



WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY 2017:

“Building a Digital World Consumers can Trust”

On 15 March 2017, consumer organisations across the globe celebrate World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD). This year the theme for WCRD is *“Building a Digital World Consumers can Trust”*. It was chosen by Consumers International given the increased access and choice consumers have to the internet, which raises concerns regarding online privacy and how data on online activity (e.g. search histories) is used by business enterprises.

The CARICOM Competition Commission (CCC) views the theme for WCRD 2017 as particularly relevant to the region. According to statistics from the International Telecommunications Union, on average, internet users in CARICOM almost doubled over the past 9 years. Internet users increased from 27.3 percent of the population of the region in 2007 to 53.1 percent in 2015. This suggests that more consumers in the region are susceptible to attacks on their online privacy, and potential misleading advertising by companies.

The CCC also understands that whenever consumers go online, they generate personal data whether knowingly or unknowingly. Consequently, consumers become part of an information industry that is both lucrative and complex. The CCC therefore, believes that business enterprises have an obligation to improve the level of awareness of consumers with respect to how they collect and use their personal data. Companies should also explain the measures they implement to protect the privacy of consumer information in language that is clear to consumers. In that regard, the CCC welcomes industry initiatives, such as website browsers that empower consumers by enabling consumers to identify and opt out of behavioural advertising if desired, or to minimise the amount of data they provide to firms.

The CCC looks forward to discussing these issues and working with the national consumer protection agencies in CARICOM to determine the best strategies to implement to ensure that the online activities of consumers are protected. In doing so, the CCC recommends that the following initiatives should be pursued:

- A. Research conducted at the national levels to gain a better understanding of the knowledge of consumers about the information they share online with companies. This would enable the national consumer protection agencies to identify the most effective policies for protecting consumers in this growing age of internet usage.
- B. The enactment of national consumer protection laws in those CARICOM Member States where these legislations do not as yet exist, to prohibit deceptive practices (e.g. misleading advertising) over the internet by companies.
- C. The establishment of a regional consumer complaints database so that the CCC and national consumer protection agencies can collect data on misleading advertising over the internet. The data collected will assist in developing consumer education strategies relating to e-commerce.

For any more information about the work of the CCC in consumer protection, please email admin@ccc.sr or view our website at www.caricomcompetitioncommission.com.