

LYNCH ANALYSIS: How the issues of industry distrust predate the 2022 Optus outage

TELSTRA: Vicki Brady observes that mobile is key to AI usage

NBN CO: Begins trials of FibreOne building development product

**21,051 readers
last week**

COMMUNICATIONS DAY

9 June 2026

News and analysis about ANZ telecom and digital infrastructure

ISSUE 7382

NBN Co rejects ACCAN demand forecast challenge

NBN Co has rejected a challenge by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network to its demand forecasts, saying there is “strong and accelerating customer demand for higher speed and higher capacity connectivity.”

ACCAN questioned the level of future demand for higher speed services in its submission to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission’s consultation on the future of NBN Co’s Special Access Undertaking. The group also commissioned FTI Consulting to review NBN Co’s demand forecasts.

ACCAN said NBN Co’s forecasts “seem to be driven by network expenditure plans and prices, rather than the other way around” and argued there was limited transparency on how willingness to pay had been incorporated. It said those concerns were aligned with issues previously raised by the ACCC.

“Instead of the demand forecasts informing planned initiatives, ACCAN considers that NBN Co’s forecasts appear to have been reverse engineered from proposed investment initiatives,” ACCAN argued.

ACCAN said there was a difference between consumers upgrading to higher speeds because of “genuine demand” and those who were “upgraded for free” to a service with maximum bandwidth they may not need. It said it held significant concerns that NBN Co’s analysis may have “materially overstated latent consumer demand for higher speed services, in order to justify proposed expenditure.”

NBN Co rejected the criticism.

“Our demand forecasting is based on actual customer take-up rates in the early stages of the program between FY21 and FY23, and demand for fibre upgrades and higher speed tiers has only accelerated in the last three years,” an NBN Co spokesperson told CommsDay.

“More than 1.29 million homes and businesses have upgraded to fibre, with NBN consistently taking orders and upgrading approximately 47,000 premises from ageing, copper-based technologies to full fibre each month.”

The company also pointed to changes to fibre-to-the-curb to fibre-to-the-premises upgrades being rolled out from next month.

“Our approach reflects the significant economies of scale NBN is able to achieve as a result of the sequence and timing of the Fibre Upgrade Program, which builds on NBN’s experience from the initial fibre rollout and is consistent with international

peers,” the spokesperson said.

NBN Co said consultation on its Replacement Module Application under the SAU had coincided with strong customer interest in further upgrades to the network.

“This includes our national fibre upgrade program, planned enhancements to our low Earth orbit satellite capability and further initiatives to improve network reliability and resilience, particularly in the face of increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters,” the spokesperson said. “These investments are fundamental to ensuring the network remains robust, adaptable and fit for the future.”

NBN Co also rebuffed ACCAN’s criticism of its approach to community engagement, including the suggestion that the company had approached the process seeking endorsement of a predetermined position.

The spokesperson pointed to “two years of intensive engagement” involving the ACCC, retail service providers, consumer advocacy groups and customers, including through the independently chaired Regulatory Proposal Forum, of which ACCAN is a member. NBN Co also convened an end user panel.

The company said it had consulted on specific expenditure proposals and had adjusted its proposed benchmark service standards in response to feedback.

“We have valued the opportunity to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to strengthen the wholesale broadband services that support millions of Australian homes and businesses,” the spokesperson said.

Rohan Pearce

Brady says mobility is overlooked in AI debate

Telstra CEO Vicki Brady has argued that mobile networks are being underplayed in Australia’s AI policy debate, saying secure and reliable connectivity will be central to how most people, devices and machines interact with the technology.

Speaking after an AI conference in Sydney, Brady said the discussion around AI had shifted rapidly from generative AI to agentic AI.

“A year ago, the conversations were about generative AI. This time it was all about agentic – when AI goes from assisting to doing – and what that means for where and how work gets done,” she said.

Brady said the shift would change the way organisations operated and the skills they required, with workers moving “from doing the work to directing the work.” She said the technology itself was not the main constraint.

“The tech isn’t the limitation – it’s how fast organisations can change,” she said.

But Brady also sought to position AI as a broader national issue, arguing that Australia’s ability to build trust, skills and inclusion would determine whether the benefits were widely shared.

“There’s a national conversation to be had about how the benefits of AI are shared,” she said. “I believe business has an important role to play in that, working alongside government, industry and unions.”



Vicki Brady

Brady said the role of connectivity in enabling AI was “beginning to be understood,” pointing to Telstra’s recent announcement that Google would become a customer on its Aura Network. Telstra also said it would access new subsea cable capacity through Google’s Pacific Connect and Australia Connect initiatives, which Brady said were critical to connecting data centres and linking Australia to the world.

However, she said the less-discussed issue was mobility.

“There is no AI without a secure and reliable network connecting people, devices, robots, drones, sensors and so on,” Brady said. “This is how most people will interact with AI and will be essential to unlocking economic and social benefits.”

Brady said AI-era mobile demand would differ from the streaming and video traffic patterns that had shaped recent network investment cycles. She said future demand would require “a higher level of network sophistication,” which advanced 5G and 6G would deliver.

But she linked that transition to the policy and investment environment, saying it would require “a significant investment leap” that could not occur “without the right conditions and alignment with government.”

“The future will be more digital than anything we’ve known before,” Brady said. “We’re beginning to have the right conversations, but we have further to go if we want to become an advanced AI nation, and do it in a way that benefits all Australians.

Grahame Lynch

NBN enters test phase for FibreOne

NBN Co is moving into the test phase for its new FibreOne product to supply non-broadband services to developments. The telco has released a customer trial agreement for what it has dubbed managed service providers, which will use the product to support integrated communications network solutions.

The aim is to use NBN fibre infrastructure deployed at new developments to support technologies such as intercoms, CCTV, renewable energy systems and intercoms, while not interfering with the delivery of broadband and potentially fibre TV.

Deployment requires a developer to support a master development agreement with NBN Co for both NBN Ethernet and NBN FibreOne.

“The Trial Agreement has been developed for the limited purpose of facilitating testing and trial activities in connection with nbn’s proposed launch of the nbn FibreOne solution,” a letter accompanying the new testing agreement said.

“Accordingly, the terms of the Test Agreement are intended to apply solely to the testing arrangements during the trial period and should not be taken as final or enduring commercial terms for the FibreOne product.”

Participating MSPs will have an opportunity to review and comment on the final standard form of access agreement for FibreOne as part of an upcoming formal industry consultation process, the letter said.

Following an earlier consultation NBN Co said it would proceed with the launch of FibreOne, with target availability of Q2 FY27. The wholesaler said that overall it had received positive feedback. However, in its close-out paper from that consultation NBN noted that support had not been unanimous from participants.

One unnamed stakeholder argued “NBN should only enter a new market segment to remedy an identified market failure that private operators are unwilling or unable to address due to high barriers to entry or low returns on investment,” the paper said.

Rohan Pearce

TIO topped ACMA section 522 notice list over past two years

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman received more formal information-gathering notices from the Australian Communications and Media Authority than any other identified entity over the past two financial years, according to answers provided by the regulator to a Senate inquiry into Triple Zero outages.

ACMA told the committee it had issued five notices to the TIO under section 522 of the Telecommunications Act over 2024-25 and 2025-26. That compared with two notices issued to Singtel Optus and two to Telstra over the same period.

The disclosure follows scrutiny of ACMA’s use of a section 522 notice to obtain information from the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network about its Consumer Sentiment Tracker, including data from a question on whether respondents had struggled to contact Triple Zero.

ACMA issued ACCAN with the notice in 2025-26. The consumer group has said it had already offered to provide further information about the Wave 3 data in response to questions from the regulator. ACMA has said it sought material beyond what ACCAN had offered.

In its answer to the committee, ACMA said it routinely used section 522 notices as part of its regulatory work but did not maintain a consolidated register of all notices issued. Other recipients identified by the regulator included gambling operators, marketing entities and retailers.

ACMA also issued a notice to Ericsson in connection with the Optus Dapto outage in September 2025, as well as two notices to Samsung’s Australian subsidiary to assess compliance with the Telecommunications Act in relation to device supply.

NSW Ambulance received a notice in relation to the November 2025 Triple Zero incident in Ingleburn. That incident related to a Samsung device running out of date software. ACCAN CEO Carol Bennett last month described ACMA’s decision to issue the advocacy group with a notice as “extraordinary”, saying the regulator “should be focussed on holding industry not consumer organisations to account.”

The Senate committee has been examining the resilience of Triple Zero access following a series of outages and device-related failures.

Rohan Pearce

Telstra Foundation delivers ‘catalytic’ funding to help device bank scale

A close to \$3 million commitment by Telstra’s philanthropic arm is expected to move the National Device Bank from an initial pilot to a genuinely scaled national model aimed at addressing a key element of digital exclusion.

Telstra Foundation CEO Jackie Coates said that the Australian Youth Digital Index showed some 19-23% of young people lack access to a laptop or desktop PC at home; equivalent to around 1.42 million people.

The funding will “really help scale something that we know works,” building on the experience of the pilot, Coates told CommsDay.

The announcement coincided with a meeting of representatives from businesses, community organisations and government agencies in Sydney on Friday to support the draft Tech Reuse for Good Charter.

The charter has been developed by the Business Council of Australia, Good Things Australia and WorkVentures. Along with Telstra Foundations, other participants at the roundtable included NBN Co, the Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, Amazon, the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance, KPMG, Deloitte, Ashurst, Westpac, The Smith Family, First, Infoxchange, and Dementia Australia.

Assistant minister for science, technology and the digital economy Andrew Charlton said the broad cross-sector collaboration “reflects a shared commitment to inclusion and opportunity—values that underpin our goal of ensuring all Australians succeed in the digital age.”

“The government recognises Telstra’s significant investment into this program and the support this new social infrastructure will provide to young Australians and the contribution of all partners working together to close the digital divide,” Charlton added.



Friday's launch in Sydney

“Telstra Foundation’s catalytic support of the National Device Bank strengthens the Tech Reuse for Good Charter’s ambition to scale for-purpose device donations and enhance digital inclusion across Australia,” said WorkVentures CEO Caroline McDaid.

“WorkVentures welcomes the opportunity to work with assistant minister Charlton, Good Things Australia, the Business Council of Australia and member organisations to bring this initiative to life.”

Coates said that federal government support for the device bank and charter would be a key tool for helping ensure that business and government entities feel confident they can contribute their devices.

The charter will include a “playbook”, the Telstra Foundation CEO said, helping agencies navigate the device donation process.

“For example, we lease our laptops, so that has a certain complexity around donations; other companies don’t,” she said. “It’s going to give people case studies and ways to work through any barriers that they might feel they have around the donations. I think it’s going to play quite an important role in convening people and getting people to sign on and get inspired by what we’re trying to do.”

Addressing digital exclusion requires “systems change,” she added. “I think gone

are the days where you can just donate a bunch of laptops to a group. I think this whole system needs to be built that actually taps into those 16 million devices out there that are just up for grabs.”

Across corporate and public sector fleets, some 10 million computers and tablets and 6.5 million smartphones are expected to be refreshed over the next five years.

This is about “a systems fix at scale,” Coates said.

The federal government noted that initiative would on device donations already being carried out by individuals organisations. It noted a focus of the charter on outcomes rather than process, which it said would make it easier to contribute devices without the need for new regulation, mandates or complex funding arrangements.

Good Things Australia CEO Jess Wilson said that access to a device “can open doors to education, employment, essential services and connection” for people experiencing digital exclusion.

“Millions of usable devices are retired by businesses every year. This charter gives businesses a simple way to put them to better use,” said Business Council of Australia CEO Bran Black.

“Access to technology opens doors to communication, education and opportunity. The Business Council is proud to partner on this Charter and encourages every business in Australia to get involved.”

As for Telstra’s participation in the existing industry MobileMuster scheme, a spokesperson said: “We’re evolving our approach to device recovery, reuse and recycling, with a new 2030 target to keep more devices and materials in use for longer. As we bring donation, repair, trade-in, refurbishment and recycling options together into a single program for customers, we will be ending our membership with MobileMuster on 30 June 2026. It goes without saying that we remain committed to tackling e-waste and collaborating with industry to advance a more circular economy.”

Rohan Pearce

Industry calls for clarity on unfair trading practices legislation

The Australian Telecommunications Alliance has called for clarity on how the proposed new unfair trading practices legislative regime would interact with telco-specific rules and regulations.

In its submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Economics’ consultation into the proposed Competition and Consumer Amendment (Unfair Trading Practices) Bill 2026, the ATA said while its members supports the intent of the new rules, the sector is already heavily regulated.

“ATA’s members are bound by detailed, telco-specific rules that have been put in place to address most circumstances in which the issues covered by the proposed UTP rules, would arise. The sector is also subject to numerous other telco-specific rules, including those to protect consumers from scams and fraud,” the submission states. “It is unclear how some of the proposed UTP rules will interact with other telco-specific rules and regulations. This will create compliance and enforcement challenges.”

For example, the submission notes that one of the draft rules states that subscription contracts must provide a way for the subscriber to end the contract that is easy to find, straightforward, requires a consumer to take only steps that are reasonably necessary, and if a subscriber entered the contract online, is online.

The ATA said it supports the first three of these requirements, as long as telco specific regulations are considered when interpreting the section. But it is concerned that the proposed final requirement would potentially constrain telcos from including steps to protect the consumer from fraud or a malicious cancellation attempt by third parties seeking to harm the consumer.

Because service cancellation that results in loss of service is considered a high-risk transaction under the Telecommunications Service Provider (Customer Identity Authentication) Determination 2022, it requires the use of multi-factor authentication. While consumers would usually be able to complete the authentication process online, there are circumstances where they may be unable to do so, such as if they do not possess a smartphone or have disabilities or vulnerabilities.

As drafted, telcos offering alternative in-person or otherwise offline verification processes could be in breach of the requirement, the ATA argued. Compliance with the requirement could also be incompatible with the requirements in the domestic, family and sexual violence industry standard to protect victim survivors, because a requirement for online cancellation may inadvertently make it easier for perpetrators to exercise control over a partner or family member's account, the submission adds.

The ATA is recommending the legislation be drafted in a way that makes clear that the requirement does not apply where unsubscribing online may not be in the best interest of the consumer or would be in breach of sector-specific regulation.

The submission also expresses concern that requirements to provide consumers with detailed information on plan costs, suitability, characteristics and cancellation processes could conflict with the proposed prohibition in the draft UTP bill on providing excessive or confusing information that makes key information difficult to find or understand.

TCA AND DIGI ALSO WANT CLARITY: The Tech Council of Australia's submission meanwhile complains of an "inherent lack of clarity" across the proposed reforms, that make it difficult for businesses to understand their rights and obligations under the proposed regime. The submission recommends clear guidance on issues including key terms, how to implement the changes, and how to equip sales staff to speak to customers directly about the requirements.

The TCA is also recommending that the regime be developed in consultation with industry, and be implemented in stages, including an initial penalty-free stage.

The Digital Industry Group likewise used its submission to argue that the general prohibition on UTP in the draft bill "does not provide sufficient clarity for business or consumers about conduct that is captured and excluded." The submission argues that the concept of unfairness is inherently subjective, and that until a body of judicial precedent can eventually be developed, businesses would be left "without meaningful guidance on compliance."

Dylan Bushell-Embling

Hosted Network taps netElastic to support nationwide expansion

Sydney-based wholesale cloud and telecom service provider Hosted Network is using a software-based networking platform from netElastic to scale nationally.

The company is using netElastic's virtual Broadband Network Gateway and carrier-grade NAT (CGNAT) and the netVision GUI-based management platform to provide business-grade connectivity services to its retail partners, while pursuing growth into new markets including South Australia.

Hosted Network currently supports more than 300 managed service provider partners with services delivered across four data centres in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth.

Hosted Network CEO Ben Town said the solution provides the control, flexibility and reliability needed to effectively serve its customers, as well as the ability to provide managed services providers with self-service network operations and management capabilities. The company selected netElastic after rejecting alternative solutions from larger vendors due to limitations including costs, a lack of flexibility and complex deployment models.



Ben Town

"NetElastic is fundamental to how we run our business," he said. "By integrating directly with netElastic's systems, we can provide faster, smarter support and a better overall customer experience. NetElastic gives us the freedom to grow without constraints. It's a platform we don't have to think about, and that's exactly what you want at the core of your network."

Hosted Network initially deployed the platform in a virtualised environment for testing purposes, before transitioning to a hybrid model that combines high-availability broadband network gateways on physical infrastructure for core services with virtual instances for smaller deployments and further lab testing.

As well as its planned expansion into South Australia, Hosted Network is continuing to roll out IPv6 nationwide, and plans to further enhance its service capabilities by using data from netElastic's software platform to conduct AI-driven analytics.

"What stands out in this partnership is how Hosted Network has used our technology not just to reduce costs, but to fundamentally improve how they deliver services to their MSP customers," netElastic CEO Weixiao Liu said. "By combining performance, automation, and hardware independence, they've built a network that's both resilient and future-ready. We're proud to support their growth and innovation, and we look forward to continuing this journey together."

netElastic is a Santa Clara-based software company that develops virtual routing products for broadband service providers, with its main focus on virtual Broadband Network Gateway, Carrier Grade NAT and virtual router software.

Dylan Bushell-Embling

SiteSee launches NexDT digital twin platform in US

Brisbane telecom software company SiteSee has launched its NexDT digital twin platform in the US market, using the Connect (X) event in Florida to support its international expansion.

The company said the launch demonstrated that Australian-built telecom software can compete globally when focused on “real customer workflows, trusted site data and measurable commercial outcomes.”

NexDT is a digital twin platform for telecom infrastructure, providing a digital representation of tower and rooftop assets and supporting workflows including colocation, upgrades, maintenance and engineering activities.

SiteSee used the launch to showcase customer feedback from Fortysouth New Zealand CEO Nick Clarke and Symphony Towers Infrastructure USA's Jeremie Partridge.

Clarke coined the phrase “15 minute moment” to describe the speed of SiteSee's colocation application process.

Partridge provided what SiteSee described as “a practical US market perspective”, with the company saying that “speed and customer experience win deals” and that NexDT helps infrastructure owners deliver both.

The launch comes as tower companies and mobile operators face growing demands from network densification and ongoing infrastructure upgrades.

SiteSee said the next stage of digital twin adoption would be driven by “faster decisions” and by “unlocking the billions of dollars of value already sitting inside customers' existing workflows.”

Founded in 2016, SiteSee develops artificial intelligence-based software for telecommunications infrastructure. The company said the US launch represented another step in its global growth strategy and an opportunity to address the large North American tower market.

Grahame Lynch



Nick Clarke, Jeremie Partridge, David Pash

MUSK FLAGS 100,000 STARLINK SATELLITES

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk has said the company planned to deploy more than 100,000 satellites for communications, with its third-generation Starlink satellites expected to deliver more than 10 times the bandwidth of the current V2 constellation. Musk told JP Morgan CEO Jamie Dimon during SpaceX's IPO roadshow that V3 satellites would be 10 to 20 times more powerful than existing satellites. He later said on X that

SpaceX would launch 10 times as many satellites, producing “>100X more bandwidth.” Musk said the V3 satellites would orbit at about 350km, down from 550km, cutting minimum round-trip latency to below 5ms.

NASC TAKES DOWN 5,800 SCAM SITES IN Q1

The National Anti-Scam Centre helped take down 5,834 scam websites in the March quarter, including 1,960 fake online gambling sites, as reported losses to Scamwatch fell 17% year-on-year to \$76.7m. The centre’s latest quarterly snapshot found Scamwatch reports declined 17.8% to 45,816, of which 6,775 involved a financial loss. Combined Scamwatch and ReportCyber reports, adjusted to remove duplicates, reached 60,657 with total reported losses of \$248.3m. Online scams caused the greatest financial harm, with \$38.3m lost through online contact. ACCC deputy chair Catriona Lowe said online platforms let scammers reach large numbers of people “quickly, cheaply and convincingly.” Investment scams recorded the highest Scamwatch losses at \$45.5m, while relationship scam losses rose to \$7.5m.

UN STUDY FLAGS AI ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A new United Nations University study has called for broader scrutiny of the environmental impact of artificial intelligence, arguing that carbon emissions alone did not capture the footprint of AI data centres. Researchers at UNU’s Institute for Water, Environment and Health said AI infrastructure also raised material water and land use concerns, with some lower-carbon energy sources potentially increasing other impacts. Lead author Dr Miriam Aczel said some choices that looked “greenest” on carbon could be worse for water or land. The report warned that AI-generated video could sharply increase energy demand, saying a short AI-generated video could use as much electricity as 200,000 basic text classifications.

WLAN POSTS FIFTH DOUBLE-DIGIT GROWTH QUARTER

The wireless local area network market recorded its fifth consecutive quarter of double-digit growth in the first quarter of 2026, according to Dell’Oro Group. The research firm said the result was driven by a 14% increase in unit shipments and higher average selling prices. Revenue from Wi-Fi 7 systems rose by triple digits, although Wi-Fi 7 still accounted for only 37% of indoor access points shipped during the quarter, leaving room for further migration. Dell’Oro said memory supply challenges and rising component prices were expected to affect some equipment lead times. Cisco, Ubiquiti and Huawei remained market leaders.

YOUTUBE OVERTAKES NETFLIX ON DAILY VIEWING

YouTube has overtaken Netflix in average daily viewing time across 20 international markets, according to new research from Digital i. The firm said users spent an average of 99.1 minutes per day on YouTube in 2025, up from 87.2 minutes in 2024. Netflix viewing fell from 100.5 minutes in 2024 to 93.4 minutes last year. Digital i attributed the shift to changing viewing habits, including increased consumption of YouTube on television screens. It said 35% of all YouTube viewing now occurred on television sets.



The vexed question of telecom trust

There was intense interest in last week's CommsDay Summit presentation by Roy Morgan's Michele Levine on why the telecommunications industry is distrusted. Levine traced the current malaise to a series of events beginning with the Optus data breach in late 2022. That was certainly an inflection point.

But the problem began earlier and runs deeper. Indeed, serious failures of trust were evident as long ago as the Telecom COT cases of 1988-1993, One.Tel's collapse in 2001, Vodafone in 2010 and Telstra's national outages in 2016 and 2018. These headline incidents are nothing new. So what else is at work? In my view, Australian telecoms is distrusted because it sells big promises over increasingly complex systems, then carries the blame when those systems fail at the moments consumers need them most, or when the ordinary act of dealing with a provider becomes difficult.

Some of that is the industry's own doing. Retail telcos effectively trained consumers over many years to look for the catch through confusing plans, promotional discounts, add-on charges, handset repayment complexity, loyalty penalties, difficult cancellations and support systems that too often felt designed to retain or deflect rather than resolve. These practices were not unique to telecoms and nor were they irrational in a competitive market. But they taught consumers that the advertised proposition was rarely the full story.

Government policy also played its role by separating the company that sells the service from the company that controls much of the fixed access network. Consumers funded the NBN through public capital, paid for broadband through retail bills and then found themselves in a model where accountability was split between NBN Co and retail providers, often most damagingly at the point of connection or fault repair.

The 2009–2015 fibre wars did further reputational damage to the sector. The NBN became a proxy battle over cost and competence rather than a settled infrastructure project. Fibre-to-the-premises was presented by one side as essential nation-building and by the other as unnecessary, delayed and unaffordable. It was a long-running public argument that undermined confidence before many consumers had even connected. For many households, the political promise outweighed the lived experience: a long wait followed by inconsistent outcomes.

There is an irony in the present debate over trust.

Many of the voices now attacking the sector's performance come from the same policy and advocacy milieu that presented structural separation of Telstra through the NBN as a cure for the industry's problems 15 to 20 years ago. It was not. Structural reform solved some problems, created others and left a more complex chain between infrastructure, retailers, regulators, ministers and consumers. Failed telecoms policy outcomes remain largely consequence-free for their originators.

DISTORTED PRICE SIGNALS: The NBN delivery lottery also weakened the integrity of broadband pricing. Consumers were sold retail broadband plans wholly derived from wholesale constructs measured at a particular point of interconnect, when the actual household experience could depend on access technology, in-home wiring, Wi-Fi, CVC

and backhaul provisioning & congestion. Two households could buy the same nominal plan and receive materially different outcomes.

Subsequent developments blurred the old value signals in broadband pricing. If the gap between a 50Mbps service and a 500Mbps service is just a few bucks, the customer no longer receives a clear signal about what extra speed is worth. Lower-speed users can feel overcharged, while higher-speed tiers can look deceptively cheap because pricing is being used to support migration rather than simply reflect a transparent relationship between price and value.

Furthermore, there has been a failure to explain higher speeds in a way that connects with many Australians' actual lives. Too much of the case for faster broadband is framed around virtual reality, 4K entertainment and a child's impatience to use a newly unwrapped PlayStation on Christmas Day. Those arguments are narrowly bourgeois in what is a more diverse socioeconomic market.

THE CUSTOMER ENDURANCE TEST: Constant six-month promotions reinforce the sense of contrivance, with temporary wholesale discounts often flowing through as \$20-a-month differences in retail prices before reverting to a higher underlying charge. Promotions and migration incentives are normal commercial tools. But in telcoms, they sit on top of an already complex wholesale framework, making the customer experience feel less like choice and more like a test of endurance.

The same problem is visible in mobile. Promotional plans, sub-brands, data inclusions, handset repayments and loyalty discounts obscure the underlying value signal. But blackspots still remain blackspots. Coverage at the margins was made more variable by the 3G shutdown, which exposed the difference between theoretical population coverage and the lived experience of people in fringe areas, indoors, on older devices or in difficult terrain. The political treatment of Triple Zero failures has added to the damage. Serious but statistically isolated failures inevitably fuel broader attacks by politicians, media and consumer lobbies on the sector as a whole.

The deeper issue is that mobile has become essential in a way that goes far beyond voice calls. A mobile failure can mean being unable to pay, verify identity, access services or communicate in an emergency.

That creates a sharp accountability imbalance.

Handset makers generate Australian revenues not far removed from telcos themselves, with new iPhones and Samsung devices often costing well over \$1000. Over-the-top platforms capture much of the value from our online activity. Spectrum managers, planning authorities, global technology vendors, device manufacturers and app platforms all shape the customer experience.

Yet when something goes wrong, consumers rarely blame the handset maker, the council that resisted a tower, the spectrum allocation process that constrained radio capacity or the platform controlling authentication. They blame the telco.

REPUTATION BURDEN: Mobile operators therefore carry the visible reputational burden for a much wider digital ecosystem.

Telecoms has too often invited the public to believe in simple answers, then asked for forgiveness when reality proved more complicated. Coverage maps are a useful example. You cannot adequately represent the physical radio communications envi-

ronment across 3 million sq km on a 10cm map, yet we still purport to achieve something close to that. Mobile is a best effort technology—much like the internet itself—but we pretend otherwise and, worse, place obstacles in the way of its improvement.

Now none of this is an argument against competition, profit or commercial discipline. The best telecom markets need all three. Incentives matter. But telecoms is not a simple consumer goods market. It is a highly interdependent capital-intensive, utility-like sector. The issue is not that telcos compete or return profit. It is that their complex set of ecosystem relationships are poorly understood, governed and defined.

It is, of course, easy to be a know-it-all with the benefit of hindsight. Much of what has damaged trust has not been the result of simple bad faith or incompetence, but the unintended consequences of progress, technology change, well-meaning regulatory design and shifting consumer dependence on connectivity. A mature response would be to understand this and react constructively. Instead, we are prone to damn, criticise or censure every time a complex system produces an inadequate result.

The industry can still reverse some of this. It can simplify products, educate users, reduce tricky promotions, make coverage and performance claims more honest, improve fault ownership, explain the limits of network control more clearly and stop making every pricing change a market-wide churn event.

It is sadly symbolic that government has just defunded a body dedicated to helping rural users get more out of their telecom options but increased the funding for a consumer advocate that seemingly views the word “industry” as a profanity.

Telco needs to tell its story better. After all, it is one of the great enabling industries of modern life. The miracle is that most of it works nearly all of the time across a continent of difficult geography and dispersed population. That story is too often lost.

DIRECT ADVOCACY: The sector needs to be more direct about the social and economic value it creates, while being more honest about the constraints under which it operates. The good news is that the industry has great communicators capable of doing that. For example, three leading infrastructure CEOs spoke at CommsDay Summit last week: NBN Co’s Ellie Sweeney, Vocus CEO Andres Irlando and Telstra Digital Infrastructure CEO Steven Worrall. Sweeney again displayed her warm, engaging and reassuring delivery style. Worrall revealed an impressive off-the-cuff speaking facility. Irlando would not be out of place in central casting for a Hollywood movie.

They are strong, credible and convincing leaders, worthy of exposure to wider audiences across mass media and the economy. Telstra CEO Vicki Brady has already laid the path with her recent National Press Club appearance.

Levine’s presentation also contained some positives. While Australian telecoms as a whole, along with its leading brands, is distrusted, some specific brands are not. She named Aussie Broadband, iiNet, TPG and Starlink as four with positive associations. That is a sign that all hope is not lost.

It is also a warning to regulators, politicians and policymakers not to overcorrect. If some are earning trust through clearer propositions, better service or stronger consumer affinity, policy should recognise those green shoots rather than smother them under reflexive intervention, punitive settings or one-size-fits-all regulation. A sector that has lost trust invites scrutiny. But it also needs room for evidence of recovery to be recognised, rewarded and allowed to grow.

10 YEARS AGO IN COMMSDAY

Optus CEO Allen Lew has appointed a new member of his executive inner circle, promoting Ben White to Optus Consumer marketing and product MD tasked to lead what Lew calls the next phase of the firm's transformation.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority and the International Institute of Communications will co-host a seminar on 21 June focusing on the impending arrival of 5G in Australia.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has signed off on NBN's revenue controls for the last financial year.

Service revenue generated by 4G users will outpace revenue from 3G and 2G services for the first time this year, according to new research by Strategy Analytics.

LATEST SHARE PRICES

	Company name	Change (%)	Last price	Change	Volume	Market cap
	5G Networks Limited	+4.30%	0.0970	+0.0040	404,706	26.2M
	Pentanet Limited	-11.11%	0.0160	-0.0020	1.174M	6.931M
	Aussie Broadband Limited	-0.35%	5.64	-0.02	676,457	1.655B
	Comms Group Limited	+2.03%	0.0755	+0.0015	90,247	41.281M
	Chorus Limited	-1.02%	7.73	-0.08	362,355	3.354B
	Macquarie Technology Group Limited	-0.55%	77.87	-0.43	46,331	2.007B
	Megaport Limited	+11.26%	18.48	+1.87	8.891M	3.531B
	NEXTDC Limited	-3.12%	15.86	-0.51	2.331M	11.46B
	Superloop Limited	+2.59%	3.5700	+0.0900	7.191M	1.838B
	Spark New Zealand Limited	+0.66%	1.5300	+0.0100	2.465M	2.892B
	Swoop Holdings Limited	+2.15%	0.0950	+0.0020	12,127	29.551M
	Telstra Group Limited	0.00%	4.9700	0.0000	20.862M	55.612B
	TPG Telecom Limited	+0.83%	3.6300	+0.0300	3.014M	7.126B

About Communications Day (including Space & Satellite AU & The Line New Zealand)

Communications Day is the telecommunications news bible of ANZ. Published daily since August 1994, CommsDay is expertly written and edited by a team of industry writers with a combined 80 years experience in telecoms across Australia, NZ, Asia, the United States and Europe. CommsDay is available by subscription only and read by up to 10,000 industry executives as well as policymakers and parliamentarians every week day. Around 90% of our readers are in Australia, 5% in New Zealand and the remainder across the rest of the world including Singapore, the United States and the United Kingdom.

PUBLISHED BY DECISIVE PUBLISHING

Mail: PO Box 490 Milsons

Point NSW 1565

Website: www.commsday.com

THIS PUBLICATION IS COPYRIGHT AND ITS CONTENT CANNOT BE REPRODUCED, UPLOADED TO AN AI PLATFORM OR DISTRIBUTED WITHOUT OUR EXPRESS PERMISSION. OFFENDERS CAN BE PROSECUTED. ALL RIGHTS WILL BE EXERCISED.

Contacting CommsDay

Editorial director: Grahame Lynch:
grahamelynch@commsdaymail.com
Managing editor: Rohan Pearce:
rohan@commsdaymail.com
Editor at large: Tony Chan,
tony@commsdaymail.com

CEO & Founder: Grahame Lynch
Grahamelynch@commsdaymail.com

Subscriptions and conference bookings:

Vicky Vo, vicky@commsdaymail.com
CommsDay Summit/Congress/Edisons sponsorship and co-ordination:
Veronica Kennedy-Good,
veronica@mindsharevents.com.au

DOLLAR REFERENCES IN THIS PUBLICATION ARE TO AUSTRALIAN DOLLARS UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED. WE REFERENCE DOLLARS AS AUSTRALIAN IN ARTICLES DEALING WITH MULTINATIONAL OR MULTICURRENCY TOPICS.

COPYRIGHT REMINDER: A CommsDay subscription licenses a specified number of users within your organisation to receive and read the daily PDF, in line with the terms of your subscription. It does not permit distribution outside your organisation, including via external channels or public platforms such as LinkedIn. Nor does it permit uploading CommsDay content to AI or cloud-based services for summarisation, interpretation, republication or training purposes. Such use may constitute a breach of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Civil and criminal penalties may apply, including substantial fines and custodial sentences. If in doubt, please contact us.