



European Consumer Centre DUBLIN



ANNUAL REPORT 2003

[www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie)



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Tina Leonard, Manager ECC

## FOREWORD

The European Consumer Centre (ECC) Ltd operates as a non-profit company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity in Ireland. The Centre continues to receive its funding from the European Commission, Health and Consumer Protection Directorate (DG Sanco) and the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs (ODCA). In 2003 the ECC Ltd continued to operate the Clearing House service as part of the European Extra Judicial Network (EEJ-Net) with a separate grant from the European Commission Health and Consumer Protection Directorate and the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment. In January 2003 ECC Ltd also began participating in the European Commission's Interactive Policy Making (IPM) programme which was funded by a separate grant from DG Internal Market. In 2003 the European Consumer Centre Ltd spent a total of just over €400,000 on all projects.

With a staff of seven the Centre dealt with 5,739 queries, representing a mix of information requests and cases requiring assistance. The Clearing House service dealt with a total of 90 cases. In addition 119 cases were encoded into a special database for the purposes of the IPM project.

As in the previous year, in 2003 there was a further increase in the number of 'assistance' based cases which require significant work. These now represent 13% of overall contacts compared to 6.7% in 2002.

In terms of category of complaint there was a significant increase in the number of cases relating to distance selling, which includes e-commerce. As a result ECC Dublin produced and disseminated a shopping online leaflet and carried out an online advertising campaign, in addition to the launch and marketing of the ECC network's report: 'Realities of the European Online Marketplace'.

ECC Dublin continued the 'Holiday Club' campaign during the summer months. A leaflet was also produced about the ECC's participation in the IPM project and advertising was conducted in association with this. Ongoing development work was carried out in relation to the Clearing House function. ECC Dublin conducted two cross-border price comparison surveys, one comparing prices in a shop in Dublin with those in Belfast and another comparing prices of books, CDs and electronic goods on the high street with those sourced online. In both cases huge media coverage resulted as Ireland was shown to be the most expensive.

Throughout the year in total 11 press releases were issued and there was 143 articles/interviews with the media. ECC Dublin representatives also carried out 12 outreach sessions to schools and gave 11 presentations at European and national conferences, including three at European Commission organised seminars for accession countries. Total hits to [www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie) reached 60,000 in 2003, which was a very successful outcome.

The following report represents an administrative summary of the European Consumer Centre's achievements in 2003. We look forward to 2004 and to informing consumers of their rights when shopping across borders.

*Tina Leonard*

**Manager ECC Dublin**

March 2004

## STAFF PROFILE

<b>Manager</b>	<i>Tina Leonard</i>
<b>Legal Adviser</b>	<i>Elena Calavia</i>
<b>PR &amp; Marketing</b>	<i>Mary Denise Fitzgerald</i>
<b>Administrator</b>	<i>Lindis Lenox Conyngham</i>
<b>Clearing House Co-ordinator</b>	<i>Susan Reilly</i>
<b>IPM Co-ordinator &amp; Adviser</b>	<i>Lourdes Marques</i>
<b>Adviser</b>	<i>Malgorzata Fiedot Davies (April-October)</i>
<b>Adviser</b>	<i>Juan Liria (April-June)</i>



ECC staff –  
Back row: Tina Leonard, Elena Calavia,  
Lindis Lenox Conyngham, Front row: Susan Reilly,  
Mary Denise Fitzgerald, Lourdes Marques

The following people were employed at the Centre on work experience placements:

<i>Matthieu Cenciq</i>	Marketing graduate student, University of Savoie, France, <b>January-March</b> .
<i>Juan Liria</i>	Law graduate, University of Zaragoza, Spain, <b>January-April</b> .
<i>Laura Sommer</i>	Leaving certificate student, Mount Temple School, Dublin, <b>March (2 weeks)</b> .
<i>Rachel Law</i>	Leaving certificate student, Margaret Aylward College, Dublin, <b>March (2 weeks)</b> .
<i>Carole Guillaume</i>	Communications postgraduate, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, <b>June-August</b> .
<i>Elia Zanardi</i>	Law graduate, University of Bologna, Italy, <b>September-January 2004</b> .
<i>Angelo Di Vincenzo</i>	Sociology graduate, University of Rome, Italy, <b>November-December</b> .

The Board of Directors of the company were:

<b>Chairman</b>	<i>Dermott Jewell</i> , Chief Executive, Consumers Association of Ireland.
<b>Directors</b>	<i>Colin Bird</i> , Information Officer, Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs. <i>Sonia Martin</i> , AIB Business Relations Manager, Goodbody Stockbrokers <i>Josette Cuthbert</i> , Regional co-ordinator, Comhairle.



## ADVICE SERVICE



### Consumer queries

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The ECC's advice service forms a crucial part of the company's business. From 9.30 to 17.00 Monday to Friday the Centre's experts answer information requests and assist consumers with cross-border disputes.

As part of a network of 14 Centres across the European Union, co-ordinated and co-funded by the European Commission DG Sanco, the ECC focuses on European consumer legislation and problems arising from shopping in the internal market. Each Irish consumer is protected by a range of European legislation, and consumers need to be advised of their entitlements when shopping across borders. This is especially important given recent Eurobarometer statistics published by the European Commission. They show that while 48.5% believe they have a high level of consumer protection in their own country, only 20.3% believe they have a high level of consumer protection when shopping in another EU country.

In 2003 ECC Dublin dealt with 5,739 information requests and assistance based cases. The overall number of contacts received by the ECC has decreased in line with projections. This is due to the reorganisation of the national consumer advice service (Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs (ODCA)). Previously ECC Dublin was dealing with the overflow in demand for such a service. It is anticipated that a further decrease will occur in 2004, representing the further consolidation of the improved national service and the more focused approach of ECC Dublin in dealing with European and cross-border issues only. This is matched by an increase in contacts relating to cross-border purchases within the EU which rose to 22.5% from 10% in 2002. Since 2000 this figure has doubled each year and it is anticipated that there will be a similar rise in 2004.

The vast majority of contacts received in 2003 represent information requests (87%) relating to EU consumer issues. Almost one third of the information requests are referrals. This was a large increase on 2002 and this mainly represents queries referred to the ODCA in relation to national consumer advice. At the same time, the number of contacts received requiring assistance rose to 13% from 6.7% in 2002. Assistance based cases involve consumer disputes with retailers in another country. ECC Dublin will intervene with the trader on behalf of the consumer and liaise with experts in other ECCs in order to find a solution for the consumer. If the ECC cannot solve the dispute through 'amicable' means, the case is forwarded to the Clearing House section. This is housed within the ECC and is part of the European Extra Judicial Network (EEJ-Net)<sup>1</sup>. The Clearing House can forward the case to an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) body (arbitration or mediation) in the relevant country.

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<sup>1</sup> EEJ-NET covers the EU, Norway and Iceland.

General travel and package travel complaints were the number 1 area of complaint in 2003, rising to 14.6% of total contacts.

TABLE 1		THE TOP 4						
	2002		%		2003		%	
1.	Clothing & Accessories	1,154	(12%)	Travel	830	(14.5%)		
2.	Travel	1,147	(11.9%)	Clothing & Accessories	568	(9.9%)		
3.	Electrical Products	848	(8.8%)	Electrical Products	410	(7.1%)		
4.	Cars	634	(6.6%)	Distance Selling	288	(5%)		
	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>9,632</b>		<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>5,739</b>			

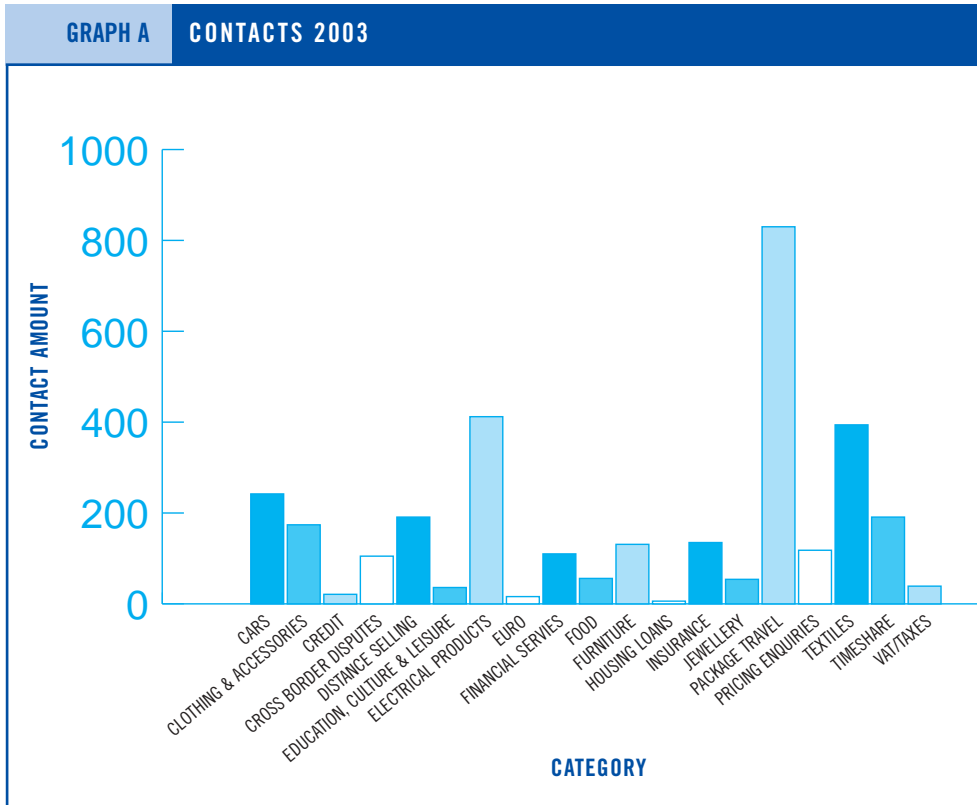
2003 saw a significant increase in the number of contacts relating to distance selling, which includes e-commerce, representing 5% of total contacts compared with 1.5% in 2002. This may correspond to an increase in consumers purchasing by distance means and also in the successful marketing of ECC Dublin's service.

Complaints relating to Timeshare and Holidays Clubs which had increased dramatically in 2002, slowed down from 414 complaints in 2002 to 190 complaints in 2003. This reduction may be partly a result of a decrease in marketing activities by ECC Dublin about timeshare/holiday clubs. Nonetheless, ECC Dublin still believes this to be a problem area.

ECC Dublin experienced an influx of complaints relating to foreign lottery promotions in 2003, mainly originating from addresses in the Netherlands and Spain. These include letters received by consumer which claim they have won substantial amounts of money or a luxury vehicle. However, these claims are simply incentives to encourage the consumer to join the lottery for a monthly fee. Other foreign lottery promotions ask consumers for their credit card details in order to pay an 'administrative fee' so that their 'prize' can be claimed. ECC Dublin reacted to these complaints by compiling information on the scams and liaising with ECC Gronau, the International Consumer Protection & Enforcement Network (ICPEN), the European Advertising Standards Authority (EASA) (via ASA of Ireland) and the Office of Fair Trading UK (OFT) on the issue. Proactive work included issuing a press release on the subject in order to warn consumers against the scams.

Another frequent area of complaint was against a satellite services company based in Scotland. The complaints related to the service (for satellite TV) not being provided while charges continued to be deducted from the consumer's account. Happily, ECC Dublin was able to solve the majority of complaints through direct intervention with the company and some through the ECC UK.

Complaints about purchases of electrical products and jewellery bought in Spain continued to dominate, to the extent that ECC Dublin issued a press release in August giving consumers tips on careful shopping in Spain. This press release was issued with the co-operation of the consumer information office in Lanzarote, Spain.



Requests for information leaflets remained constant at 4%. Contact by telephone remained the main method of communication. However it did reduce by 3% which facilitated an increase of 3% in contact made via email and through [www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie). A further 60,000 consumers logged on to ECC Dublin's website to access information on consumer rights in the EU in 2003.

The first three case examples below are typical of the majority of ECC Dublin cases in that a resolution was found for the consumer. However the cases also highlight other existing barriers faced by consumers in the Internal Market. The fourth case is unresolved and highlights the problems in dealing with retailers who breach consumer law.

## Case examples:

€70 was taken out of the bank account of a French student resident in Ireland for no apparent reason. This amount was a significant sum for the student, but he could not sort the situation out. ECC Dublin managed to solve the problem and the student was refunded the €70. However, this case highlights the difficulties associated with cross-border banking in the EU, as it took some time for ECC Dublin to ascertain where the responsibility lay and even the student's own local branch of his bank in France was unsure what to do. Eventually it was discovered that the student's bank were required to report the error to the bank in Dublin and request an investigation, which was carried out successfully. Many resources – fax, telephone and email were used to solve this dispute, and it is highly unlikely that the student would have been in a position to solve this case without the assistance of ECC Dublin.

An English consumer purchased two shirts from an Irish-based online retailer. The money was withdrawn from his credit card, but two months later the shirts hadn't arrived. The consumer contacted us (via our sister office in the UK) and we then got in touch with the retailer. In that situation the retailer immediately organised a refund for the consumer. However whilst checking the terms and conditions on the website, it was evident that there were breaches of both the distance selling regulations – and the Sale of Goods and Supply of Services Act, 1980. ECC Dublin raised these issues with the retailer and he made the appropriate changes. It was clear that the online retailer had not known what his legal obligations to the consumer were.

An Irish woman was on holiday in Spain and bought a ring while there. On her return home she sought to get it insured and discovered that its value was less than she had been advised by the seller. ECC Dublin intervened on behalf of the consumer and the Spanish jeweller agreed to replace the ring if she returned the first ring. However, the consumer found that no courier would agree to transport the ring back to Spain due to its high value. With no solution in sight the consumer contacted a national radio programme for help. Through the programme an Irish travel agent offered to fly the woman back to Spain with the ring where it was duly returned and a replacement of the correct value given. While this case has a successful outcome, it also shows the potential pitfalls of purchasing a high value product cross border.

A Russian opera singer resident in the UK purchased a suit from a company in Dublin, which was to be delivered to the UK. A year and a half later the suit still had not been delivered. ECC Dublin intervened with the Irish retailer to no avail. Consequently ECC Dublin sought the intervention of the Irish enforcement agency, the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs (ODCA). The ODCA did intervene, but again to no avail. This case highlights the problems that arise when retailers refuse to comply with the law in relation to consumer rights and it points to a lack of power to deal with such retailers who are breaching the law.



## INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

- **‘ConsumerWATCH’ newsletter**
- **Annual report 2002**
- **‘Shopping Online’ campaign**
- **‘Holiday Club’ campaign**
- **Information on travelling to Spain**
- **Price comparison surveys**
- **Public relations**
- **General advertising**
- **Outreach programme**

As well as answering consumers’ questions on their consumer rights in the EU, ECC Dublin has as an objective to be proactive in providing consumers with information they need to be knowledgeable consumers. Proactive work includes publishing and disseminating information material, disseminating information through the media, carrying out advertising and engaging in an outreach programme.



Mary Denise Fitzgerald,  
Marketing & PR Manager

Providers such as: Citizens Information Centres; Money, Advice and Budgeting Service and libraries. Specific publications may also be distributed through related organisations. Publications are also distributed to government and relevant organisations and all are available in Word and PDF format on [www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie). Publications are also available in the public area of ECC Dublin’s city centre premises.

### **‘ConsumerWATCH’ Newsletter**

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Issues 17 to 20 of ECC Dublin’s newsletter *ConsumerWATCH* were produced in 2003. For the first time the newsletter was distributed via email only. The format is a plain

text email which is accessible to all and is sent to all mailing contacts quarterly. Current and back issues of *ConsumerWATCH* can be accessed in the publications section of [www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie).

## **ECC Annual Report 2002**

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40 copies of ECC Dublin Annual Report 2002 were published in February 2003 and distributed to funders, ECCs and EEJ-Net Clearing Houses. Copies were freely available in PDF format on [www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie).

## **Shopping online campaign**

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With more and more European consumers shopping online and relatively recent consumer protection legislation relating to shopping online, the ECC Network has recorded an increase in complaints relating to this area. As a result in 2003 the ECC Network decided to publish a report on the topic. The Report called 'Realities of the Online Marketplace' consisted of three main parts:

1. A shopping exercise in which ECC staff performed cross border shopping from foreign ecommerce companies.  
A total of 114 orders were made.
2. A quality examination of the information that was given on 262 webtraders' websites.
3. A comparative analysis of the implementation of the Distance Selling Directive with special regard to the cooling off period.

The outcome was very negative: 34% of ordered goods never arrived; 31.5% of returned goods were not re-imbursed and in one third of web sites examined, the correct information was not given. However, the results also gave the ECC Network the opportunity to remind consumers to learn about their rights in order to know how to protect themselves when shopping online.

As the Report was coordinated by ECC Düsseldorf and ECC Stockholm, the European launch was held in Düsseldorf in May. Following participation in the Düsseldorf launch, ECC Dublin held a national launch in Dublin in May. Presentations were given by the Director of Consumer Affairs, Carmel Foley, Chief Executive of the Irish Internet Association, Irene Gahan and Fredrik Nordqvist, Legal Adviser, ECC Stockholm. 50 copies of this ECC Network report were printed for distribution at

the ECC Dublin launch of the findings of the Report in May. Further copies were disseminated to the media and other interested parties via PDF formation on ECC Dublin's web site. There was good attendance at the Dublin launch and a positive media response with 25 national press articles and radio interview conducted in the immediate aftermath.



At ECC Dublin's launch of 'Realities of the European Online Marketplace' are Tina Leonard, Manager, and Carmel Foley, Director of Consumer Affairs



'Realities of the European Online Marketplace'  
Fredrik Nordqvist, Legal Adviser, ECC Stockholm



'Realities of the European Online Marketplace'  
Irene Gahan, CEO Irish Internet Association

In addition ECC Dublin produced 10,000 copies of a shopping online information leaflet for consumers. As well as usual distribution channels, 5,000 copies were distributed as inserts in the annual publication of the Irish Internet Association (IIA). A PDF version of the leaflet is available on ECC Dublin's web site and on that of the IIA.



To reinforce messages about consumer rights when shopping online that were disseminated through the media, ECC Dublin conducted an online advertising campaign on the popular Irish site 'pigsback.com'. A competition was run to highlight awareness of consumer rights when shopping online and this resulted in 12,610 hits to the ECC Dublin web site in July, double the monthly average.

As this is an area where complaints to the ECC Network are still increasing, the ECC network began work on a second E-Commerce Report in October 2003. The second Report will analyse the shopping online complaints received by all European Consumer Centres from January to October 2003. ECC Dublin are co-ordinators with ECC Stockholm on this Report and had an organisational meeting in London in November. All information from ECCs relating to e-commerce cases was gathered by mid-December. This second ECC Network e-commerce report will be published in March 2004.

## **'Holiday Club' campaign**

Following on from a successful holiday club marketing campaign in 2002 and an increased number of complaints relating to holiday clubs, ECC Dublin continued it's marketing drive to warn consumers of the dangers of holiday clubs in 2003.

As with last year, ECC staff visited Dublin and Cork airports twice each week during the month of August handing out ECC Holiday Club leaflets. In addition luggage

tags were produced with contact details for ECC Dublin and these were given to travellers. At the same time a press release was issued in August resulting in 8 articles in national media.

To raise awareness of the problems relating to holiday clubs with decision makers, letters were sent to 166 TDs (members of Irish parliament) and 15 MEPs. ECC Dublin also developed its links with the Irish Tour Operator Federation and established links with the crime prevention unit of the Garda Síochána (Irish police force).

## **Information on travelling to Spain**

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Many Irish people travel to Spain on holidays and shop while there. This is reflected by the fact that after the UK, the largest number of cross-border complaints received by ECC Dublin relate to Spain. To better inform these travelling consumers, ECC Dublin issued two press releases in July and August. The first related to the new eco-tax being charged in the Balearic Islands and the second was produced with the co-operation of the Consumer Information Office in Lanzarote and provided tips to Irish consumers shopping in the Canary Islands.

## **Price comparison surveys**

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As a reaction to the increasing media dialogue regarding 'rip-off Ireland', ECC Dublin conducted two price comparison surveys in October and November.

The first compared 21 items from an Argos store in Dublin with the same items in Argos in Belfast, Northern Ireland. It was found that on each item, taking the £Sterling difference into account, a saving could be made on each item if purchased north of the border. The second survey compared the prices of electrical goods, books and CDs between the high street in Dublin and online stores in other Counties. Again it was found that remarkable savings (up to 66%) could be made when shopping for goods online.

Two press releases were issued relating to these surveys resulting in a great media interest with a total of 32 radio, TV and print articles.

**TABLE 2 ARGOS PRICE COMPARISON OCTOBER 2003 (inc. VAT/both countries)**

<i>Items</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>EUR</i>	<i>STG*</i>	<i>Savings</i>
Bed linen (Dorma collection)	Heather King size cover	105.00	92.86	12.14
	Pillow cases x 2	50.00	42.86	7.14
Throwovers	Faux husky fur throw	56.99	49.99	7.00
Towels (Memphis 100% cotton)	Set of three towels (hand, bath, bath sheet)	101.97	92.11	9.86
Espresso maker (Gaggia)	Chrome deluxe	309.00	284.29	24.71
Cutlery (Viners)	58 piece serena canteen cutlery set	99.99	85.7	14.29
Dinner set	platinum rim porcelain 20 piece set	40.00	34.29	5.71
Table lamp	Leather effect lamp	39.99	35.7	4.29
Wok (Ken Hom)	Non-stick family wok	31.49	28.56	2.93
Pots (Tefal)	Premier 5 piece charcoal cookware set	50.49	42.84	7.65
Juicer/blender (Rosemary Conley)	Juicer/blender	63.99	56.43	7.69
Food processor (Kenwood)	Food processor and hand blender	89.99	78.56	11.43
DVD (Philips)	DVD625 compact and ultra slim	139.99	128.56	11.43
Suitcase (Carlton)	Hard sided trolley case	99.99	85.7	14.29
Camera (Canon)	Sureshot 80U	119.99	99.99	20.00
Rug	Carved border 100% wool rug	79.99	71.41	8.58
Glasses (Sorrento)	6 piece wine glass set	32.99	28.56	4.43
Wine rack	Chrome 15 bottle arch wine rack	21.99	18.56	3.43
Christmas tree	1.8m delux arctic fur gold tree kit	64.99	57.13	7.86
Outdoor lights	Outdoor snowing icicle lights	37.99	28.56	9.43
Christmas Doormat	Singing merry christmas doormat	19.99	14.27	5.72

**STG\* = Price in EUR**

**TABLE 3 ONLINE SHOPPING PRICE SURVEY 1**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Shop</i>			<i>Best Saving</i>
Gameboy	Argos €149.99	Smyths €139.00	www.amazon.co.uk (Toys r Us) €127.19	17.93%
Digital camera Fuji FinePix F410	Argos €599.99	Dixons €429.99	www.technikdirekt.de €346.00	73.41%
DVD player Panasonic 535E	Argos €179.99	Dixons €149.99	www.amazon.co.uk €120.99	48.76%
DVD player Sony NS 330	Argos €179.99	Dixons €129.99	www.amazon.co.uk €121.99	47.54%
CDs x 10	Virgin €213.90	HMV €187.90	www.cdwow.com €128.5	66.46%
DVDs x 5	HMV €172.95	Virgin €151.95	www.amazon.co.uk €122.09	41.66%
Books x 10	Waterstones €256.25	Easons €231.46	www.amazon.co.uk €203.43	25.96%

COMPARISON MADE 21/11/03      RATE OF EXCHANGE €1 =STG £0.6996

ONLINE PURCHASES INCLUDE DELIVERY COSTS TO IRELAND  
 Argos Jervis Shopping Centre / Dixons Jervis Shopping Centre / Waterstone's Bookstore Jervis Shopping Centre /  
 Easons O'Connell St, Dublin 1 / Smyths Toystore Jervis St, Dublin 1

**TABLE 4 ONLINE SHOPPING PRICE SURVEY 2**

<b>CDs</b>	€ Virgin	€ HMV	€ www.cdwow.com
Britney Spears, <i>In the Zone</i>	21.99	19.99	12.85
Beyonce, <i>Dangerously in Love</i>	21.99	15.99	12.85
Christine Aguilera, <i>Stripped</i>	21.99	16.99	12.85
Red Hot Chilli Peppers, <i>Greatest Hits</i>	21.99	19.99	12.85
Dido, <i>Life for Rent</i>	19.99	19.99	12.85
REM, <i>The Best of</i>	21.99	19.99	12.85
Justin Timberlake, <i>Justified</i>	19.99	19.99	12.85
Ronan Keating, <i>Turn it On</i>	21.99	21.99	12.85
Stereophonics, <i>You Gotta Go There to Come Back</i>	19.99	19.99	12.85
Coldplay, <i>A Rush of Blood to the Head</i>	21.99	12.99	12.85
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>213.90</b>	<b>187.90</b>	<b>128.50</b>
<b>DVDs</b>	€ HMV	€ Virgin	€ www.amazon.co.uk
Matrix Reloaded	29.99	29.99	22.78
X Men 2	29.99	21.99	14.27
The Hours	29.99	26.99	19.99
The Recruit	32.99	17.99	21.41
The Lord of the Rings, Two Towers (special edition)	49.99	44.99	34.29
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>172.95</b>	<b>151.95</b>	<b>122.09</b>
<b>Books</b>	€ Waterstones	€ Easons	€ www.amazon.co.uk
<i>A Royal Duty</i> , Paul Burrell	21.10	22.99	17.99
<i>My Side</i> , David Beckham	20.00	21.55	13.56
<i>Jamie's Kitchen</i> , Jamie Oliver	37.75	34.50	25.01
<i>Bill Clinton – An American Journey</i> , Nigel Hamilton	37.75	30.25	25.01
<i>Broken Music</i> , Sting	28.65	25.00	18.99
<i>Tupac: Resurrection</i> , Tupac Shakur	30.20	25.00	20.00
<i>Yellow Dog</i> , Martin Amis	25.65	20.99	16.99
<i>My Invented Country: A Memoir</i> , Isabel Allende	16.60	13.99	18.99
<i>Vernon God Little</i> , DBC Pierre	15.60	13.99	10.99
<i>The Grandmothers</i> , Doris Lessing	22.95	23.30	15.99
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>256.25</b>	<b>231.46</b>	<b>203.43</b>
<p>COMPARISON MADE 21/11/03      RATE OF EXCHANGE €1 =STG £0.6996</p> <p>ONLINE PURCHASES INCLUDE DELIVERY COSTS TO IRELAND  HMV Music Store <i>Henry Street, Dublin 1</i> / Virgin Store <i>Henry Street, Dublin 1</i> / Waterstone's Bookstore <i>Jervis Shopping Centre</i> / Easons Bookshop <i>O'Connell St, Dublin 1</i></p>			

## Public relations

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ECC Dublin issued 11 press releases in total in 2003 resulting in 143 national media article and interviews.

**The following is a list of press releases issued. Copies of all press releases are annexed to this Report.**

<b>March 27:</b>	Consumers seek solutions cross borders
<b>May 29:</b>	Shopping online – 1 in 3 goods never arrive
<b>July 15:</b>	Consumers need results and not just from the courts
<b>July 31:</b>	Eco-tax in Balearic Islands to be paid by holidaymakers
<b>August 1:</b>	Tips on Canary shopping
<b>August 14:</b>	Irish holidaymakers issued with Holiday Club warnings at airports
<b>September 30:</b>	Irish consumers conned by foreign lotteries
<b>October 20:</b>	Savings to be made by going North for Christmas gifts
<b>November 3:</b>	Consumer voices required. Apply to IPM
<b>November 26:</b>	Net yourself great bargains for Christmas
<b>December 16:</b>	Travel free hassle this Christmas

## Other advertising

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- General advertisement in the 2003 wall planner produced by the Consumers Association of Ireland (CAI). 10,000 copies of the wall planner were distributed to CAI members and schools around the country.
- Editorial and advertisement in the annual guide and diary of the University of Dublin, Trinity College for the academic year 2003 / 2004.



Advertisement

- General advertisement in Insight magazine, a direct mail magazine for people with disabilities which has a print run of 25,000.

## Outreach programme

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Another method of distributing information to consumers is directly to schools and community groups. In addition, speaking at conferences raises the profile of ECC Dublin and reminds other professionals of the work the ECC Network is undertaking.

### Outreach presentations made by ECC Dublin staff:

DATE	VENUE
17th January	Synge Street, Christian Brothers School (junior cert)
27th February	Synge Street, Christian Brothers School (leaving cert)
5th March	CIC Beaumont, Dublin
12th May	Business Spouses Association, Irish Marketing Institute, Dundrum
21st May	Greenhills College (intellectually disabled group)
17th June	National Training & Development Institute, Clonmel x2 <i>(intellectually disabled group and acquired head injuries)</i>
3rd September	FAS Loughlinstown
13th November	ICA, An Grianan, Termonfeckin (European Awareness Week)
20th November	Grange Community College Donaghmede (Leaving Cert)
21st November	Grange Community College Donaghmede (Leaving Cert)
26th November	FAS Loughlinstown
4th December	DIT Aungier Street (E.business students – third level)

## Presentations were given by ECC staff at the following conferences:

- ‘*Living in Europe*’ at EURES conference, Dublin;
- Session chair for ‘*The Marketplace*’ at Corporate Social Responsibility conference, Dublin
- Presentation on ECC to Euro Info Centres annual meeting, Dublin
- Presentation on ECC Network to Consumer Seminar for Candidate countries organised by European Commission, Berlin;
- Presentation on ‘*EEJ-Net from ECC perspective*’ at EEJ-Net conference organised by European Commission, Brussels
- Presentation to Irish media of ECC Network report ‘*Realities of the European Online Marketplace*’
- Presentation on ECC information activities to Consumer Seminar for Candidate countries organised by European Commission, Helsinki
- Presentation on establishing an ECC to consumer organisations/government, Lithuania
- Presentation ‘*rip-off Ireland*’ to Fine Gael (Irish political party) national conference, Galway
- Presentation on ECC information activities to Consumer Seminar for Candidate countries organised by European Commission, Vienna,
- Presentation on ECC Network to Consumer Seminar for Candidate countries organised by European Commission, Vienna.



## OTHER ACTIVITIES

- 
- Market Research
  - ‘Shopping in Europe’ steering group
  - Conferences / Meetings attended
  - Staff training



### Market research

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As in 2002, ECC Dublin sent a questionnaire to 93 former clients, asking questions related to ECC Dublin’s service. 57 clients replied, representing a positive 61.2% of the total questioned. The questionnaire is attached in the annex to this Report.

The main results were:

- The average age of respondents was 50 +  
*(in the survey of 202 the majority was over 35 years old)*
- The majority read the Irish Independent and listened to RTÉ Radio 1
- All respondents have access to the Internet,  
using it in 36% for e-mails, 28% for research and 13% for shopping online.
- 94% would watch or listen to a TV or radio programme on consumer issues;  
this is also the most frequent advice to improve our service.
- The majority found out about ECC Dublin through the internet;  
many through ODCA and CIC but also through friends and colleagues.
- To the question “**How would you rate our performance?**”  
49% of respondents rate our services as excellent.
- To the question “**Were you happy with the outcome?**”  
63% of respondents were happy with the outcome.
- 91% would use our service again.
- 61% are confident in cross-border shopping.

#### ADVISED IMPROVEMENTS FOR OUR SERVICES WERE:

1. More advertising; a TV/radio programme on consumer issues (94%)
2. More internet interaction;
3. Stronger legislation/ measures to support consumer complaints.

## **'Shopping in Europe' steering group**

ECC Dublin contributed to the steering group for the project 'Shopping in Europe' which is co-ordinated run by ECC Düsseldorf/Gronau. Information was gathered relating to shopping Ireland and submitted in December 2003. The ECC Network 'Shopping in Europe' publication, covering all EU countries will be published in March 2004.

## **Conferences / meetings**

In addition to attending meetings organised by the European Commission DG Sanco, in relation to ECC, EEJ-Net and IPM, ECC Dublin also attended conferences and seminars in order to keep up to date on relevant issues and to network with colleagues from relevant organisations.

### **An ECC Dublin representative attended:**

- Consumer conference, Bilbao, Spain
- Consumer conference, Eretria, Greece
- Public Relations Institute of Ireland annual conference
- Presentation of ECC network report '*Realities of the European Online Marketplace*', Düsseldorf
- '*How to sell online*', seminar, Dublin
- '*Literacy and the legal system*', Dublin
- Marketing Institute of Ireland annual conference.

ECC Manager Tina Leonard had the opportunity to visit ECC Helsinki while in that city in August to present a paper at a European Commission seminar for accession countries.



Helsinki – L to r: Agneta Gilback, ECC Stockholm, Satu Pohjola, ECC Helsinki, Tina Leonard, ECC Dublin and Ioannis Sidiropolous, ECC Athens

ECC Dublin Manager Tina Leonard and Administrator Lindis Lenox Conyngham took the opportunity to meet with representatives from the European Enforcement section of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in London, during a visit there to meet with ECC Stockholm regarding work on the second e-commerce project. They also visited ECC Vienna while there as presenters at a European Commission seminar for accession countries.



At ECC Vienna: Tina Leonard, ECC Dublin, Georg Mentschl, ECC Vienna, Lindis Lenox Conyngham, ECC Dublin and Harald Schmelcher, ECC Vienna

## Staff training

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ECC Dublin continues to be committed to providing ongoing staff training in relevant areas for employees. Monthly internal staff trainings are held, conducted by the Legal Adviser, in various areas of consumer law. Another monthly meeting involves discussion of cases so that advisers can learn from each others practical experiences. All staff participated in a company planning day to facilitate the inclusion of all ideas and opinions in relation to future company policy and projects.

### **External training is equally important and the following courses were undertaken by various staff members:**

French language x 1; Italian language x 1; Distance Selling seminar; Contract law seminar; Time management skills x 2; Negotiating skills x 1; Presentation skills x 1; ECODIR project training; staff workstation assessment (all staff); assertiveness skills; supervisory management x 1; privatisation of EU law; staff study visit to ODCA.

## CLEARING HOUSE

- Cases
- Development of ADR
- Future

The Clearing House of the European Extra Judicial Network (EEJ-Net), operated by ECC Dublin, celebrated one year in operation in May 2003. This coincided with the end of the 'consolidation phase' of the EEJ-Net and a conference hosted by the European Commission DG Sanco in June to mark the progress of this project. Susan Reilly, Clearing House Co-ordinator attended that conference in Brussels in June, and Tina Leonard, ECC Manager gave a presentation at the conference on the complimentary roles of the ECC Network and EEJ-Net. ECC Dublin issued a press release to mark the occasion. Susan Reilly, Clearing House Co-ordinator, also attended EEJ-Net meetings throughout the year, the annual consumer conference in Brussels in October and attended an ADR conference in Strasbourg in November which was organised by the German Clearing House.



Susan Reilly,  
Clearing House Co-ordinator

An advertisement was placed in the 2003 issue of the car rental magazine '*Ireland at your Leisure*' which is distributed to thousands of rental vehicles in Ireland. An article on the EEJ-Net and the development of ADR was published in the Law Gazette in November 2003, aimed at lawyers, many of whom work as arbitrators.

### Cases

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In 2003 the Clearing House dealt with 90 cases in total, compared with 29 in the first 10 months of operation in 2002. The Clearing House deals only with cases that the ECC has not been able to solve with the retailer in an amicable way. If there is a suitable alternative dispute resolution body (ADR) in the country of the trader the Clearing House can then facilitate the sending of the cases to the ADR

mechanism. ADR is a means of solving consumer 2 business disputes outside of court and is carried out by an arbitration or mediation procedure.

Of the 90 cases dealt with by the Clearing House Dublin, in 55 cases there was no ADR available and in 12 of the cases they were sent to ADR but as of yet there is no outcome. Looking back to 2002 there was only one case settled by ADR and as the Clearing House still awaits the outcome of 12 cases submitted to ADR in 2003, it is not yet possible for the Clearing House Dublin to ascertain the success of using an ADR system to solve a consumer disputes. All 12 cases sent to ADR are sent to ADR bodies in EU countries other than Ireland, and this reflects the fact that the majority of cases (78) were from Irish residents against a retailer in another Member State. However 12 cases were lodged by other EU residents against Irish companies. In all 12 cases there was no suitable ADR body available in Ireland to handle their dispute and so all cases were closed unresolved. This is not a positive situation and points to the need for the development of ADR in Ireland.

The following two case examples are typical of cases dealt with by the Irish Clearing House: one where no ADR is available in Ireland to deal with a case and the second where an ADR is available to deal with an Irish resident's dispute against a retailer in another country but no outcome has been reached:

### Case examples:

A Danish consumer purchased a computer from a company in Limerick, Ireland in 2001. In March 2003 the computer was reported to be faulty and so the Danish consumer was entitled to remedy. The company refused to repair the computer and so the case was first referred to the ECC Dublin. No amicable solution with the company could be found and the case was referred to the Dublin Clearing House. As no ADR is available in Ireland to deal with type of complaint, the case was closed and remained unresolved.

An Irish consumer booked accommodation in Italy online but never received confirmation of the booking and so assumed that the transaction had not been successfully completed. However when they received their credit card statement, they discovered they had been charged for the accommodation which of course, they had not used. Representations made to the online company by the consumer and ECC Dublin were unsuccessful. There is a suitable ADR body available in Italy to deal with this dispute and so the details were forwarded to them. The Clearing House is still awaiting an outcome for this case.

## **Development of ADR**

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As mentioned above, the situation can be positive for Irish consumers who have a dispute with a retailer in another country such as the UK or Spain, where there is a good tradition of arbitration, or with the Scandinavian countries who opt for a one-stop-shop ADR solution to cover all sectors. However, these results also indicate that for other EU consumers buying in Ireland there is a gap in the provision of ADR services for consumers.

To this extent the objective of the Clearing House Dublin in 2003 was to work towards the development of ADR in Ireland. This involved building relationships with three groups, each with a role to play in ADR development:

- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE),  
Consumer Policy Section
- Existing ADR bodies (not already nominated)
- Business sector

### **Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment**

As the Consumer Policy section of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), has the responsibility to nominate ADR bodies under the two Commission Recommendations, it is imperative that the Irish Clearing House and DETE work together to build an understanding of what is desirable in terms of ADR in Ireland and on a practical level what can be achieved to fulfil this. Several joint meetings were held to discuss such development and a positive working relationship and understanding of the salient issues was reached. It was agreed that the Clearing House Co-ordinator would write a Report to be presented to the DETE, detailing the ECC/Clearing House arguments for developing ADR and how this may happen. This Report will be submitted in February 2004.

### **Existing ADR bodies**

There are 6 Irish ADR bodies currently nominated by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment due to their compliance with the two Commission Recommendations on arbitration and nomination. In addition there are other ADR bodies in existence which could comply and be nominated in the future. In order to fulfil its objective of developing ADR in Ireland, the Clearing House engaged in positive discussion with ADR bodies in 2003:

- A response paper was written and submitted to the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) in relation to their consultation document '*Protecting users in a developing Market*'. The Clearing

House was particularly interested in a section of the document relating to the possible development of a dispute resolution body to deal with telecommunication disputes.

- A follow-up meeting was held with ComReg to provide information on the Clearing House/EEJ-Net and on the positive benefits of establishing an ADR scheme.
- Discussion meetings took place with the Private Tenant and Landlord Association where they were encouraged to consider becoming a nominated ADR body.
- A meeting was held with an arbitrator and arbitrator lecturer at Trinity College Dublin with the view of potential nomination and Clearing House involvement in the course.
- A meeting was held with the Direct Selling Association of Ireland regarding a review of their code of practice, pending consideration of nomination as a recommended ADR body.
- Contact was maintained with the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators in relation to their possible nomination.

## Business sector

In terms of the development of ADR it is crucial to get the message to the business sector that being part of an ADR scheme is good for business. The Clearing House Dublin began the process of communication with businesses in December 2003. This involved an advertisement and a full page editorial in Ireland's leading business magazine Business & Finance. The article included the testimonies of the Society of the Irish Motor Industry and the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators as to why arbitration was important to them.



At the same time letters were sent to the Chambers of Commerce round the country, to small and medium businesses and to businesses associations, informing them of the EEJ-Net/Clearing House, it's work and the advantages of the involvement of Irish businesses in ADR schemes.

## **Future**

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In order for the Irish Clearing House to properly fulfil it's role, more ADR bodies need to be established in Ireland, so that disputes involving Irish retailers can be dealt with. In 2004 the Clearing House will continue to work towards this aim. A report on ADR development in Ireland will be submitted to the DETE, meetings and presentations will continue with ADR bodies and business groups and it is hoped that more nominations of ADR bodies will be made to the European Commission. At the same time the Clearing House will continue to handle cases and to find the best solution for consumers.

## FEEDBACK ACTIONS

- Interactive Policy Making (IPM) project
- Direct legal comment

### Interactive Policy Making (IPM) project

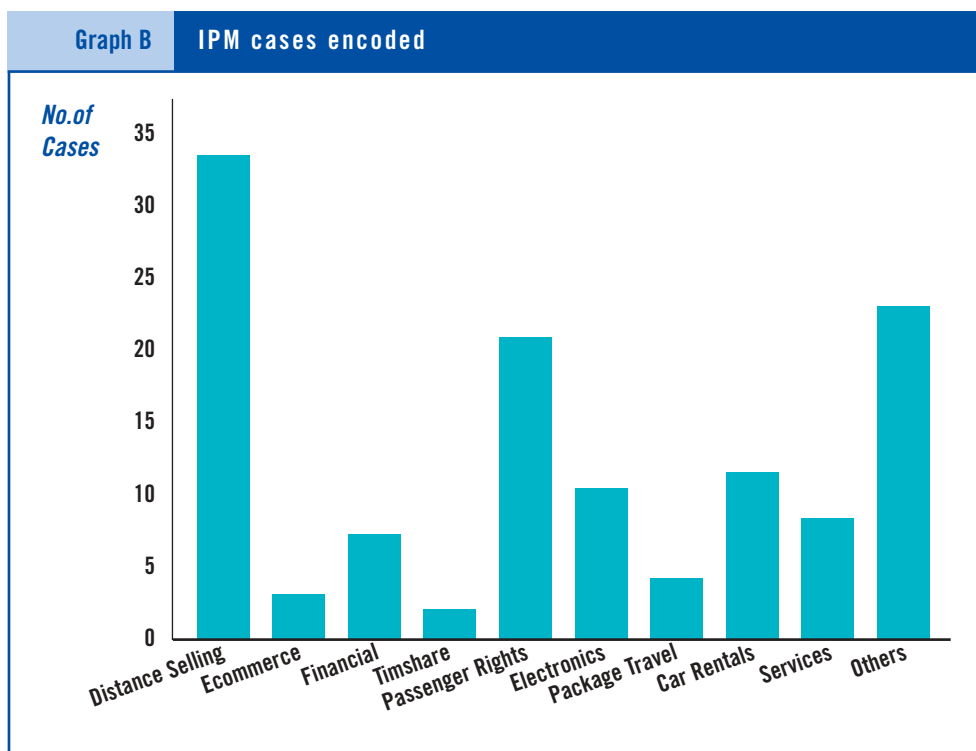
In January 2003 ECC Dublin began participating in the IPM project. This European Commission project aims to:



- Evaluate existing EU policies
- Promote open consultations on new initiatives
- Allow the Commission to respond more quickly and accurately to the demands of citizens, consumers and businesses.

The ECC network's role in the IPM project was to use a specially created online database as a feedback mechanism to provide policy makers in the European Commission with information on consumer cases relevant to the Internal Market.

Lourdes Marques, Adviser at ECC Dublin was appointed IPM Co-ordinator on a half-time basis. Tasks included liaising with other staff regarding cases on a weekly basis; analysing cases for their suitability and encoding information on the cases into the IPM online database. 119 cases were encoded in all during 2003.



## Marketing activities

In terms of the general provision of information regarding the IPM project, the IPM Co-ordinator developed relationships with other Irish IPM participants in the Euro Info Centres, visited ECC Barcelona on an IPM study trip, trained ECC Dublin staff on the IPM project and gave a presentation on ECC Dublin's involvement in the project at the Irish Euro Info Centre general assembly in Dublin.

In order to inform consumers a section on the IPM project was added to ECC Dublin's web site [www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie) and 2,000 copies of a leaflet explaining the service were published and distributed.



Letters were sent to all consumers whose cases had been encoded into the IPM database. They were informed about the new service offered by ECC Dublin and that their cases had been encoded in order to highlight their negative experiences of the Internal Market to policy makers in the European Commission. Letters were also sent to other information providers such as the Citizens Information Services, Euro Info Centres, European Commission and Parliament representation in Ireland and the libraries.

Direct advertising was undertaken on the popular Irish shopping site 'pigsback.com'. A weekly quiz and opinion poll were conducted over the period of one month. The results indicated that 'pigsback' users find it difficult to get information on their consumer rights in Europe. They were evenly split on the question about whether or not the European Commission was interested in hearing about their consumer problems.



## Direct legal comment

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In June 2003, ECC Dublin submitted a paper of comments on the Communication of the Commission to the European Parliament and Council 'A more coherent European Contract Law: An Action Plan'. This five page commentary document outlined concerns and opinions based on ECC Dublin's practical experience of handling cases.



Elena Calavia, Legal Adviser

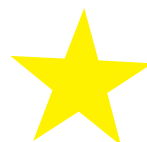
ECC Dublin Legal Adviser and Manager attended a government briefing on two new European Commission legislative proposals in November 2003. The proposals related to the Directive on Unfair Commercial Practices (so-called 'Framework Directive) and the Directive on Enforcement Co-operation. Both pieces of proposed legislation will impact ECC's work in a positive way and ECC Dublin is closely following their progress. ECC Dublin will also submit to the Commission, case studies where the Enforcement Co-operation Directive could play a role in the future.

With limited resources, it is regretful that ECC Dublin cannot give more time to giving direct comment on legal proposals. However, ECC Dublin will endeavour to participate where possible and to continue to submit collated details on experiences relevant to proposed legislation or to a problematic area, such as the submission on timeshare/holiday clubs that was previously made.

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*The European Consumer Centre, Dublin would like to thank the European Commission DG Health & Consumer Protection, the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs, the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and the European Commission DG Internal market for their continued support.*

*ECC Dublin would particularly like to thank all staff at the Centre for their continued dedicated, hard work and good humour.*



## MEDIA COVERAGE 2002

### General Press Coverage

#### JANUARY

- 4 **Caution in booking holiday break advised** – The Irish Times, *Alison Healy*
- 5 **Out with the old scam in with the new** – The Sunday Times, *Jill Kerby*
- 5 **Can I claim a refund on unwanted gifts?** – Sunday Business Post, Question of money
- 6 **Lining up to return unwanted gifts** – Irish Examiner, *Nicola Cooke*
- 6 **How not to book that holiday from hell...** – Irish Independent, *Martha Kearns*
- 14 **How to avoid a holiday in hell** – Evening Herald, *Shane Hickey*
- 16 **Why it pays to know your rights on those faulty purchases** – Irish Independent, *Bill Tyson*
- 17 **Michael Helhe's true class** – The Phoenix Magazine
- 23 **Watchdogs are looking out for you** – Irish Independent, *Bill Tyson*
- 24 **Lie back and think of holiday hell** – The Irish Times, *Shane Hegarty*

#### FEBRUARY

- 13 **Best Buys** – Irish Independent
- Ulovlige reisvilkar** – Forbruker Rapporten, (Norwegian consumer magazine)
- 20 **Best Buys** – Irish Independent

#### MARCH

- The art of complaining** – Consumer Choice
- Online armour** – Consumer Choice
- 25 **Consumers warned over hidden costs of scratch card prizes** – Irish Examiner
- 27 **Good Buys** – Irish Independent

#### APRIL

- 15 **Your holiday rights** – Womans Way magazine
- 23 **Holidays in Hell** – In Dublin, *Clare O'Dea*

#### MAY

- 11 **Consumers must exercise their rights** – Sunday Business Post
- State of the Net** – Dot.ie magazine
- 18 **Surfers fall for lure of net savings** – The Sunday Times, *Kathy Foley*
- 22 **Watch out for credit card surcharges** – Irish Independent

#### JUNE

- 12 **Know your rights** – Leinster Leader
- 17 **Know your rights** – North County Leader newspaper
- 19 **Best Buys** – Irish Independent
- 19 **Don't get duped by 'holiday clubs'** – Dublin Daily, *Fergal O'Brien*
- 24 **Know your rights** – Waterford Today

#### JULY

- 3 **Best Buys** – Irish Independent
- 13 **Reclaiming for lost luggage** – Sunday Business Post, Question of Money
- 25 **Sign up to a holiday club and live to regret it** – The Irish Times, *Laura, Slattery*

#### AUGUST

- 14 **Don't let a bad electrical buy spark off a bad** – Irish Independent
- Cross-border issues** – Consumer Choice magazine

## SEPTEMBER

- 28 Spanish company shut down after stinging Irish firms – Sunday Business Post

## OCTOBER

- 5 How to holiday abroad and only pay the airfare – Sunday Times  
26 Companies warned about €3K charge for directory service  
– Sunday Business Post, *Kieron Wood*

## NOVEMBER

- Alternative remedies (EEJ-Net) – The Law Society Gazette  
14 Chic Zara fashion costs less – Irish Independent  
16 Timeshare/Holiday Clubs – Ireland on Sunday  
23 Too good to be true, it probably is (Holiday Clubs) – Sunday Tribune  
28 Small claims court brings satisfaction – Irish Examiner

## DECEMBER

- 14 If it look fishy, don't bite – Sunday Times, *Margaret E Ward*  
15 How to help yourself – Irish Independent  
30 Better rights for consumers online – Irish Independent

## General Radio Coverage

### JANUARY

- 2 Interview on new wine labelling legislation – LiteFM  
6 Interview on package holidays – Newstalk 106FM  
8 Interview on club class and holiday clubs – Liveline Radio 1  
14 Interview on holiday clubs – Youghal Community Radio  
29 Interview on cost of living across the EU – Newstalk 106FM

### FEBRUARY

- 11 Interview about pricing of goods in euro and sterling – Dublin Institute of Technology student radio station

### APRIL

- 28 Interview on assertiveness and consumer rights – Newstalk 106FM

### MAY

- 22 Interview on timeshare and holiday clubs – Newstalk 106FM  
28 Interview about going on holidays – Live95FM Limerick

### JULY

- 31 Interview on holiday clubs – Anna Livia

### AUGUST

- 14 ECC Mentioned – Gerry Ryan show  
24 Newstalk 106FM  
27 Newstalk 106FM  
30 Travelling in the EU – BBC Radio Ulster

### NOVEMBER

- 25 Newspaper review – Newstalk 106FM

### DECEMBER

- 30 Interview on internet rights – Newstalk 106FM

**PRESS RELEASE: MARCH 27 *Consumers seek solutions cross borders***

- MARCH 29 – *Buyers' holiday home dream turns into €700,000 nightmare*  
: Irish Independent, Lorna Reid
- 31 – Clare FM  
– Lite FM

**PRESS RELEASE: MAY 29 *Shopping online – 1 in 3 goods never arrives***

- MAY 29 – *Third of online buys fail to arrive* : The Irish Times, Laura Slattery  
– News at one with Sean O'Rourke  
– Spin FM  
– *Consumer affairs boss warns e-tailers* : Electricnews.net, Andrew McLindon  
– *Shopping on-line in Europe: 1 in 3 goods never arrives* : Out-law.com  
– Netgain Issue 1 2003 IIA magazine
- 30 – Lite FM  
– *Shopping online in Europe – 34% of goods not delivered* : iia.ie
- 31 – Newstalk  
– *E-tailers may face prosecution* : Irish Independent, Ailish O'Hora  
– *Online shoppers not receiving goods claims watchdog* : Irish Examiner, Kelly Andrew
- JUNE 5 – *EU Shops E-tailers* : Business & Finance, Andrew McLindon  
– Eastcoast radio
- 6 – *European consumer report casts doubts on online delivery and use of credit cards*  
: The Irish Times, Laura Slattery  
– *Sell out: online Shopping proves unsatisfactory* : Irish Examiner, John Hearne  
– ElectricNews.net, Andrew McLindon
- 9 – Red FM Cork  
– *Shopping online in Europe – 1 in 3 goods never arrive* : Public Sector Times
- 11 – Anna Livia
- 19 – Southeast Radio
- 22 – *Question of Money: Set internet sales to rights and get your goods.*  
: Sunday Business Post
- JULY 3 – *Buying online? New VAT tax and doubtful delivery record add to uncertainty.*  
: Irish Independent
- AUGUST 1 – Beat 102/103FM
- 22 – *Online shopping is virtual scam* : Irish Independent
- SEPT – *Online swindle* : Consumer Choice magazine
- OCT – Inside.ie website

**PRESS RELEASE: JULY 15 *Consumers need results and not just from the courts***

**PRESS RELEASE: JULY 31 *Eco-tax in Balearic Islands to be paid by holidaymakers***

JULY 31 – 104FM

**PRESS RELEASE: AUGUST 1 *Tips on Canary Shopping***

- AUGUST 5 – Lite FM  
8 – *New checklist on shopping in Spain* : The Irish Times  
11 – *Fake “bargains” a costly holiday peril* : Evening Herald  
13 – Cork Campus radio  
15 – *Overvalued ring highlights 24 carat tourist trap* : Irish Examiner

**PRESS RELEASE: AUGUST 14**

***Irish holidaymakers issued with Holiday Club warnings at airports***

- AUGUST 14 – 96FM Cork  
17 – *EU watchdog warns of holiday club scams* : Ireland on Sunday  
18 – Beat102/103 FM  
– Castlebar radio  
19 – Tipp FM  
22 – *Beware of Holiday Clubs lobby warns* : The Irish Times  
25 – South East Radio  
27 – *Sun holiday scam warning* : Northside People newspaper

**PRESS RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 30 *Irish consumers conned by foreign lotteries***

- SEPTEMBER 1 – UCC campus Radio  
3 – LiteFM  
5 – *Card numbers come up in lottery scams* : Ireland on Sunday  
10 – *Complaints up over lotteries overseas* : The Irish Times / Public Sector Times  
13 – *You’re in the money – too bad its €2 – as lotto schemes return* : Irish Independent  
21 – Newstalk 106FM

**PRESS RELEASE: OCTOBER 20 *Savings to be made by going North for Christmas gifts***

- OCTOBER 21 – *UK discount store charging Irish customers much more* : Irish Independent  
– Cross border for bargains : The Star  
– Newstalk106  
– 2FM Full Irish radio programme  
– Beat FM  
– Eastcoast radio

- NOVEMBER 5 – *Christmas shopping cheaper in North* : Irish Examiner
- 6 – LM/FM Drogheda
- East Coast FM
- 7 – *Thin line between good and bad value* : Irish Examiner
- 11 – Morning Ireland, RTE Radio 1
- 12 – The Last Word, Today FM
- 25 – BBC Northern Ireland 6pm TV News
- 30 – *Store's discounts border on pricey* : Sunday Times

**PRESS RELEASE: NOVEMBER 3 *Consumer Voices required. Apply to IPM***

- NOVEMBER 7 – *EU consumer body bids to improve laws* : The Irish Times

**PRESS RELEASE: NOVEMBER 26 *Net yourself great bargains for Christmas***

- NOVEMBER 26 – Morning Ireland
- 98FM News
- Beat102103 FM
- Newstalk
- 104FM
- *Buying online much cheaper than in shops, survey reveals* : Irish Independent
- ElectricNews.net
- FM103 Cork
- 2FM News 11am
- SpinFM
- 27 – LiteFM
- LMFM
- Todayfm The last word
- Highland Radio
- SpinFM
- 28 – Eastcoast Radio
- DECEMBER 4 – *Have a Hap E-Christmas* : Business and Finance
- 6 – *Why rip-off Ireland is a (web) site for sore eyes* : Irish Independent

**PRESS RELEASE: DECEMBER 16 *Travel free of hassle this Christmas***

- DECEMBER 12 – LiteFM

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE 27 March 2003**

## **CONSUMERS SEEK SOLUTIONS CROSS BORDERS**

Today 27th March, European Consumer Centre Dublin published its Annual Report for 2002. ECC Dublin, located in O'Connell St, provides free information to consumers on their rights when shopping in the EU and provides assistance on cross border consumer disputes.

Over 9,000 consumers contacted ECC Dublin last year. The vast majority of these queries related to consumers having problems with Irish businesses. However an increase of 6% was noted for consumers with queries/problems with businesses in other EU countries.

*"One in six Irish consumers shop in other EU countries and what we are seeing now is an increase in the number of consumers wanting to find out what legislation protects them when shopping cross borders"* stated Tina Leonard ECC Manager.

In 2002 ECC Dublin received three main categories of cross border queries and complaints. The three main categories were: travel, shopping online and mail order complaints. The most popular complaints related to package holidays and flights. ECC Dublin also recorded a significant increase in the number of timeshare/holiday club complaints.

Shopping online complaints ranged from goods never arriving to concerns about credit card fraud. Mail order complaints centred on problems with debt collection agencies.

*"If you find yourself in a pickle with a purchase you bought while on holidays in the Canaries or don't know where to turn for help when shopping online contact ECC Dublin"* Tina Leonard ECC Manager reassures.

Last year ECC Dublin launched a new service called the Clearing House. The Clearing House provides access to consumers who wish to avail of arbitration and avoid going to court. The Clearing House assisted 11 consumers in resolving their dispute with businesses.

By clicking on the newly revamped [www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie) consumers have instant access to useful information on their rights when shopping in Ireland and also in other EU Member States.

*Ends*

Mary Denise Fitzgerald, PR & Marketing Manager,  
Tel: 01 8090607      Mobile: 086 8057339  
Email: [maryd@eccdublin.ie](mailto:maryd@eccdublin.ie)

**EMBARGO 29 May 2003**

**SHOPPING ONLINE IN EUROPE – 1 IN 3 GOODS NEVER ARRIVE**

Today, Thursday 29 May, European Consumer Centre Dublin announced the findings of the ECC Network Report on the Realities of the European online marketplace. The Report concludes that shopping on the internet is littered with problems but consumers have rights and must exercise them.

The ECC Network encountered three main problems when shopping online in the EU: **1 in 3 goods were never delivered; key information was missing and returned goods were not reimbursed.**

In 2002 thirteen ECCs participated in a shopping survey which involved 114 orders from webtraders in the EU. The following products were ordered: t-shirt, ink cartridges, paper, CD, DVD, toy, dictionary and watch. Only 75 of these orders resulted in a delivery. That means that 34% of the goods were not delivered.

In addition to the shopping exercise 262 EU websites were examined for the purpose of evaluating the quality of information provided. Among the provisions of the Distance Selling Directive, a consumer is given seven days (cooling-off) after receipt of the good/service to make a final decision whether or not to keep it. 32% of the websites gave no information regarding the consumer's right to withdraw from the contract.

If the consumer decides to withdraw from an online contract the consumer is entitled to a refund. To test if the webtraders adhered to this provision the ECC network returned 57 of the 75 goods received. In 18 of those cases the network did not receive any refund. This represents 31.5%.

Fifteen Irish webtraders were examined for the quality of information provided. Only two of the websites complied with the cooling-off period of seven days.

*“The results show that consumers experience numerous problems shopping online in the EU. But there is protection for consumers and greater awareness of these rights will inspire confidence in online shopping”* stated Tina Leonard Manager ECC Dublin.

*Ends*

Mary Denise Fitzgerald, PR & Marketing Manager,  
 Tel: 01 8090607      Mobile: 086 8057339  
 Email: Email: maryd@eccdublin.ie

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE 15 July 2003**

**CONSUMERS NEED RESULTS AND NOT JUST FROM THE COURTS**

Today, 15th July, ECC Dublin announced the results of the pilot phase for its Clearing House Service of the European Extra Judicial Network (EEJ-Net).

The Clearing House assists consumers in resolving their consumer disputes through the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) bodies. This service is used for disputes against traders in other EU Member States where an amicable solution cannot be found.

The results show that there is a need to develop alternative dispute resolution bodies so that more consumer disputes can be resolved.

*“Going to court in another country is not a feasible option for consumers,” stated Tina Leonard Manager ECC Dublin, “language differences, cost of travel and the time involved are all barriers to seeking a satisfactory solutions for consumers. The Clearing House/EEJ-Net service gives consumers access to alternative dispute resolution without leaving their homes.”*

From May 2002 to March 2003 the Irish Clearing House handled 47 cases. These cases ranged from Irish consumers with disputes against Spanish holiday resorts over non-refund of deposits to Norwegian consumers with complaints against an Irish Airline over ticket refunds. Unfortunately, nearly 60% (27 cases) have been closed unresolved due to the lack of relevant ADR bodies.

*“There is a lack of ADR bodies in many EU Member States and this is especially true of Ireland. Consumers need more dispute resolution bodies in addition to the judicial system to feel confident in shopping in the EU”* re-iterated Tina Leonard ECC Manager.

In Ireland there are six alternative dispute resolution bodies currently recommended by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment that are in co-operation with the EEJ-Net.

- The Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland
- The Insurance Ombudsman
- The Ombudsman for Credit
- The Chartered Institute of Arbitrators  
(scheme for Tour Operators and consumers)
- The Centre for Dispute Resolution
- Electricity Supply Board – Consumer Complaints Arbitrator. (ELCOM)

The Irish Clearing House aims to encourage the development of ADR bodies and bring awareness to consumers and businesses regarding the different options open to them.

*Ends*

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE 31st July 2003**

**ECO-TAX IN BALEARIC ISLANDS MUST BE PAID BY HOLIDAYMAKERS**

ECC Dublin reminds holidaymakers that eco-tax must be paid in parts of Ibiza, Menorca, Majorca and Formentera. This environmental levy is used for projects such as regenerating parks, planting fruit trees and restoring historic parks.

The Balearic Islands introduced the eco-tax in May 2002. The duty is levied on arrival at the tourist accommodation on the islands. It is charged to holidaymakers at a daily rate from 51 cent to €2.05 depending on the type of accommodation. For example holidaymakers pay €2.05 eco-tax per day for five star hotel and apartment hotels. As little as 51 cent is levied per day for some tourist apartments. Children under 12 and elderly persons visiting the Balearics as part of a social programme do not have to pay.

Tour Operators are required under the Package Holiday and Travel Trade Act 1995 to inform consumers of the tax before departure and in the contract. If the Tour Operator is based outside of Ireland the travel agent is then required to provide the necessary information when travelling to the Balearics. If the tour operator or travel agent fails to inform the consumer of the charge the consumer can seek compensation from the tour operator or travel agent on return from the holiday.

**Notes**

**CONTRIBUTION PAYABLE FROM JANUARY 2003**

- 5 \*hotel and apartment hotels €2.05
- 4\* & 3\*hotel and apartment hotels €1.03
- 2\* hotel and apartment hotels €0.51
- 1\*hotel and apartment hotels €0.51
  
- 4 Key Tourist apartments €2.05
- 3 Key & 2 Key Tourist apartments €1.03
- 1 Key Tourist apartments v0.51
  
- Campsite €0.77
- Rural hotel €1.03
- Leasing of immovable property €1.03

*Ends*

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE August 2003**

### **TIPS ON CANARY SHOPPING**

As the Canary Islands are the most popular European destination for Irish holidaymakers, the European Consumer Centre (ECC) Dublin has joined with the Consumer Information Office in Fuerteventura to offer consumers useful tips when shopping on the Islands.

Unfortunately every year ECC Dublin receives complaints about purchases made in the Canaries. The most common problems faced by consumers relate to the purchase of electrical equipment such as digital cameras, camcorders and car rental.

Some recommendations to holidaymakers purchasing in the Canary Islands:

- Compare prices and quality before buying. The retailer may convince you his/her prices are the lowest but the advice is to shop around.
- Prices must be displayed on or near the products. Try to avoid purchase if there are no prices displayed.
- Always ask for a receipt.
- When buying electrical goods ask for the instruction manual and guarantee. This must have the stamp of the store and should not be modified in anyway.
- When paying with a credit card make sure to get not only the receipt for the card but also get a receipt with details of what is purchased.
- If you need to make a complaint you have to ask for an official complaint form in the store. The retailer is required by law to have these forms. On completing the form visit the Consumer Information Office which is usually located in the Town Hall.
- Before renting a car make sure you check for existing faults and take out adequate insurance to cover any potential damage.

"Holidays are about having fun and not getting hassled about faulty cameras and the like. We want consumers to know that if they have problems with their purchases they are protected by consumer legislation", reassures Tina Leonard Manager ECC Dublin.

If consumers cannot solve their complaints while on holiday they should contact ECC Dublin on their return. ECC Dublin offers a free service assisting consumers with cross-border disputes.

\*NOTE: These tips also apply to the rest of Spain.

*Ends*

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE 14 August 2003**

**IRISH HOLIDAYMAKERS ISSUED WITH HOLIDAY CLUB WARNINGS AT AIRPORT**

With the peak holiday season, Irish holidaymakers are prone to being ripped off by Holiday Clubs scam in Spain and Portugal. The European Consumer Centre (ECC) goes to Dublin and Cork airports to prevent consumers signing these contracts and losing their money.

*“Holiday Clubs remains our major concern this summer since the ECC has seen the problem of bogus Holiday Clubs increase,” says Tina Leonard, ECC Manager. “This is why we’re visiting airports again this year and warning holidaymakers against joining Holiday Clubs”.*

Holiday clubs offer luxury annual holidays at knock down prices to potential members. So, in theory, members can enjoy fabulous holidays in beautiful resorts for a fraction of the cost and even get their money back after their membership terminates. But Holiday Clubs are not all they seem.

Holiday clubs are aggressively sold in Spain and Portugal. The initial approach is made by a Holiday Club rep on the street who presents the consumer with a scratch card. Invariably, the consumer “wins“ a holiday. The consumer is then taken to an office to claim the prize. Aggressive marketing techniques are used to woo the consumer into signing a Holiday Club contract. Unfortunately there is very little hope of recouping monies spent on Holiday Clubs.

*“Unlike Timeshare, which is covered by EU legislation, there is no cooling off period, so you can’t withdraw from the contract”, explains Tina Leonard. “We have already received 120 queries on timeshares and holiday clubs to date this year, with an average loss of €7,000 to each consumer.”*

If somebody approaches you in the street or on the beach with a scratch card or invites you to a brief presentation, walk away. If you are unsure contact the European Consumer Centre for advice.

The ECC outreach programme includes visits in Dublin airport (21st, 23rd, 30th August) and in Cork (28th August).

*Ends*

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE 30 September 2003**

**IRISH CONSUMERS CONNED BY FOREIGN LOTTERIES**

In the past year ECC Dublin has seen an increase in the numbers of Irish consumers complaining about foreign lotteries. The problem with these lotteries is that they are misleading and consumers are losing money as a result of this scam.

Consumers are guaranteed they have won a major prize on opening the lottery promotional material which comes in the post. To claim the prize the consumer must submit personal details and credit card information. But the small print indicates that the consumer has only entered into a prize draw and money will be debited from the credit card to pay for administration fees and lottery tickets.

ECC Dublin warns consumers to be wary of these lotteries. Consumers should note that:

1. Legitimate lottery operators do not ask for administration fees.
2. Never provide personal identity information to an unknown third party.

*"If you receive information from foreign lotteries you should contact us before proceeding further",* advises Tina Leonard Manager ECC Dublin.

*Ends*

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE 20 October 2003**

**SAVINGS TO BE MADE BY GOING NORTH FOR CHRISTMAS GIFTS**

As Christmas is approaching ECC Dublin did a price comparison between Argos in the UK and in the Republic. The results indicate that with or without VAT Argos UK is cheaper than Argos in the Republic

The survey reveals that prices are cheaper in the UK even taking into consideration the exchange rate. The net benefit to the shopper is that by saving on buying Christmas presents they have more money to spend on themselves.

The survey examined prices for 21 goods that are popular gifts. Consumers can save from €3 to €25 on goods such as espresso machines, cameras, food processors, bed linen etc.

*“This small survey shows that money can be saved by shopping across borders” states Tina Leonard Manager ECC Dublin. “We want consumers to know that if they have problems with the products they purchase in another Member State they can turn to us for assistance”*

Consumers in Ireland cannot order from the Argos UK website but consumers can easily travel north to avail of value for money.

The complete list of prices is attached in a spreadsheet.

*Ends*

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE 3 November 2003**

**CONSUMER VOICES REQUIRED. APPLY TO IPM**

Today ECC Dublin announced its participation in a European Commission project, **Interactive Policy Making (IPM)** which has the aim of improving the way Europe is run.

The IPM initiative gathers information via three networks relating to consumers, business and citizens rights.

ECC Dublin submits relevant information regarding consumer experiences to the European Commission via the IPM database. Personal details are not included. The ECC advises and assists consumers with queries or problems when buying goods or services in another EU Member State. These may include problems with online shopping, mail order or buying goods on holiday. While the ECC will attempt to resolve the complaint, inclusion in the IPM database means that problems are highlighted directly with the European Commission.

The information submitted relating to consumer complaints in the EU can help the European Commission evaluate existing policies and legislation in an effort to make the Internal Market work better.

*“This means that when consumers’ cross-border complaints are handled by ECC Dublin, their experience may effect future policy decisions regarding shopping in the Internal Market,”* said Tina Leonard, ECC Manager.

Through the ECC and other IPM initiatives consumers can speak directly of their experiences shopping in the EU (<http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice>) Consumers can play an active part in making the internal market work for them.

*Ends*

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**EMBARGO**    **Midnight 25 November 2003**

**NET YOURSELF GREAT BARGAINS FOR CHRISTMAS**

ECC Dublin offers good cheer to consumers who may associate Christmas shopping with empty pockets and aching feet. A price comparison of popular gifts reveals that shopping online is cheaper than buying from the high street and can all be done from the comfort of home.

The survey conducted on Friday 21st November reveals that money can be saved shopping on the internet. ECC Dublin compared the prices of 10 CDs, 5 DVDs, 10 books and 3 pieces of electrical equipment. Consumers can save over €20 on a Gameboy and €60 on a DVD player by choosing to shop online. If these findings fail to impress, consumers will be amazed that they can save €250 on a digital camera simply by using the internet.

CDs, DVDs and books are favourite gifts at Christmas time with consumers buying a few of each as stocking fillers. Just buying one CD, DVD or book online is cheaper than on the high street. For example Britney Spears' album "In the Zone" costs €21.99 from Virgin but only €12.85 from www.cdwow.com. The survey revealed that more savings can be made online when consumers buy in bulk keeping delivery costs to a minimum. Comparing the total cost of five DVDs such as Matrix Reloaded and Lord of the Rings there was a saving of €50 between HMV in Dublin and www.amazon.co.uk. There was a difference of €85 for ten CDs between Virgin music store in Dublin and www.cdwow.com.

"Buying on the internet offers consumers greater choice at better prices", asserts Tina Leonard ECC Manager. "Consumers are protected by law if goods don't arrive and ECC Dublin is here to help if problems occur."

The complete list of prices is attached in a spreadsheet.

*Ends*

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE 16 December 2003**

**TRAVEL FREE OF HASSLE THIS CHRISTMAS**

ECC Dublin offers consumers useful tips when travelling over the festive season.

- When travelling by plane if your luggage is delayed, damaged or mislaid make sure to fill out a Passenger Irregularity Report form (PIR) which you will get at the airport. You are entitled to compensation when your luggage is not returned within twenty four hours. Consumers must complete the form in order to avail of the compensation.
- Always label your luggage whether travelling by bus, boat, train or plane. Clearly state your name and address in case items go missing. Contact ECC Dublin for free luggage tags at [info@eccdublin.ie](mailto:info@eccdublin.ie) or 01 8090600.
- Do not wrap your presents before travelling especially at airports because of heightened security measures.
- Instead of carrying large sums of money check with your bank to see if your ATM card can be used in other eurozone countries. If so the cost of withdrawing money from an ATM in the eurozone is the same as in Ireland.

*Ends*

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## MARKET RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How did you find out about ECC Dublin?

- Media (e.g. Radio, Newspapers, TV)
- The Internet
- Friends & Colleagues
- Telephone book
- Office of the Director of the Consumers Affairs (ODCA)
- Consumer Associations of Ireland (CAI)
- Citizen Information Centre (CIC)

2. How did you find the first contact with the office?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Not good

**If your query required further assistance please answer Q3 to Q6**

**Please skip to Q7 if your query was answered in your first contact with ECC Dublin.**

3. Once you wrote to ECC, how long did it take to receive a response?

- 1 week
- 2 weeks
- 3 weeks
- More than 3 weeks

4. During the course of your complaint how informed were you kept?

- Very well informed
- Adequately informed
- Uninformed

5. How long did the entire case take?

- Less than a month
- 1-3 months
- 3-6 months
- More than 6 months

6. Were you satisfied with the time it took us to handle your case?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Unsatisfied

7. How would you rate our performance?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Not good

8. Were you happy with the outcome?

- Yes
- No

9. Are you now more confident when shopping in another EU country?

- Yes
- No

If not, why?

- Problem of language differences
- No need to shop cross-border
- Others (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Would you use our service again?

- Yes
- No

11. How could we improve our service?

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The ECC is co-funded by the European Commission  
and the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs.

