

The under-performing British consumer

written by Clive Bates | 30 May 2006



Just back from an excellent break in the Lake District, but had cause to reflect on the reasons for Britain's poor record on economic productivity compared to the US. I'm convinced it's little to do with the rise of China taking all our jobs, the failing biotech revolution, poor R&D spend or any of the other reasons usually offered. No, it is something much closer to home: the underperforming British consumer is to blame.

The basic reason is that Brits too easily put up with rubbish service or products or are too undiscerning to notice that's what they have been offered. The consumer is the problem...

This allows poor service to persist in a service economy and weakens selection pressure between providers, denying businesses offering high standards their just rewards and sheltering businesses that should go under or be taken over.

Many people think the future is in hi-tech - but a much larger part of the economy is based on everyday things you can complain about and so force the pace of productivity growth. For example, only 0.73% of the value added in the UK economy comes from pharmaceuticals, but retailing, hotels, pubs, restaurants and recreation services account for about 12%* - and this is where where complaining really makes a difference. And once the link to our national economic virility is

understood, complaining becomes truly a patriotic duty. As you send back that over-cooked salmon *for the third time*, you really are making Britain more prosperous.

So, it is **vital** that we are all up to speed on this - please see [Art of complaining](#) for guidance on tackling useless restaurants. Visited one in Grasmere while on holiday, [The Swan Hotel](#). Food was okay, but there were no less than ten complainable incidents in the evening. I'm proud to record that only one of these passed unremarked. That was the truly awful muzak - some ghastly collection of romantic bombast, with bloody Pavarotti singing *My Way* and worse. And we did have them turn the volume down.

* For more on the breakdown of the economy see [National Accounts Input Output tables](#) - it's a surprise what goes into our GDP!