[GB] BBC Adopts Code of Practice on Competitions and Premium Rate Phone Calls

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Following serious criticism of the use of premium rate phone calls in competitions, which has included the BBC as well as commercial broadcasters (see IRIS 2007-8: 11), the BBC has issued a Code of Conduct for Competitions and Voting and new rules, which severely restrict the use of such phone calls.

The new Code applies to all interactive competitions and votes whether or not they involve phone calls. The competitions should never be run to make a profit, and only used for fund raising for BBC-supported charitable initiatives. The key principles are that competitions and votes are conducted in a way that is honest, open, fair and legal. Winners will always be genuine and never invented, pre-chosen or planted by the production team; every entry will have a fair chance of winning. No-one will ever be asked to pose as a competition contestant or winner. Prizes will be described accurately and winners will receive their prizes in a reasonable time. There will be clear rules for any competition or vote, which will be readily accessible to the public. Whatever pressures there may be to “keep the show on the air” the BBC will never compromise its editorial integrity, and it will not cover up when things go wrong, nor falsify the outcome.

Premium rate calls to BBC programmes will be capped at a total cost of 15 pence; the only exception will be in programmes directly related to a charity appeal such as BBC Children in Need, and a clear indication will be made in these cases of what is happening. Other programmes will not increase the call price to support charities.

As a result of the new rules, a limited number of competitions will return to the BBC from January 2008, having been suspended as a result of earlier criticism. Other protections will be that all staff involved must have attended the BBC training course “Safeguarding Trust”, any proposed competition must have very senior level prior approval and be supervised by an appropriate editorial figure, and use of premium rate phone lines will need approval by the BBC’s Editorial Policy Department.

BBC, “BBC Code of Conduct for Competitions and Voting”, November 2007

http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/advice/interactivity/code/

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BBC, Stringent New Policies on Premium Rate Phone Calls Precede a Phased Return of BBC Competitions", press release of 30 December 2007

http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/12_december/30/competitions.shtml

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