

theConnection

newsletter of **thePhoneCo-op**

Autumn 2011



Members respond to consultation

Earlier in the summer we undertook a consultation with our members regarding our overall strategy, including moving into other European markets.

Chief executive Vivian Woodell explains, "As the UK telecoms market continues to mature and consolidate, we need to look at other areas of opportunity to continue growth. The board has been investigating several potential avenues, including energy and renewables, as well as telecoms outside the UK."

A letter went out to members setting out the board's current strategic thinking and seeking feedback. They were asked to consider the following statement:

"I agree with the strategy proposed by the board both for strengthening our existing business, and

looking for new opportunities, including expanding into other European markets, and that this approach creates the opportunity for The Phone Co-op to make a co-operative difference."

Members were asked to give the response which most clearly fitted their view, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.' Of the 843 responses we received, 84% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, compared to 12% who felt the opposite. In other words, those supporting the board's strategy outnumbered those opposing the recommendation by seven to one.

"We'd like to thank everyone who took the opportunity to express their views on the future direction of your co-operative," says Vivian.

Sunny side up

One of the potential new areas of business we are currently exploring is solar PV installation. Director Paul Hopewell volunteered to be a first 'test site' and writes here about his new 'domestic power station':

To cut a long story short, my family have long wanted our own solar power plant, but it has taken over 20 years to realise that dream. During the early 1990's I researched domestic power generation but concluded that, although technically feasible, solar PV was simply uneconomic. While other countries invested in establishing a strong market, there was little incentive in the UK to install a system until the creation of a Feed-in Tariff in 2010. This gives guaranteed, index-linked earnings for 25 years and transformed domestic PV into a very sound investment.

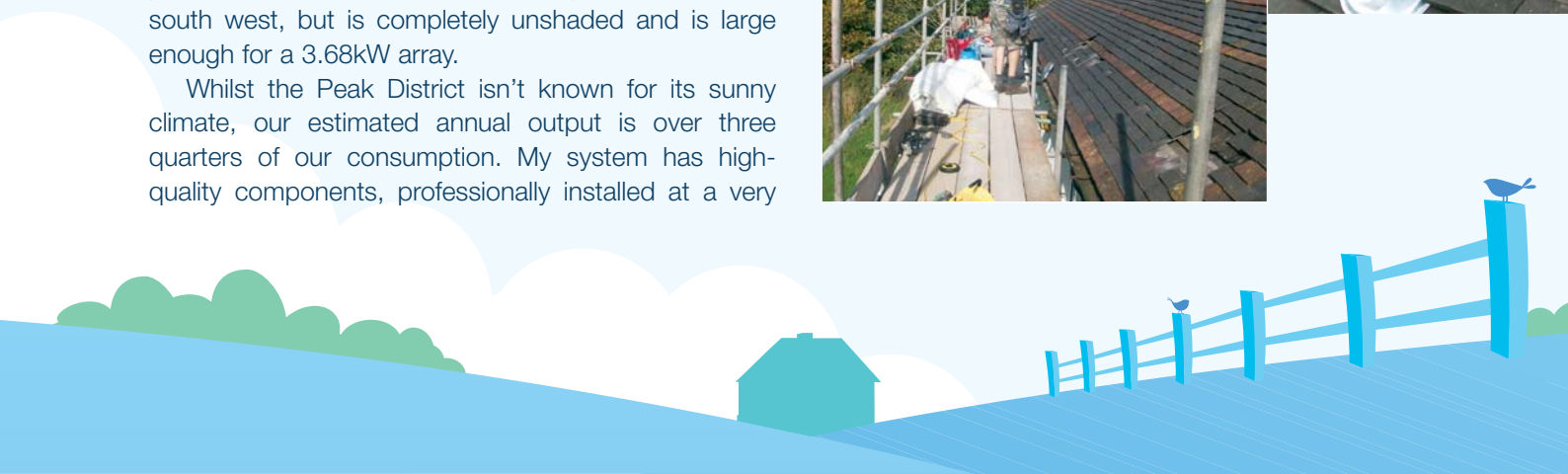
The Phone Co-op has, with experienced partners, established a PV installation co-operative and I am very pleased to be their first customer. My 'best' roof faces south west, but is completely unshaded and is large enough for a 3.68kW array.

Whilst the Peak District isn't known for its sunny climate, our estimated annual output is over three quarters of our consumption. My system has high-quality components, professionally installed at a very

competitive price, and with energy inflation easily outstripping savings interest, modelling suggests a payback in less than nine years.

Our children (Ellie 12, Joe 10) are very excited to be living in a home that now has its own solar power station. If the house is green, then their friends' faces are greener!

Our solar PV service is likely to be launched to customers next year. If you think you might be interested, you can register your interest by emailing amanda@thephone.coop and we will keep you informed of developments.



Customer profile: Penrith Co-operative Society

Offering a free food delivery service since 1890, Penrith Co-operative Society may be one of the smaller retail co-operative societies but few could challenge its impressive track record in the service it provides in predominantly rural parts of Eden Valley, Weardale and the Lake District.

The Society's nine stores sell the Co-op range of goods, as well as locally sourced products such as homemade cakes and preserves. In Penrith the Society's largest store has a grocery supermarket, a fresh meat counter offering its unique recipe Cumberland sausage, as well as an extensive home furnishing department and the largest display of electrical goods in town, along with a well established café.

Many of its shops offer additional facilities, such as a post office, library service, cash machine or recycling, all of which play a vital role in supporting rural communities. Ethics also played an important role when the Society reviewed its telecoms provision in early 2010 and made the decision to move from BT to The Phone Co-op.

"Price was a factor, but in the end it was as much an ethical decision to go with The Phone Co-op," recalls chief executive John Mills.

Today The Phone Co-op is providing calls, line rental and broadband services to all society stores plus the Penrith head office, and supporting 230 staff in their various roles.

"We're very happy," says John Mills. "We've been able to simplify everything, right down to the paperwork, and the level of support has been first class. At the same time, we're supporting another co-operative."

For information about Penrith Co-operative Society, visit www.penrithco-op.co.uk



Need a number?

Whatever you do, don't dial 118118. Your call will cost you at least £1.70 and if you accept their offer to put you through to the number you're seeking, you could be stung for an extremely expensive call.

We are constantly dealing with queries from customers who have unwittingly run up high call charges when simply needing to find a number. One unfortunate customer of ours was charged over £80 when she accepted the offer of being connected to a number in Canada.

Sadly we can't influence what directory service

providers charge, but we can suggest some alternatives so that you can keep these charges to a minimum or, even better, eliminate them completely.

The easiest, free way to find a number is to search online or, if you're looking for a residential number, visit www.bt.com/directoryenquiries. If you don't have access to the internet at home and can't get to a library, then we recommend you use a directory service set up by one of our suppliers and dial 118114. We charge 35p per minute compared to £1.29 per minute with other well known services.

Thanks for helping us grow

Thank you to everyone who has recommended us over the past few months. We've gained many new customers thanks to your recommendations.

It's not too late to be in with a chance to win a year's free phone and broadband.

All home users will have received a leaflet within the last few weeks with two tear-off coupons to pass to friends or family members whom you think might benefit from our services. For each friend you

recommend who takes up our service, we'll give both of you a £10 credit on your bill. What's more, we'll enter both your names into a draw for a year's free phone and broadband.

All you have to do is fill out your name and account number on the coupons you pass to your friends. There's no limit to the number of people you can recommend or the number of times you can enter the draw, so if you'd like more coupons, just visit **www.thephone.coop/referafriend** or call us on **0845 458 9040** and let us know how many you'd like.

But don't delay. The offer ends on 30 November and we'll be drawing the winning account numbers on 10 December.



Join our customer panel

Our marketing team has been out and about over recent months conducting focus group research amongst consumers who have not yet heard of The Phone Co-op.

Such research gives us valuable information about people's awareness of different brands and the responses that advertising engenders. We'd like to extend our research to include our existing customers, so we are looking to recruit a group of people who would be happy to be contacted on an occasional basis to give their responses



and feedback on things like new products and price offers that we are thinking about introducing. You would not be required to travel anywhere but you do need to have internet access at home.

If you're interested in being part of this panel, please email your contact details to **matt.lane@thephone.coop**



Line rental – now's the time to switch

If you've still got your line rental with BT, there's never been a better time to switch to The Phone Co-op.

Once again, BT has announced price increases – from December their line rental will go up from £13.80 to £14.60. Compare this with £11.69 with us.

Consider, too, the fact that we last raised our line rental prices in May 2010 and that since then BT has made three increases. We rest our case. Switching is simple – just call our sales team on **0845 458 9040** and they'll take it from there.

Membership News

Date for your diary

– our AGM will be held on Saturday 4 February 2012 in Chipping Norton

It's election time again and our members will have recently received nomination forms for the Board of Directors, notice of the AGM which will be held on 4 February 2012, a preliminary agenda and registration forms for attendance.

Have you considered standing for election as a director? Member participation is very important to us and we look forward to several nominations and a contested election for the three positions available. To qualify, you need to have been a member for a minimum of six months. Full details concerning the eligibility requirements are given in the Society's Rules, which are available at **<http://www.thephone.coop/about-us/society-rules>**

And if you are not yet a member, then why not join? You'll benefit from 2.25% interest on your investment, a dividend based on what you spend with us and the opportunity to make a real difference to your co-operative. All details can be found on our website at **<http://www.thephone.coop/membership>** or **amanda@thephone.coop/membership** or call Amanda, your Membership Manager, on **0845 458 9012** or **amanda@thephone.coop**

thePhoneCo-op

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OX7 5XL

Customer service

0845 458 9000
Monday – Friday: 9am – 7pm
Saturday: 9am – 3pm

Residential sales

0845 458 9040

Business sales

0845 458 9070

Fax

0845 458 9001

Email - General enquiries

enquiries@thephone.coop

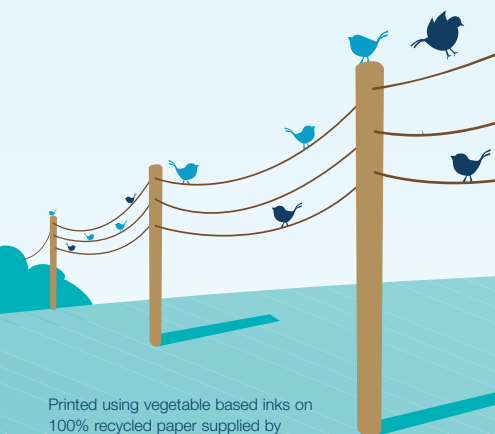
Internet & broadband

internetsupport@thephone.coop

Billing

bills@thephone.coop

www.thephone.coop



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Paperback, a workers' co-operative.

Affinity Partner Profile: Samaritans

"There's very few places you can go to in the world where you can pick up a telephone and another human being, no matter why they're doing it, will listen to you unconditionally. If you want to pour out in a phone call, they will listen for hours, for as long as you need them to."



These are the words of one of the many people supported by a volunteer working for Samaritans.

Samaritans was started in 1953 in London by a young vicar called Chad Varah, who worked in the city parish of St Stephen, Walbrook in the City.

During his career he had offered counselling to his parishioners, and he increasingly wanted to do something specific to help people in distress who had no-one to turn to.

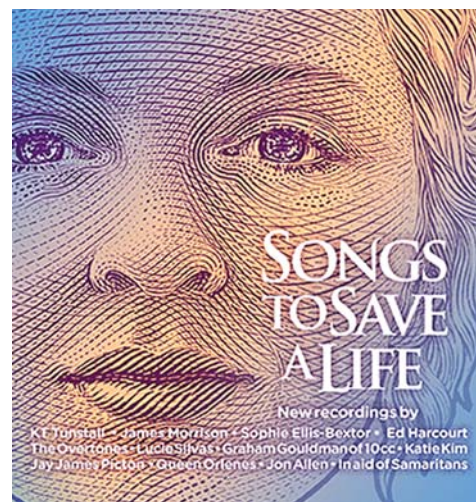
Today Samaritans is a national charity and the co-ordinating body for the 201 Samaritans branches in the UK, the Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, each of which is an independent charitable organisation. They provide completely confidential emotional support 24 hours a day by telephone, personal visit, email, and

letter, through its branch network – support that includes outreach activity at festivals as well as in prisons, hospitals, schools, offices and with homeless people.

The Phone Co-op has recently formed a partnership with Samaritans to help the charity raise funds via its supporters and volunteer network and is delighted to be working with such a well-established, respected and valuable charity.

You can find out more about their work here: www.samaritans.org

You can also support Samaritans directly by purchasing the newly released Songs to Save a Life album which includes contributions from 11 musicians, including KT Tunstall, James Morrison and Sophie Ellis-Bextor. It's available now through the Samaritans website and at www.songstosavealife.com



Avoiding nuisance calls

It's early evening and you've just sat down to eat, turned on your favourite TV programme or popped the children in the bath. The phone rings ... "You've won a free holiday, madam!"

Our sales team reports that more and more people feel they are plagued by unsolicited sales calls at home. Whilst it's not always possible to eliminate such calls completely, there are some simple steps you can take to reduce them to a minimum. We always recommend that you register with the Telephone

Preference Service (TPS). This is the free, official central opt out register on which you can record your preference not to receive unsolicited sales or marketing calls.

It is a legal requirement that all UK organisations (including charities, voluntary organisations and political parties) do not make such calls to numbers registered on the TPS unless they have your consent to do so. You can register very quickly online at www.tpsonline.org.uk or you can call them on **0845 070 0707**.