

# The New Zealand Herald

## Harnessing democratic power of web

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It was heartening to see an online petition against the high cost and poor speed of Telecom's fast internet service, Jetstream, on Monday night.

Consumers are fighting back: "We, The Undersigned, request that you (Telecom New Zealand) provide New Zealanders with a more substantial and competitive service in the 'fast' (a.k.a. Broadband) internet connection market."

The call is for Telecom to stop crippling the country with its pathetic broadband offerings and give internet users what they want - a cheaper and faster service with "true" broadband speeds and more reasonable monthly traffic caps.

The [petition](#) got 1000 signatures in the first eight hours and when I last looked there were 2772. Not a bad effort for just three days.

But to make chief executive Theresa Gattung listen, there needs to be a lot more - so don't just sit there, get online and sign. Will it have any effect? Probably not, because when you're a monopoly you don't need to care about what your customers think - but any chief executive reading customer comments like these ought to feel concerned.

PetitionsOnline is just one example of a host of [web petition sites](#).

While not totally reliable, because they mostly rely only on an email address for verification, they are a good weathervane of public opinion.

They're also much more trustworthy than those annoying email petitions that invade your inbox from time to time and travel the web in a neverending loop.

Yes, website petitions do sometimes work. In July, 80,000 people in China signed one objecting to Japanese participation in a contract for the US\$16 billion high-speed railway between Beijing and Shanghai.

And the call for a [National Underwear Day](#) on August 13 was brilliant: "We believe that underwear is under-appreciated, under-mentioned, and that too often it remains under our clothes." Hear, hear.

But, while the ease with which an online petition can be signed makes a groundswell of public opinion more immediate, it's almost too easy. To keep apathy at bay, protest always needs followup.

I'm looking forward to the day when web petition sites combine with [flashmobs](#).

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