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EU warns of hidden ringtone charges

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20th July, 2008

THE ARTICLE

The European Union is cracking down on shady websites that are wrongly selling or charging for mobile phone services. The EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva has warned the public that they may be paying hidden charges for ringtones, news feeds, video games and wallpaper. Many sites are cheating people out of their money, especially trend-conscious teenagers, who like to keep up to date with the latest phone fashions. An EU investigation into 500 sites discovered that 80 per cent were misleading consumers. "Far too many people are falling victim to costly surprises from mysterious charges, fees and ringtone subscriptions [that] they learn about for the first time when they see their mobile phone bill," Kuneva told reporters.

The Reuters news agency reports that the value of ringtone sales in 2007 within the EU was in the region of US\$1.10 billion. Among the companies under Ms Kuneva's microscope are industry giants such as Vofafone and VeriSign. Failure by these providers to address the commissioner's concerns could lead to heavy fines or site closures. The investigation identified a number of common dishonest practices. These include unclear price information, not telling the consumer about taxes, and not making it clear to consumers they were signing up to a subscription. Kuneva warned: "We need to get a clear message out particularly to teenagers and children. Be on your guard. It's all about the small print....Make sure you are not signing up for more than you bargained for."

WARM-UPS

1. RINGTONES: Walk around the class and talk to other students about ringtones. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your partner(s) and share your findings.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

European Union / shady websites / mobile phone services / hidden charges / victims / microscopes / industry giants / fines / taxes / subscriptions / the small print

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. CHARGES: Are you happy with the charges you pay for different services? Write down what you get and what more you want for these. Change partners and share what you wrote.

Services	What I get	What more I want
Mobile phone		
Internet Provider		
English school		
Clubs		
Transport		
Other _____		

4. MOBILE PHONE: Which of these mobile phone services are important? Rate them: 10 = "A must"; 1 = "I can live without this". How much would you pay a month for each service? Talk with your partner(s) about this.

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| _____ ringtone | _____ camera |
| _____ text / SMS | _____ GPS navigation |
| _____ answer phone | _____ touch-screen / scrolling |
| _____ Internet | _____ MP3 |

5. HEADLINE PREDICTION: With your partner(s), use the words in the "Chat" activity above to predict what the news article will be about. Once you have your story, change partners and share them. Who was closest to the real story?

6. WEBSITE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'website'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. The EU is after dodgy sites that are dishonestly charging for ringtones. T / F
- b. An EU commissioner says companies are hiding charges on their sites. T / F
- c. The elderly are most at risk to being cheated when buying ringtones. T / F
- d. Many people will be surprised when they see their first phone bill. T / F
- e. The value of the European ringtone market is more than US\$10 billion. T / F
- f. Some famous mobile phone companies need to change their websites. T / F
- g. Most websites make it very clear their service is a subscription. T / F
- h. The EU commissioner warned against phones with a small text size. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. shady | a. dishonest |
| 2. hidden | b. expected |
| 3. charges | c. area |
| 4. misleading | d. untrustworthy |
| 5. costly | e. deal with |
| 6. region | f. careful |
| 7. address | g. unseen |
| 8. closures | h. expensive |
| 9. on your guard | i. costs |
| 10. bargained for | j. shutdowns |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. The European Union is cracking | a. with the latest phone fashions |
| 2. paying hidden | b. Ms Kuneva's microscope |
| 3. Many sites are cheating | c. up to a subscription |
| 4. keep up to date | d. people out of their money |
| 5. people are falling | e. your guard |
| 6. the companies under | f. victim to costly surprises |
| 7. could lead to heavy | g. down on shady websites |
| 8. signing | h. for |
| 9. Be on | i. charges |
| 10. more than you bargained | j. fines or site closures |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

The European Union is _____ down on shady websites that are _____ selling or charging for mobile phone services. The EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva has warned the _____ that they may be paying _____ charges for ringtones, news feeds, video games and wallpaper. Many sites are cheating people _____ of their money, especially trend-conscious teenagers, who like to keep up to date with the latest phone _____. An EU investigation into 500 sites discovered that 80 per cent were misleading consumers. "Far too many people are falling _____ to costly surprises from mysterious charges, fees and ringtone subscriptions [that] they _____ about for the first time when they see their mobile phone bill," Kuneva told reporters.

public
fashions
learn
cracking
hidden
victim
wrongly
out

The Reuters news agency reports that the _____ of ringtone sales in 2007 within the EU was in the _____ of US\$1.10 billion. Among the companies under Ms Kuneva's microscope are industry _____ such as Vofafone and VeriSign. Failure by these providers to address the commissioner's concerns could lead to _____ fines or site closures. The investigation identified a number of _____ dishonest practices. These include unclear price information, not telling the consumer about taxes, and not making it _____ to consumers they were signing up to a subscription. Kuneva warned: "We need to get a clear _____ out particularly to teenagers and children. Be on your guard. It's all about the small _____Make sure you are not signing up for more than you bargained for."

region
clear
heavy
print
value
common
message
giants

LISTENING: Listen and fill in the spaces.

The European Union is cracking _____ websites that are wrongly selling or charging for mobile phone services. The EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva has _____ that they may be paying hidden charges for ringtones, news feeds, video games and wallpaper. Many sites are _____ of their money, especially trend-conscious teenagers, who like to keep _____ the latest phone fashions. An EU investigation _____ discovered that 80 per cent were misleading consumers. "Far too many people are _____ costly surprises from mysterious charges, fees and ringtone subscriptions [that] they learn about for the first time when they see their mobile phone bill," Kuneva told reporters.

The Reuters news agency reports that the value of ringtone sales in 2007 within the EU _____ of US\$1.10 billion. Among the companies under Ms Kuneva's microscope are _____ as Vofafone and VeriSign. Failure by these _____ the commissioner's concerns could lead to heavy fines or site closures. The investigation identified a _____ dishonest practices. These include unclear price information, not telling the consumer about taxes, and not making it clear to consumers they were _____ subscription. Kuneva warned: "We need to get a clear message out particularly to teenagers and children. Be on your guard. It's _____ print....Make sure you are not signing up for more than you bargained for."

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'small' and 'print'.

small	print
--------------	--------------

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cracking• hidden• up to date• 500• victim• first time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• US\$1.10 billion• giants• heavy• common• message• print
--	--

STUDENT RINGTONE SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about ringtones in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

RINGTONES DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'ringtone'?
- c) Do you like different ringtones?
- d) What mobile phone services do you pay for?
- e) Is it important to have a good ringtone?
- f) Have you ever paid hidden charges you didn't know about?
- g) Have you ever been cheated out of your money?
- h) Do you like to keep up to date with the latest fashions?
- i) Have you ever fallen victim to a company's shady practice?
- j) How do you feel when you get your mobile phone bill?

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RINGTONES DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Are you surprised the European ringtone market is worth so much?
- c) What companies would you like to put under the microscope and why?
- d) What do you think of the dishonest practices mentioned in the article?
- e) Are you always on your guard when you sign up for things?
- f) Are you happy with your current mobile phone subscription?
- g) Do you always read the small print?
- h) What things are contained in the small print?
- i) Have you ever signed up for something you didn't bargain for?
- j) What questions would you like to ask EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva?

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LANGUAGE

The European Union is cracking (1) _____ on shady websites that are wrongly selling or charging (2) _____ mobile phone services. The EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva has warned the public that they may be paying (3) _____ charges for ringtones, news feeds, video games and wallpaper. Many sites are cheating people (4) _____ of their money, especially trend-conscious teenagers, who like to keep up to date with the latest phone fashions. An EU investigation into 500 sites discovered that 80 per cent were misleading consumers. "Far too many people are falling victim to (5) _____ surprises from mysterious charges, fees and ringtone subscriptions [that] they learn about for the first time when they see their mobile phone (6) _____," Kuneva told reporters.

The Reuters news agency reports that the value of ringtone sales in 2007 within the EU was in the (7) _____ of US\$1.10 billion. Among the companies (8) _____ Ms Kuneva's microscope are industry giants such as Vofafone and VeriSign. Failure by these providers to address the commissioner's concerns could lead to (9) _____ fines or site closures. The investigation identified a number of common dishonest practices. These include unclear price information, not telling the consumer about (10) _____, and not making it clear to consumers they were signing up to a subscription. Kuneva warned: "We need to get a (11) _____ message out particularly to teenagers and children. Be on your guard. It's all about the small print....Make sure you are not signing up for more than you bargained (12) _____."

Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1. | (a) up | (b) on | (c) down | (d) in |
| 2. | (a) with | (b) for | (c) to | (d) by |
| 3. | (a) hide | (b) hiding | (c) hidden | (d) hid |
| 4. | (a) with | (b) for | (c) all | (d) out |
| 5. | (a) cost-plus | (b) cost effective | (c) cost | (d) costly |
| 6. | (a) sill | (b) gill | (c) bill | (d) till |
| 7. | (a) region | (b) regional | (c) regions | (d) regionally |
| 8. | (a) over | (b) under | (c) behind | (d) on |
| 9. | (a) tubby | (b) overweight | (c) heavy | (d) obese |
| 10. | (a) taxes | (b) taxis | (c) taxation | (d) taxed |
| 11. | (a) cleared | (b) clearest | (c) clearly | (d) clear |
| 12. | (a) about | (b) for | (c) with | (d) over |

HOMework

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find out more about ringtone charges. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. MOBILE PHONES: Make a poster about the perfect mobile phone. Describe all of the services it has. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

4. FALLING VICTIM: Write a magazine article about teenagers who fall victim to hidden charges on websites offering ringtones. Include imaginary interviews with a teenager and a mobile phone company boss.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

5. DIARY / JOURNAL: You are a mobile phone. Write your diary entry for one day in your life. Is your owner good to you? Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson.

6. LETTER: Write a letter to the boss of a mobile phone company. Ask him/her three questions about the charges for their different services. Give him/her three pieces of advice how to improve his/her service. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. T c. F d. T e. F f. T g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. shady | a. untrustworthy |
| 2. hidden | b. unseen |
| 3. charges | c. costs |
| 4. misleading | d. dishonest |
| 5. costly | e. expensive |
| 6. region | f. area |
| 7. address | g. deal with |
| 8. closures | h. shutdowns |
| 9. on your guard | i. careful |
| 10. bargained for | j. expected |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. The European Union is cracking | a. down on shady websites |
| 2. paying hidden | b. charges |
| 3. Many sites are cheating | c. people out of their money |
| 4. keep up to date | d. with the latest phone fashions |
| 5. people are falling | e. victim to costly surprises |
| 6. the companies under | f. Ms Kuneva's microscope |
| 7. could lead to heavy | g. fines or site closures |
| 8. signing | h. up to a subscription |
| 9. Be on | i. your guard |
| 10. more than you bargained | j. for |

GAP FILL:

EU warns of hidden ringtone charges

The European Union is **cracking** down on shady websites that are **wrongly** selling or charging for mobile phone services. The EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva has warned the **public** that they may be paying **hidden** charges for ringtones, news feeds, video games and wallpaper. Many sites are cheating people **out** of their money, especially trend-conscious teenagers, who like to keep up to date with the latest phone **fashions**. An EU investigation into 500 sites discovered that 80 per cent were misleading consumers. "Far too many people are falling **victim** to costly surprises from mysterious charges, fees and ringtone subscriptions [that] they **learn** about for the first time when they see their mobile phone bill," Kuneva told reporters.

The Reuters news agency reports that the **value** of ringtone sales in 2007 within the EU was in the **region** of US\$1.10 billion. Among the companies under Ms Kuneva's microscope are industry **giants** such as Vodafone and VeriSign. Failure by these providers to address the commissioner's concerns could lead to **heavy** fines or site closures. The investigation identified a number of **common** dishonest practices. These include unclear price information, not telling the consumer about taxes, and not making it **clear** to consumers they were signing up to a subscription. Kuneva warned: "We need to get a clear **message** out particularly to teenagers and children. Be on your guard. It's all about the small **print**....Make sure you are not signing up for more than you bargained for."

LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - a 2 - b 3 - c 4 - d 5 - d 6 - c 7 - a 8 - b 9 - c 10 - a 11 - d 12 - b