



## Report of the Adjudicator

Complaint number	#59699
Cited WASPA members	Baseplay (1836)
Notifiable WASPA members	Not applicable.
Source of the complaint	Public
Complaint short description	Unauthorised service charges
Date complaint lodged	2023-05-12
Date of alleged breach	2023-03-08
Applicable version of the Code	17.4
Clauses of the Code cited	4.2, 4.11, 5.4, 5.10, 5.12, 5.13, 5.14, 15.3, 15.9, 15.10, 15.11, 15.12, 15.13, 15.14, 15.15, 15.16, 15.17, 15.18, 15.19, 15.19A, 15.20, 15.20A, 15.22, 15.23, 15.28, 15.29, 15.30, 15.31
Related complaints considered	59697 and 59698
Fines imposed	None.
Other sanctions	Not applicable.
Is this report notable?	Not notable.
Summary of notability	Not applicable.

---

## **Initial complaint**

1. The Complainant provided a commissioned affidavit setting out his complaint.
2. The Complainant alleged that on or about 2023-03-08 he had purchased R150.00 airtime from Cell C mobile network services ("Cell C") and had noticed that the amount had disappeared without him having used the airtime.
3. The Complainant stated that he had been subscribed to 31 different subscription services, some of which were duplicates, belonging to 6 different wireless application service providers.
4. The Complainant alleged that he had no knowledge of these subscription services he was subscribed to, nor did he use these subscription services at any time. Furthermore, it was complained that the Complainant never subscribed to the subscription services in question.
5. One of the wireless application service providers was the Member, to whose subscription services the Complainant alleged he had not subscribed to ("the service").
6. The Complainant disputed the proof submitted by the Member of his subscription to the service and alleged that the Member may be intentionally defrauding customers, either directly or by way of malware.
7. The Complainant further submitted that he did not have to prove his position, as the onus of proof in civil matters lies with he who alleges.

---

## **Member's response**

8. The Member alleged that a meticulous selection of business partners was undertaken to safeguard customer interests from fraud when they contracted with Cell C.
9. It was also alleged that certain clauses of the Code were incongruent with the Member's operations, given Cell C's integral role in overseeing initial stages of subscription acquisition and Cell C's role in exclusively governing the service's subscription flow and marketing materials.
10. The Member stated that their capacity to furnish subscription logs was limited to post-SAT Push subscription occurrences and urged direct engagement with Cell C for access to further records.
11. The Member argued that numerous clauses of the Code were irrelevant due to the use of SAT Push which operated differently from traditional methods such as SMS and RCS.

12. The Member alleged that they had sent welcome and reminder messages to the Complainant after his subscription to the service. The Member asserted that they provided easily accessible and clear unsubscribe mechanisms for their service. The Member also emphasised that unsubscribe links were included in both welcome and reminder messages sent to users. Furthermore, users had the option to unsubscribe directly through the Member's portal using their accounts. The Member contended that they comply with requisite standards, ensuring customers are offered a termination method that does not unsubscribe them from other services.
  13. The Member argued that Mobile Network Operators ("MNO") provide various unsubscribe mechanisms that partners must adhere to. While the Code suggested using the word "STOP" where technically possible, the Member contended that their unsubscribe link aligned with MNO rules and technical specifications. They maintained that their systems were designed to honour all mandatory unsubscribe words. Therefore, the Member asserted that a "STOP" message would have unsubscribed the Complainant similarly to their unsubscribe link.
  14. The Member alleged that they diligently addressed all communications from the Complainant and issued a refund promptly, as per records provided by Cell C.
- 

### **Complainant's response**

15. The Complainant stated that he had no knowledge of any subscription to any of the 6 WASPs and 27 content services he was billed for.
16. The Complainant alleged that despite appeals, Cell C declined to provide detailed billing information.
17. The Complainant questioned which other members of WASPA were asked to respond.
18. The Complainant stated that the Member's response was dated incorrectly and lacked a signature, and raised doubts about its validity.
19. The Complainant stated that the Member's response did not clarify how the Complainant was subscribed to the service or provide evidence of subscription or usage.
20. The Complainant alleged that the refund issued by the Member implied unauthorised billing.
21. The Complainant also stated that the Member attempted to evade responsibility by attributing the subscription process entirely to Cell C.
22. Furthermore, the Complainant alleged that the Member deferring responsibility to Cell C, which was not a WASPA member, created a loophole for non-compliance and exploitation of customers.

---

## Member's further response

23. The Member explained the subscription process via SAT Push, emphasising the role of Cell C in initiating the process and their compliance with WASPA regulations.
24. The Member clarified their compliance with providing welcome messages, and content access as per their agreement with Cell C.
25. The Member highlighted their prompt action in blacklisting the Complainant from their service upon complaint.
26. The Member addressed the issue of incorrect response dates and the absence of signatures, asserting the admissibility of their statements.
27. The Member acknowledged the absence of the term "SAT Push" in the Code but explained its nature and context.
28. The Member reiterated their inability to provide logs beyond their possession and clarified their refund policy.
29. In conclusion, the Member requested the dismissal of the formal complaint and expressed concern over the Complainant's repeated allegations.

---

## Sections of the Code considered

30. The following sections of the WASPA Code of Conduct ("the Code") are considered, and read as follows:

"4.2 Members must at all times conduct themselves in a professional manner in their dealings with the public, customers, other service providers and WASPA.

4.11 Members must take reasonable steps to prevent their networks and systems from being used in a fraudulent manner, including:

- (a) complying with WASPA's published best practices for fraud prevention; and
- (b) ...
- (c) reporting any fraudulent activity identified on their networks or systems to WASPA within a reasonable period of time.

5.4. Members must have honest and fair dealings with their customers.

5.10 Whenever a customer is asked to consent to the terms and conditions of a service, it must not be assumed that the customer consents by default; a customer must take a specific

action to confirm consent. (Example: A consent tick-box must be empty when presented to the customer, and the customer must click on the tick-box to indicate consent.)

5.12 Telephonic support must be provided via a South African telephone number and must function effectively. Customer support must be provided via standard rated numbers, and may not be provided via premium rated numbers. Should the member be unable to provide immediate support, a customer should be provided with the ability to leave a message. Support numbers must not forward to full voice mailboxes.

5.13 The option of speaking to a call centre consultant (or leaving a message for a call centre consultant) should be obvious to the caller and available during business hours.

5.14 Members must have a procedure allowing customers to lodge complaints regarding the services provided. Members must acknowledge receipt of complaints expeditiously, and must respond to any complaints within a reasonable period of time.

15.3 For all subscription and notification services the member must keep a record of the source of the service initiation request, and all subsequent interactions with the customer. Those records must be made available to the customer, on request. Records must be kept for a period of at least three years after the customer terminates the service.

15.9 The confirmation step for any subscription service must require an explicit response from the customer of that service. The confirmation step may not be performed in an automated manner in such a way that the process is hidden from the customer.

15.10 For all subscription services initiated via a web page, there must be an additional specific confirmation step before the customer is billed. This confirmation step must be provided in one of three ways:

(i) The customer's mobile carrier may implement the confirmation step.

(ii) The member can provide the customer with a "confirmation page".

(iii) The member can send a "confirmation message" to the customer. The customer must not be charged for the confirmation message.

15.11 A confirmation page must contain the following information:

(a) the name of the service,

(b) the pricing information,

(c) a customer support number,

(d) instructions for confirming the initiation of the subscription service, and

(e) a link to any applicable terms and conditions.

Additional information about the service may also be included, provided it follows the above information.

15.12 For all subscription services initiated by the sending of an SMS, there must be an additional specific confirmation step before the customer is billed. This confirmation step must be provided in one of two ways:

- (i) The customer's mobile carrier may implement the confirmation step.
- (ii) The member can send a "confirmation message" to the customer. The customer must not be charged for the confirmation message.

15.13 A confirmation message must contain only the following information, in this order:

- (a) the name of the service,
- (b) the pricing information,
- (c) a customer support number,
- (d) instructions for confirming the initiation of the subscription service, and
- (e) (optionally) additional information about the service.

15.14 For all subscription services initiated via USSD, there must be an additional specific confirmation step before the customer is billed. This confirmation step must be provided in one of two ways:

- (i) The customer's mobile carrier may implement the confirmation step.
- (ii) The member can present the customer with a confirmation step via USSD.

15.15 The confirmation step must present the following information, in this order:

- (a) the name of the service,
- (b) the pricing information,
- (c) a customer support number, and
- (d) instructions for confirming the initiation of the subscription service.

15.16 The option to unsubscribe must be listed in the top-level menu of any USSD-initiated subscription service, under the heading "unsubscribe".

15.17 Once a customer has joined a subscription or notification service, an SMS message must immediately be sent to the customer confirming the initiation of the service. The message must be provided in one of two ways:

- (i) The customer's mobile carrier may send the message.
- (ii) The member can send the "welcome message". The customer must not be charged for the welcome message.

15.18 The "welcome message" must be a single message and may not contain any line breaks or carriage returns. The welcome message must contain only the following additional information:

- (a) (optionally) the word "welcome" at the beginning,
- (b) confirmation that the customer has subscribed to a service,
- (c) the name of the service,
- (d) the pricing information,
- (e) a customer support number,
- (f) instructions for terminating the service, and
- (g) (optionally) a link to a WAP landing page or a web page describing the service.

- 15.19 A reminder SMS message must be sent to a subscription or notification service customer within 30 days of the initiation of the service, and at least once per calendar month thereafter. The message must be provided in one of two ways:
- (i) The customer's mobile carrier may send the message.
  - (ii) The member can send the "reminder message". The customer must not be charged for any reminder message.
- 15.19A For subscription or notification services for which the successful billing in one calendar month reaches R500, an additional "reminder message" must be sent to the customer at the point the billing reaches this threshold. The customer must not be charged for this reminder message.
- 15.20 The "reminder message" must be a single message for each service the customer is subscribed to, and must not contain any line breaks or carriage returns. The reminder message must contain only the following additional information:
- (a) (optionally) the word "reminder" at the beginning,
  - (b) the name of the service,
  - (c) the pricing information,
  - (d) an indication that the customer has already reached the threshold (if this is an additional reminder message),
  - (e) a customer support number,
  - (f) instructions for terminating the service, and
  - (g) (optionally) a link to a WAP landing page or a web page describing the service.
- 15.20A Members must not send reminder messages between 21:00 and 07:00.
- 15.22 Any instructions for terminating a subscription or notification service must be clear and easy to understand and should be readily available to customers.
- 15.23 Any instructions for terminating a subscription or notification service must not be phrased in such a manner as to result in the customer inadvertently terminating services offered by any other service provider.
- 15.28 If technically feasible, a recipient must be able to terminate a subscription or notification service by replying 'STOP' to any SMS sent to the customer regarding that service, including the welcome message and any reminder messages.
- 15.29 If a 'STOP' reply could pertain to multiple services, either all services must be terminated upon receipt of the termination request, or the customer must be given a clear choice of services to terminate.
- 15.30 If the words 'END', 'CANCEL', 'UNSUBSCRIBE' or 'QUIT' are used in place of 'STOP' in an opt-out request, the member must honor the unsubscribe request as if the word 'STOP' had been used.

15.31 Once a customer has terminated a service, a message confirming this must be sent to that customer. This message must specify the service the customer has terminated, and the customer must not be charged for this message”.

---

## Decision

31. The onus of proof was on the Complainant, as he was the one alleging in the matter. However, the Complainant had failed to furnish adequate evidence to substantiate many of his claims.
32. The Complainant had stated that he did not knowingly subscribe to any of the Member's subscription service. However, the Member had provided logs with proof of the initial subscription request for each service which came from the Complainant's mobile number. No further evidence was presented to refute the accuracy of the subscription logs provided by the Member.

### Clauses 4.2 and 5.4

33. The Member immediately unsubscribed the Complainant from their service, provided proof of the Complainant's subscription, and refunded the Complainant in full. There is no evidence that the Member acted in an unprofessional or unfair manner, and in fact provided a full refund to the Complainant as an act of good faith. Therefore, the Member is not found in breach of clause 4.2 or clause 5.4 of the Code.

### Clause 4.11

34. On a balance of probabilities, it is highly unlikely that the Complainant subscribed to 31 services, and the discrepancy between the Complainant's claimed lack of subscription and the existence of numerous subscriptions with numerous members suggests a potential issue with Cell C's subscription practices rather than the Member's. The subscriptions in question were made via the SAT Push channel managed by Cell C, and the Member only purchased the delivery from Cell C after the Complainant had subscribed. The double opt-in authorisation that created a subscription took place outside of the Member's systems and the Member was unable to activate and/or charge for the subscription without the token provided after the double opt-in from Cell C. Additionally, the Member did not have control over the system as it is managed entirely by Cell C. Therefore, there is the possibility that there may have been fraudulent activity, but this was prior to the Member's interaction with the Complainant. Furthermore, the Member was in a direct contractual relationship with Cell C but did not have direct control over customer subscriptions or the subscription flow. Therefore, the Member is not found in breach of clause 4.11 of the Code.



Clause 5.10

35. Cell C exclusively managed all aspects of the service's subscriptions flows and marketing materials in line with ICASA regulations. Customers must consent to the Terms and Conditions by clicking on accept on the SAT push message. Furthermore, the customer was provided with a welcome message illustrating the Terms and Conditions of the service. Consequently, the Complainant would have had to take a specific action to accept the service and would have been made aware of the Terms and Conditions. Therefore, the Member is not found in breach of clause 5.10 of the Code.

Clause 5.12

36. The Member sent the Complainant a welcome message when he was subscribed to the service, and this message included their South African customer support number. There is no contrary evidence that the Member failed to provide telephonic support or that the customer support number provided by the Member was not functioning correctly. Consequently, the Member is not in breach of clause 5.12 of the Code.

Clause 5.13 and 5.14

37. All customer queries which relate to the service on Cell C Digital are directed to Cell C customer care. Cell C forwards all the queries, cancellation, and refund requests related to the Member's service to the Member's allocated business email. The Member then investigates the matter and provides feedback to Cell C where applicable. Cell C customer care then resolves the query and provides feedback to the customer where appropriate. Furthermore, the option of speaking to a call center consultant (or leaving a message for a call center consultant) was available to the Complainant and was available during business hours. There was also a procedure allowing the Complainant to lodge complaints regarding the service. Therefore, the Member is not found in breach of clause 5.13 and clause 5.14 of the Code.

Clause 15.3

38. There was no evidence that the Member did not keep records of all subscription and notification services and all subsequent interactions with the customer, nor that these records were not made available to the Complainant by the Member in question, on request. The Complainant requested records from Cell C, but not from the Member, and therefore the Member did not fail to provide the Complainant with such. Furthermore, the Member provided the Complainant with their subscription log files. Consequently, the Member is not found in breach of clause 15.3 of the Code.

Clause 15.9

39. According to the SAT Push data contained in the logs provided by the Member, it was indicated that the Complainant pushed the accept button on Screen 1 (the confirmation page), followed by the accept button on Screen 2 to subscribe to the service. The confirmation step was not automated or done in such a way that the process was hidden from the Complainant. No further evidence was provided to the contrary. Therefore, the Member is not found in breach of clause 15.9 of the Code.

Clauses 15.13, 15.14, 15.15, 15.16

40. SAT Push is an entirely different subscription method to USSD as it is not a USSD bearer, it is initiated by the MNO, and is a pop-up notification on the user's handset. Therefore, the Member is not found in breach of these clauses as they are not applicable to the subscription method which subscription flow was controlled entirely by Cell C. I therefore cannot make a finding in respect of the alleged breach of these clauses of the Code and the complaint in relation to these clauses is dismissed.

Clauses 15.17 and 15.18

41. Cell C sends the customer a confirmation message, confirming their successful subscription to the Member's service and subsequently sends the customer a welcome message. The welcome message includes essential details such as subscription confirmation, service name, pricing information, customer support contact, and instructions for unsubscribing. There was no proof that the Complainant did not receive the confirmation and welcome message as per usual. Consequently, the Member is not found in breach of clauses 15.17 and 15.18 of the Code.

Clauses 15.10, 15.11, 15.12, 15.22, 15.23, 15.28, 15.29, and 15.30

42. It is noteworthy that the Member sent the Complainant a confirmation message once he had subscribed to the service, as well as subsequent reminder messages. In addition, Cell C and the Member provided easily accessible and clear unsubscribe mechanisms for their customers to follow to unsubscribe from the service, and the welcome and reminder messages also included an unsubscribe link.
43. Nonetheless, there was no evidence provided regarding the Member's breaches of these clauses of the Code which deviate from the Member's standard business practices. Furthermore, the service was not initiated by USSD. SAT Push is a pop-up notification that is not a SMS or RCS message and did not fall within the scope of these clauses of the Code. I therefore cannot make a finding in respect of the alleged breach of these clauses of the Code and the complaint in relation to these clauses is dismissed.

Clauses 15.19, 15.19A, 15.20 and 15.20A

44. These clauses are not applicable as the subscriptions were under the allotted amount of R500.00 and the Complainant had already been refunded before this formal complaint was sent for adjudication. Furthermore, reminder messages were sent to the Complainant by the Member as further illustrated by the citing of clause 15.20A of the Code. There was no proof provided that the Member sent reminder messages to the Complainant between 21:00 and 07:00 in breach of clause 15.20A of the Code. Furthermore, there was no proof provided by the Complainant that the reminder messages sent by the Member were not compliant with the Code, as they have the necessary information sent to the customer in the usual course of business. Therefore, the Member is not found in breach of clause 15.19, 15.19A, 15.20 and 15.20A of the Code.

Clause 15.31

45. The Member sent a message to the Complainant confirming that the service had been terminated, and the Complainant was not charged for this message. Therefore, the Member is not found in breach of clause 15.31 of the Code.
46. In conclusion, the complaint is dismissed.

---

**Sanctions**

47. No sanctions are applied.

---

**Matters referred back to WASPA**

48. The complaint is referred to WASPA to deal with:
- 48.1 the concerns raised in relation to Cell C's, and/or any other applicable mobile network operators' control over the services subscription flows and its compliance with the Code;  
and
- 48.2 the Code's amendment to better incorporate and regulate SAT Push pop-up notifications.