

Alternative Networks plc Consumer Code of Practice

1. The Purpose of this Code

We have produced this Code of Practice as part of our obligations under the new telecommunications regulations that came in to force on 25 July 2003 and in accordance with Ofcom requirements. The overall purpose of the Code is to provide our clients with a clear statement of the range of policies, services and support activities that we offer. It is intended to provide sufficient information for our clients, to understand the range of services available from us, and how to contact us whether to obtain a new service, clarify our terms and conditions, obtain support from us, or indeed to make a complaint.

2. Who We Are

Alternative Networks is a business communication specialist focused on two key areas; Network Services and Business Systems. As a Network service provider we offer a full range of fixed line, mobile, Internet and data services. Within the Business Systems portfolio, we supply, install and maintain business telephone systems as well as fulfil call centre, video conferencing and integrated data applications. Working with world-class suppliers and providing unprecedented levels of service and quality, we offer stand-alone products from either the Networks or Systems portfolio through to fully converged solutions, using elements of both.

Co-founders James Murray and Chris Wilson set up the company in 1994 with just £9,000 to take advantage of telecoms deregulation, which allowed independent resellers to compete directly with BT in providing communication services.

Since our establishment we have experienced rapid and consistently profitable growth by providing our clients with informed and tailored advice, backed up by world-class quality products, and excellent client service. The secret to this success is our commitment to re-investing in staff and ongoing internal training to deliver excellent client service, ensuring that the company is able to maintain its industry leading position.

Since early 2001, over £250,000 has been spent expanding the client services team and a further £750,000 will be spent over the next 18 months developing its Client Relationship Management (CRM) systems. A further £300,000 has been invested in ongoing internal training, including the launch of a new employee scheme to ensure that clients benefit from the best advice possible.

3. How to Contact Us

We offer a variety of means of contact, depending on your needs at any point in time. The principal methods are detailed below:

Telephone	0800 316 8866
Fax	0800 316 8867
Email	For general enquiries you can email us on clientservices@alternativenetworks.com
Website	You can contact us via our website www.alternativenetworks.com via the Contact, Call Me page. Your enquiry will be forwarded to our client services team who will return your call.
In Writing	Should you wish to contact us in writing please direct all mail to our head office: Alternative Networks plc Chatfield Court 56 Chatfield Road London SW11 3UL

Or alternatively to our regional offices:

Alternative Networks plc
The Lancastrian Office Centre
Talbot Road
Old Trafford
Manchester
M32 0FP

Alternative Networks plc
Building 1015
Arlington Business Park
Theale, Reading
Berkshire
RG7 4SA

Alternative Networks plc
16A Concourse House
432 Dewsbury Road
Leeds
LS11 7DF

4. Our Aims and Goals

Our vision is to be the best at ‘helping people communicate’ by providing our clients with the highest level personal service and clear advice on the most efficient and cost effective ways to meet all their communication needs.



As one of the largest independent companies in our sector, we are partnered with the best suppliers in the industry. By maintaining this independence we ensure that clients have access to a choice of solutions. As we continue to forge closer relationships with suppliers and tailor the latest technologies in response your needs, we will maintain our position as the UK's leading independent business communication service provider.

As an impartial and private company that is not influenced by third parties and suppliers, we are focused on fostering organic growth. In today's market it's important that you work with a credible and financially stable company. With no net borrowings, substantial cash reserves and plans to double in size over the next two years, you can feel safe in the knowledge that we can support you now and in the future.

One of the very first companies to emerge as a result of the full deregulation of the UK telecommunications market, Alternative Networks has a track record that is second to none. Possessing a history of consistent, profitable organic growth, our core focus is based on listening to clients and delivering what they want.

Our investment will continue to remain in people to ensure they understand your needs and can use their knowledge and skills to help recommend and tailor solutions to meet these needs.

5. The Services We Offer

Since our formation in 1994, we have operated as an independent business communication specialist. We support companies in all areas of voice and data solutions and give impartial advice on developing and running your communications infrastructure.

All our solutions are geared towards optimising the efficiency, flexibility and stability of your corporate communications and include everything from telephone systems, network services and mobile phones to call centre applications and internet access.

As an independent company you can feel safe in the knowledge that we only work with world-class providers such as WorldCom, COLT, Energis, Cable & Wireless, Avaya Communication, Cisco Systems, Vodafone and O2. So you have the freedom to choose different products and services. What's more we can tailor-make a solution to fit your business and budget exactly.

You will also receive support from your own Client Manager who will monitor the market on your behalf, keep you updated on the latest developments and additionally day to day dedicated support from our Client Services team who will be one point of contact for absolutely any queries you may have.

6. Client Service

As a client of Alternative Networks you will receive the highest level of client support from both the Client Services department and your Client Manager. As your dedicated Client Services Department we are committed to providing you with the highest level of service to ensure we can respond quickly and knowledgeably to all your queries.

6.1 Timely response to queries

E-mail	Same working day if received by 12pm, otherwise next working day
Fax	Same working day if received by 12pm, otherwise next working day
Post	2 working days if received before 12pm, otherwise 3 working days
We will inform you during the same working day if we are unable to immediately answer your question. We will find an answer or update for you within 3 working days.	

6.2 Accountable

- Respond to complaints within 24 hours. We aim to resolve all client complaints within 10 working days*.
 - Monitor set client service performance targets to drive & measure improvements.
 - Continually monitor client feedback.
 - Conduct regular surveys of client satisfaction.
- * Please note, some complex issues can take longer to resolve, but we promise to update you regularly.*

6.3 Accessible

- Answer 95% of phone calls within our 3 ring answer policy.
- Provide fault reporting & handling 24 x 7, 365 days a year.
- You can contact us on freephone number 0800 316 8866 or fax 0800 316 8867 and by e-mail: clientservices@alternativenetworks.com

6.4 Knowledgeable

- Provide our clients with fully trained and professional staff to give you clear, concise advice and answers to all your queries.
- Provide our clients with Product Specialists to offer a higher level of response to complex queries within a specific area of expertise if required.
- If you feel your query requires the attention of a Client Services Team Leader or the Client Service Manager you can ask to escalate your query at any time.

6.5 Customer Satisfaction

At Alternative Networks we pride ourselves on our high levels of client satisfaction and are constantly striving to improve our service to our clients. It is important that we gain client feedback and constantly review our service offering.

We carry out the following Client Satisfaction Surveys on a monthly basis –Post Installation Survey, Post Systems Installation, Post Fault Survey and Post Complaint Survey. Within these surveys, we strive to achieve a 90% overall satisfaction rating. Any client who has reported the service to be less than satisfactory will be contacted to discuss further.

6.6 Sales Practices

We are building our client base through the use of a variety of techniques including:

- Face to face Meetings
- Telesales
- Industry specific promotions
- Targeted leafleting
- Mail shots
- Referrals and word-of-mouth recommendations
- Partnerships with other companies
- Acquisition
- Developing existing accounts
- Conferences

6.5 Ordering our Services

Clients wishing to order our service can contact us either in writing, by phone, or by email. Our Order Management team is responsible for connecting all new orders received by the company and making changes to any existing services.

A project coordinator manages the installation of the service and ensures that the client is informed at each critical point in the installation process. Quality assurance practises measure the success of the installation from point of sale through to pre-bill check within Order Management. Post install surveys measure the client's satisfaction and provide detailed reporting on areas for streamlining processes and optimising interactions with clients.

6.6 Service Cancellation

For our basic service we only operate a rolling one-month contract with the monthly fee paid up in advance. Having said this, there are a number of areas where we do need a longer-term commitment, for example:

- Where the customer is “hosting” a node
- Where a dedicated circuit has been provided

Order Management is responsible for disconnecting or cancelling services according to the terms of the contract signed by the client. All cancellations are passed from Account Management to Order Management. Any settlement fees or disconnection charges will be applied to the client bill.

6.7 Repairs

We aim to close all of our mobile repairs within 10 working days. This service includes a courier collection and return postage by special delivery— both free of charge for our clients. The client is updated throughout the repair to keep them updated on our progress reports.

6.8 Fault Reporting

Faults can be logged with Client Services on 0800 316 8866, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Work will then begin immediately to investigate and resolve the reported fault, even if the fault is reported out of hours. We have a separate procedure for clients with phone system maintenance contracts with Alternative Networks

6.9 Fault Reporting Tips

In order for Alternative Networks to deal with faults as quickly as possible, we would like to advise you of some fault reporting tips. For hints on how to best report faults, please consult our web page at www.alternativenetworks.com

6.10 Service Pricing

Alternative Networks believes in simple, easy to understand pricing for all our products and services.

As we have now reached the £40 million revenue threshold, with the help of The British Standards Institute (BSI), we are now working towards compliance of the new Total Metering & Billing Direction. This means that our standard tariffs will be available via our website and clients will be provided with any non-standard tariffs at the time of placing an order or on request.

Centralised systems are being developed to ensure that published tariffs can easily be audited against billed tariffs to ensure accuracy. Clients can contact us at any time to request pricing information on any of the products and services they are using.

6.11 Billing

Our standard billing cycle is monthly in advance for line rental, payable by direct debit or standing order. The installation/connection fee is payable as soon as the service has been successfully installed and shown to be operational. Should a client cease to pay for the service, then we reserve the right to charge interest on the overdue

amount and/or to suspend/cancel the service until the account has been brought up to date.

Bills for network services are generated by calendar month and are issued up to one month in arrears. For example, calls made in the period 1-31 July would be billed by the 31 August. Associated service fees such as line rental and connection charges are invoiced on the same bill, but could be charged for up to three months in advance, or one month in arrears, according to our product specific terms and conditions. Payment is made in a variety of methods including Direct Debit.

We are able to provide itemised bills to customers who request them, and also special format bills for those with a disability (see Section 7 below)

Queries or complaints about our monthly bills are directed to the Billing Department via Client management or our Client Services.

6.11.1 Billing - Mobile hardware, telephone systems hardware and maintenance

Invoices for mobile hardware are due in arrears after the successful fulfilment of an order, with usual credit terms being 14 days after the invoice date.

Invoices for telephone systems hardware are due in advance of the installation of the telephone system, with instalments being charged in accordance with those stated on the sales order.

Invoices for the maintenance of telephone systems are due in advance of the period of cover and if the contract is renewing, the annual increase will be based on the prevailing rate of inflation.

Payment is made in a variety of methods, including Direct Debit for those clients

wishing to pay for mobile hardware invoices who have an existing Direct Debit Instruction set up for networks services.

We reserve the right to suspend/cancel network services if a client fails to pay for mobile hardware, telephone systems hardware or maintenance invoices, until their account is brought up to date.

Queries or complaints about mobile hardware, telephone systems hardware and maintenance invoicing are directed to the relevant Account Manager or Finance Department.

6.12 Complaint Handling and Dispute Resolution

6.12.1 Complaints

We take all complaints seriously and will do what we reasonably can to resolve the issue speedily and to the satisfaction of the client concerned. If you have an issue with any aspect of our service, please call us on 0800 316 8866 and we will do our best to resolve your issue.

We respond to all complaints received within 24 hours and all written complaints are responded to in writing within 3 working days. If we cannot resolve your complaint within the first 3 working days, you will be updated continually by us.

Once a complaint has been closed, all clients are subsequently surveyed on a monthly basis (see Client Satisfaction above for more details). We aim to close 85% of our complaints within 10 working days.

6.12.2 Disputes

If an Alternative Networks client has a real or perceived dispute they may contact us (by telephone, email, fax etc).

All disputes are logged and we aim to acknowledge all disputes within 24 hours. Your complaint will be investigated in conjunction with your Client Manager and our Credit Control Department and you will be kept updated.

If at the end of this procedure you feel your complaint has not been addressed properly, you can contact Otelo.

Otelo
PO Box 730
Warrington
WA4 6WU

Website: www.otelo.org.uk
Email: enquires@otelo.org.uk
Telephone: 0845 050 1614.

Otelo is an independent approved dispute resolution service and is empowered to resolve customer disputes; we are committed to this process. Otelo is approved by the communications regulator Ofcom.

If we have not resolved your complaint to your satisfaction after 12 weeks or if you have received a letter from us saying that your complaint has reached “deadlock”, you may make a complaint through Otelo.

6.13 Compensation

We have no rigid compensation process. If there is a circumstance where compensation would be appropriate, we would look at it in isolation upon its own particular facts and assess the applicable level of compensation.

7. Services for Disabled Customers

AN will access all requests for information and make special arrangements on a case by case basis. Examples would be the provision of product information and contract information and billing information in Braille or in large print. Please contact your client manager for assistance and further information (please see contact details at Section 3 above)

8. Malicious Calls Policy

Alternative Networks takes the problem of nuisance calls and malicious communications seriously. Please contact us if you experience such calls and / or communications and we will work with you and the Police and any other regulatory body, as appropriate

9. Minors and Restricted Access

- 9.1 We would encourage parents to register their children's mobile phones and to take responsibility for all client services for them
- 9.2 We are able to tailor the services that we provide, which could include putting a bar on international and / or premium rate numbers

10. Customer Rights and Obligations

Your rights and obligations when using our services are detailed in our terms and conditions which are available by contacting Alternative Networks (see How to Contact Us above).

11. How We Communicate with Our Customers

We aim to communicate with our current and potential clients using the most effective (and cost effective) means available. In practice, the majority of direct (one to one) communication with clients will be either via email or telephone. Where we wish to communicate on a wider basis than this will tend to be done via news and/or other postings

on the most relevant web site or by our quarterly magazine Grapevine.

Our Client Management team will be in contact with our clients on a regular basis and for our larger clients we aim to have monthly review meetings.

This Code of Practice is in itself one of our methods of communication with our clients, as it seeks to outline our business aims, the services we offer, and what you should be able to expect from us as your service provider. A copy of this Code is posted on our web site. However, if you would like us to post you a copy then please contact us via email, phone, or post and we will happily send you one.

12. Approval and Review of this Code

This Code of Practice has been approved by Ofcom. We will publish revisions to this Code of Practice as and when we feel it will be necessary and/or beneficial. However, we also undertake to conduct a formal review of the Code once a year.

If you have any specific comments on this Code of Practice, or would like us to consider specific amendments, corrections, or improvements in a future revision, then please do contact us.

13. Further Contact Information

Ofcom

Ofcom Contact Centre
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London
SE1 9HA

Email: contact@ofcom.org.uk

Web site: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/>

Tel: 020 7981 3040 or
0845 456 3040