cyber cafes to access internet.

Keeping such grievances in mind, the global consumer body, Consumers International (CI) last in 2012 announced a campaign titled "Holding Broadband Service Providers to Account". The campaign aims to empower consumer organisations around the world to demand more equitable and accessible broadband service offerings, respecting consumers' rights as a necessary condition of achieving a socially-inclusive information society.

The Consumer Council launched its national campaign for Broadband Nutrition Labeling in September last year aimed at getting ISPs to be more truthful in the information they provide to consumers. The Council is calling on ISPs to provide a Broadband Disclosure Statement which summarises essential information that can assist consumers to make an informed decision.

The statement should not only provide essential information for consumers to make informed choices, but also allow them to compare services between various ISPs in the market. The

Broadband Disclosure Statement proposed by the Council involves 5 basic components: speed variation; reliability; service limits and conditions; pricing information and; other information.

One of the problems faced by internet users is misleading advertisements. A good example is when internet speeds are commonly mis-advertised, with “up to” speeds being claimed that do not represent anything like the actual average speeds that users experience in practice. The Council expects ISP’s to give a likely speed estimate so that consumers know what kind of speeds they will get during peak and off-peak times.

Providers who have signed up to it must give customers a written estimate of their broadband speed at the start of a contract and must allow them to leave a contract without penalty if they receive speeds significantly below the estimate.

ISP’s can do that at the point of sale because broadband speed can be affected by network coverage area and for wireless users, distance from a wireless access point or tower. ISPs should be focusing providing more accurate information on speed variability. Rather than providing an estimated speed range that a customer could expect to receive, providers should pinpoint a more accurate speed that customers can expect at their home address and provide this in writing. ISPs should provide information such as peak hours and off-peak hours during which internet speeds drop or are at optimum levels.

Consumers prefer ISP’s guaranteeing the minimum speed rather than giving false hope by using the term “up to”.

Information sheet on the campaign is available on the Council website – [www.consumersfiji.org](http://www.consumersfiji.org) that includes an example of a Broadband Disclosure Statement.