

PRESS RELEASE



The Independent Committee for the Supervision of
Standards of Telephone Information Services

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For immediate release – Thursday 10 August 2006

ICSTIS BEGINS FORMAL *BIG BROTHER* INVESTIGATION

Premium rate services regulator ICSTIS has announced that it has begun a formal investigation into the *Big Brother* voting service. ICSTIS has to date received almost 2,700 complaints since it was announced that contestants who had previously been evicted were being given the chance to return to the house and potentially win the cash prize.

The majority of the complainants believe that they have been misled as they were under the impression that they had voted to evict the contestants permanently. Consequently, ICSTIS' investigation centres on paragraph 4.3.1a of its Code of Practice, which states that:

“Services and promotional material must not:

- a misled, or be likely to mislead, by inaccuracy, ambiguity, exaggeration, omission or otherwise”*

ICSTIS has raised an alleged breach of this paragraph with the two premium rate service providers concerned. They are Minick Ltd, which is providing the mobile shortcode text vote facility, and ITouch UK, which is providing the 090 telephone voting facility. ICSTIS is not investigating Channel 4 or Endemol as they are not the premium rate service providers.

– ends –

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NOTES

- ICSTIS is the industry-funded regulatory body for all premium rate charged telecommunications services.
- ICSTIS regulates premium rate service providers – defined under its Code of Practice as “...any person engaged in the provision of premium rate services who contracts with, or enters into arrangements with, a network operator for facilities enabling the provision of premium rate services...”.
- ICSTIS regulates the content, promotion and overall operation of services through its Code of Practice. It investigates complaints, and has the power to fine companies and bar access to services if the Code is breached. It can also bar the individual(s) behind a company from running any other premium rate services under any company name on any telephone network for a defined period.
- Most services are advertised on ‘09’ dialling codes. Many mobile services are advertised on four- or five-digit ‘short code’ numbers. Directory enquiry services begin with ‘118’. In some instances, such as interactive TV where viewers make ‘calls’ using their remote controls, the premium rate number may not be shown.
- Services offer some form of information and entertainment that is charged to your phone bill. You can access services in a number of ways – on your landline or mobile, by fax, on interactive TV and on your PC. Many mobile services work on a subscription-only basis.
- Services generally vary in cost between 10 pence per call and £1.50 per minute or message. The money paid by users for services is shared between the telephone company carrying the service and the organisation providing the content. Approximately 45,000 services are in operation at any one time, generating forecast revenue of £1.6 billion in 2006.

