

UNICOM PRESS RELEASE

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BROWN LEAVES SMALL BUSINESSES FEELING BLUE

Photography available at www.unicomimages.co.uk

The number of small businesses who believe they are better off today under Gordon Brown's leadership than when he was appointed 18 months ago has plummeted by 69.8%.

This is the finding of a survey conducted by Unicom, a specialist in telecommunication services for small business, which this week asked 230 companies calling into its contact centre whether they felt better, worse or indifferent to Brown's leadership since he came to office.

Only 5.2% (12 companies) out of the 230 companies questioned said they felt better, 45.2% (104) said they felt worse, and the remaining 49.6% (114) said they were indifferent to Browns leadership.

Businesses were asked how they anticipated the change in leadership would affect their business; for better, worse or indifferent. The results show a huge decline in confidence for the PM when compared with the same survey conducted by Unicom back in June 2007 when Gordon Brown came to power.

Those who feel better under his leadership have declined from 17.2% in June 07 to 5.2% today – a fall of 69.8% and those who feel worse has increase from 25.7% in June to 45.2% an increase of 75.9%.

"Unicom's customers are a good barometer of small businesses nationally. Gordon Brown's time as Prime minister has been of mixed fortune, but it seems attempts to win back the confidence of small business owners have not been successful," said Chris Earle, Operations Director, Unicom.

"Our survey conducted at the end of November when the government announced a reduction in VAT showed that less than a fifth of business owners felt that the decision to reduce VAT would benefit them, despite the fact that only 26% would be reducing their prices by 2.5%.

“Thanks to a long period of strong economic growth in the UK, a large proportion of small business owners have never had to face the effects of economic slowdown and their confidence during these uncertain times depends heavily on how they judge the competence of the man in charge of the economy.

“At least Unicom’s customers can be reassured they will not receive any nasty surprises on their phone bills during the credit crunch with prices for most customers frozen for up to three years and savings of up to 73% off BT Business Standard rates.”

About Unicom

Unicom, a trading name of Universal Utilities PLC, is a telecommunications service provider specialising in the small business market. It currently provides telecom, broadband and website services to 70,000 small businesses throughout the UK. Unicom has an annual turnover of over £42m, and employs 500 people at its 10 regional offices situated around the UK.

Unicom has attracted its business customers by offering discounts of up to 60% off BT’s prices, at the same time as keeping customers on the BT network. Unicom currently supplies in excess of 450 million minutes of call time to its customers each year. Unicom differentiates itself by offering a high standard of personal customer service, with no premium rate 0845 or 0870 numbers, no recorded messages or menus, and no overseas call centres. Unicom boasts one of the highest customer retention rates in the industry.

This year Unicom launched a new directory enquiry service, 118 777. Based on calls from a BT or Unicom telephone line, 118 777 is 34% cheaper than 118 118, and 30% cheaper than 118 500 and 118 247. Calls from other networks may vary.

Unicom was ranked 26th in the Sunday Times Profit Track 100 listings in April 2006, 89th in the Sunday Times Fast Track 100 index in December 2006 and 96th in the Sunday Times Profit Track 100 listings in April 2007. In September 2007 it achieved a ranking of 95th, and in September 2008 a ranking of 88th, in the Sunday Times Microsoft Tech Track 100 index. In October 2008 Unicom became ISO 9001 certified.

For the year ending April 2008, Unicom reported pre-tax profits of £9.8m on a turnover of £41.6m (with profits up 29.2% and turnover up 12.3% from April 2007). Unicom expects profits to be in excess of £11m on a turnover of more than £45m for this year.