More than 14,000 small businesses advocate for free online trade: ‘Choice in eCommerce’ hands over petition to Vice-President Olli Rehn

- Initiative ‘Choice in eCommerce’ hands over petition for choice and innovation in online trade signed by more than 14,000 online sellers to Vice-President of the European Commission Olli Rehn.
- Some 60 per cent of eCommerce sellers have been negatively affected by sales restrictions according to a survey by ‘Choice in eCommerce’.
- Sales restrictions do not only endanger jobs but also harm consumers as they lead to higher prices and less choice in available goods.

Brussels, 17 December 2013. ‘Choice in eCommerce’, the Initiative of Choice and Innovation in Online-Trade, today handed over a petition signed by more than 14,000 online sellers from all over Europe to Olli Rehn, Vice-President of the European Commission at a high-level breakfast event in Brussels on “Restoring competitiveness in Europe - the role of a functioning Digital Single Market for SMEs”. The petition calls on manufacturers and brand owners to refrain from imposing sales restrictions or prohibitions on online traders. Several manufacturers are prohibiting online sellers from freely using the internet, e.g. to sell their goods through online marketplaces.

A recent pan-European and industry-wide survey of more than 2,000 eCommerce sellers launched by ‘Choice in eCommerce’ underlines that many merchants feel threatened by online sales restrictions: according to the results, close to 60 per cent of respondents have been negatively affected by sales restrictions, with some sellers fearing insolvency as a consequence. Moreover, the survey shows that sales prohibitions have a negative effect on trade between EU countries. “The feedback we received was that many sellers feel deprived of a way of reaching their customers and making sales by such unilateral bans. This harms business and restricts entrepreneurial freedom – especially that of small and medium-sized retailers. It also reduces choice and transparency for consumers. We welcome the investigations into suspected restrictions on online trade initiated by the European Commission and call on policy-makers to take effective measures where manufacturers restrict eCommerce unnecessarily”, explained Oliver Prothmann, founder and spokesperson of ‘Choice in eCommerce’.

The European Commission is currently investigating the issue of online sales restrictions. Recently, it initiated unannounced inspections in several Member States at the premises of a number of companies suspected to have put in place restrictions on online sales of consumer electronic products and small domestic appliances. According to the European Commission, these restrictions may lead to higher consumer prices and make products unavailable through certain online sales channels. “Innovation and the entrepreneurial dynamism of small and medium-sized retailers are key to growth in the EU. We therefore need to ensure that the freedom to compete is protected and avoid unnecessary sales restrictions. As the Internet becomes the modern shipping route, restrictions on online trade will warrant more careful review to make sure the European Union is pursuing a path towards economic growth. We need to guarantee freedom to trade online and avoid unnecessary sales restrictions.”, states James Waterworth, Vice-President of the Computer and Communications Industry Association” (CCIA).
Additionally, the issue of sales restrictions is directly linked to jobs and innovation. European online revenue of goods and services reached €311.6 billion in 2012. The number of jobs created directly and indirectly by the B2C eCommerce sector is estimated at 2 million¹. Studies show that future growth in the sector will be led by mobile commerce. Innovation in technology and ways of doing business requires fast-moving and agile online sellers to come up with new ideas. This is at stake if manufacturers succeed in taking complete control of internet sales.

About ‘Choice in eCommerce’

Choice in eCommerce is an eCommerce sellers’ initiative founded by Oliver Prothmann in April 2013. Mr Prothmann, the founder of the Multi-Channel tool chartixx (www.chartixx.com), has been close to the business seller community for several years and has profound experience with doing business via online marketplaces. Over the last two years, Mr Prothmann and many members of the seller community have become increasingly concerned by the negative impact of platform bans, especially on small and medium-sized sellers. As a marketplace expert, he has been discussing with merchants how to act against any kind of discrimination against eCommerce in order to preserve innovation and growth in the sector. Consequently, he launched the ‘Choice in eCommerce’ initiative in April, and later received support from other industry stakeholders including, BVOH (Bundesverband Onlinehandel) and CCIA (Computer and Communications Industry Association).

About ‘CCIA’

CCIA is an international non-profit membership organization representing companies in the computer, Internet, information technology, and telecommunications industries. Together, CCIA’s members employ nearly half a million workers and generate approximately a quarter of a trillion dollars in annual revenue. CCIA promotes open markets, open systems, open networks, and full, fair, and open competition in the computer, telecommunications, and Internet industries.

Petition, Photos and Logos

Media inquiries to

Christoph Blase
Initiative „Choice in eCommerce“
c/o Publilinkator GmbH
Königstraße 2, 14163 Berlin, Germany
eMail press@choice-in-ecommerce.org
Tel +49 30 200898-31
Fax +49 30 200898-99

Jakob Kucharczyk
Computer & Communications Industry Association
6 Rond Point Schuman, 1040 Brussels, Belgium
eMail jkucharczyk@ccianet.org
Tel +32 492 887 943

¹ Ecommerce Europe Report 2013