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AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ALAC Statement on the
Draft Advice Letter on Consumer Trust, Consumer Choice, and Competition

Introduction

By the Staff of ICANN

Wolf Ludwig, Chair of the European Regional At-Large Organization (EURALO) and Yrjö Länsipuro, At-Large member from the EURALO Region, originally composed this Statement after discussion of the topic on the mailing lists and at the ICANN 43rd Public Meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica.

On 9 April 2012, a draft of the Statement was posted on the [At-Large Draft Advice Letter on Consumer Trust, Consumer Choice, and Competition Workspace](#). On that same day, Olivier Crépin-Leblond, Chair of the ALAC, requested At-Large Staff to send a three-day call for comments on the draft Statement to all At-Large members via the ALAC-Announce Mailing List.

On 16 April 2012, the Chair of the ALAC requested that Staff open a five-day ALAC ratification on the Statement. The Chair also requested that the Statement be transmitted to the public comment process, copying the ICANN Staff member responsible for this public comment topic, along with a note saying that the document was currently undergoing ALAC ratification with a vote to start shortly.

[End of Introduction]

The original version of this document is the English text available at <http://www.atlarge.icann.org/correspondence>. Where a difference of interpretation exists or is perceived to exist between a non-English edition of this document and the original text, the original shall prevail.

ALAC Statement on the Draft Advice Letter on Consumer Trust, Consumer Choice, and Competition

Introduction

The At-Large Advisory Committee fully supports the recommendations of the Consumer Trust, Consumer Choice and Competition Working Group, noting that several of its members were active members of the Working Group.

While it is understood that the use of the term "Consumer" was made by the Board using an expression from the "Affirmation of Commitments", the ALAC emphasizes the problem that the use of such a term causes for our community, especially in some of our regions.

To illustrate its inadequacy, please find the following case example:

Reservations regarding the "consumer" term in German

The notion of "consumer" or "Konsument" (or "Verbraucher") in German language offers divers connotations, depending on context and circles where it is used. Many of EURALO's German (or germanophone) ALSes may challenge this term because it offers a dichotomous and rather traditional understanding particularly if adopted for the Internet age. And we have learned that this ambiguous perception is shared by member ALSes in other European countries.

A consumer or "Konsument" or "Verbraucher" in German is somebody who is mostly interested in general consumption. Commercial offers should be inexpensive and of decent quality or providing a good value-for-money ratio. Consumer trust is considered important. Besides a certain purchasing power, "der Konsument" is rather inactive than pro-active, or sort of "couch potato" in a traditional sense. Consumer associations are still confined in the analogue age and remarkably reluctant to broaden their scope to the Online world.

The notion of "consumer" or "Konsument" is more and more generalized up to whateverism and political abuse. In the area of media for example, recipients are no longer and more precisely specified or characterized as readers, spectators, audience, public or the like but reduced and generalized as "Konsumenten". And whatever pleases a certain majority of "consumers" must be good, even if bare of substance. Institutions of public broadcasting are increasingly affected by this tendency. Furthermore, Internet users are more and more also producers of content and actively sharing information. Besides, traditionally consuming something (e. g. food, water, energy etc.) implies that the resource or commodities in question diminishes by consumption. Therefore we think, we should not use the same word for a resource which actually grows in value when it is "consumed" or shared by more people.

When you refer to consumer choice, trust, protection and the like, you imply conventional commerce, consumption and markets but not obviously Online and the Internet. As this notion in a German language context and further European perceptions doesn't offer much specification or clarification but more likely nebulisation, our community prefers and mostly uses the Internet user notion ("Internetnutzer"). The Internet user won't reconcile him/herself with a role of conventional passive consumption but insists on inter-activity, surfing, commenting, down/uploading, and the whole variety of options provided by the Internet. To our understanding, the "Internetnutzer" is comparably younger with certain skills for the use / Nutzung of the Internet (factor of empowerment) and showing a certain political sensitivity when key issues and principles of the Internet like access or openness etc. are at stake. In related terms, we also talk about

Internet-Nutzung (usage), Nutzungsgewohnheiten (habits) and more of such user specifications, whereas "consumption of the Internet" simply sounds strange and dissociated in German. These are some brief reflections explaining our reservations regarding the "consumer" term.

Recommendation

Although the report of the Working Group clearly defines the term "Consumer" as "actual and potential Internet users and registrants", the ALAC believes that the correct term to use in all publications instead of "Consumer" should be "Internet User" and "Consumers" as "Internet Users" whether they are registrants or not. The recommendation of the ALAC is for the ICANN Board to use the term "Internet User" in future work and communication referring to "actual and potential Internet users".

The ALAC leaves it to the Board to determine how to respond to third parties that use the term "Consumer" in light of the dissociation in the international context, an example of which is provided in this Statement.