

Issue 7

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Newsletter

'Buy with confidence when you see this sign'



Buying with confidence: (left to right) Penny Boys, Amanda Holden and Richard Berry (Direct Selling Association)

OFT Approved codes launch to consumers

Actress Amanda Holden launched the OFT's consumer codes approval scheme to consumers on 5th October 2005. Our most ambitious campaign to date was backed by a million pound advertising campaign, involving a whole range of innovative ways to reach consumers with our message – 'Buy with confidence where you see the OFT Approved code logo.'

Amanda Holden was chosen to spearhead the publicity campaign, because her high profile increased media exposure of the OFT's key messages to consumers.

The campaign was launched with a photo shoot and press conference which took place at the Blueprint café in the Design Museum central London. Representatives from all five OFT Approved codes joined in a celebratory lunch following the press conference.

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Launch day

As well as the photo shoot, Amanda appeared in the video news release and gave a number of television interviews on the day of the launch. She was also the voice of the radio advert which ran for 4 weeks on regional commercial radio stations.

The launch day was marked by full page adverts in two daily newspapers (see below), and a pair of mobile advertising scooters toured central London carrying the campaign messages.

Following the press briefing, Amanda Holden and senior OFT representatives were kept busy conducting interviews with radio, television and print journalists.

High profile

The campaign also made use of an innovative product called *Featurelink* in local newspapers. This combined an editorial on the codes concept, with relevant local advertisers who are also OFT Approved code members.

The high profile media campaign used poster sites, telephone boxes and bus backs nationwide.

The OFT has also distributed a large number of leaflets to libraries, citizens advice bureaux and Trading Standards offices. To help consumers understand more about OFT Approved codes, a dedicated codes information line designed to give specific codes information has been operating since the launch, with the telephone number carried on all the campaign material.



The codes campaign launch was innovative, using branded BT telephone kiosks and fronted by actress Amanda Holden

Effectiveness

We will be carrying out a post-campaign assessment to measure the effectiveness of the campaign at conveying our key messages to target audiences. This will provide us with comparative data, following on from last year's baseline study carried out by the OFT that measured consumer and business awareness of codes of practice.

This campaign is only the start of OFT's promotional activity to raise public awareness of the OFT Approved code logo. Further quarterly campaigns are proposed. These will ensure that the OFT Approved codes message continues to influence and educate consumers in the marketplace as the scheme expands.

Media coverage of the OFT Approved codes campaign

The campaign has been hugely successful in gaining media coverage.

The launch was featured on six television stations attracting an estimated audience of 3.5 million viewers. Highlights included Amanda Holden's interview on *BBC Breakfast News* watched by over a million people, while three quarters of a million saw her explain the codes regime on GMTV. All the major news channels including Sky News and BBC News 24 ran the story.

There was coverage by a host of radio stations, with a potential weekly audience of over 12 million people. Christine Wade – the OFT's Director of Consumer Regulation and Enforcement – was interviewed on Radio 4's popular consumer affairs programme, *You and Yours*.

Newspaper coverage

The story appeared nationally in the *Financial Times*, *the Guardian*, *Motor Trader*, *the Daily Star* and the *Daily Sport* and was further picked up by another 33 regional papers from all over the nation and regions. These were substantial pieces, that accurately conveyed the scheme and our messages using photos of the photo call alongside Amanda Holden.

Online

The launch also achieved significant online coverage.

ABTA gets OFT code approval

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) achieved OFT approval for its consumer code of practice on 29 September 2005. The code is designed to reassure holidaymakers they can expect fair treatment if things go wrong.

Members of ABTA can now use the OFT Approved code logo to display their commitment to higher customer service standards.

ABTA represents the majority of UK travel agents and tour operators. ABTA members account for around 90 per cent of UK package holidays sold in the UK. They also provide a range of independent travel options. Over 1700 members of ABTA can be licensed to use

the OFT Approved code logo to display their commitment to higher customer service standards at over 4000 travel agencies.

The OFT only approves codes that are effective in safeguarding and promoting consumer interests beyond the basic requirements of the law. The main benefits of the ABTA code are:

- access to low cost dispute resolution via arbitration should things go wrong
- a disciplinary committee to deal with members who do not deliver the standards required by the code
- a set of model terms and conditions.

Welcoming ABTA's successful efforts to secure OFT approval for its code, outgoing Executive Director Penny Boys said:

'It is great news that around ninety per cent of package holidays sold in the UK are covered by the code, thanks to the hard work of ABTA.'

Further details about ABTA and its code of practice are available from its website at www.abta.com

Feeling the benefit

A member of the Vehicle Builders and Repairers Association (VBRA) has found that membership of an OFT Approved code is enabling him to retain a higher percentage of his business, reports VBRA magazine *The Body*. The VBRA's code was the second to be approved by the OFT in November 2004.

John Lagan of John Lagan Body Works in Leek, Staffordshire, says that he is now able to retain 95% of the insurance work that comes to him.

Previously he had to fight hard for insurance work despite enjoying a strong local reputation. Talking to *The Body* John said:

'We provide a trouble free and reliable service for our customers. We specialise in light repairs and we can get in and out quickly and the insurers now seem to appreciate the service we provide.'

If your business has experienced an increase in trade as a result of OFT Approved code membership, then the OFT codes team would love to hear from you.

We would also like to hear from any potential code sponsors who feel that their code would benefit from OFT approval.

Please email us at consumercodes@oft.gov.uk or call us on 020 7211 8987