



Consumer Alert

Robocalls: Legitimate or a Scam?

The telephone rings and once again, it's that annoying call – a recorded message soliciting a product, service or donation, followed by instructions to “press 1” for more information, or “2” to decline further calls. These are referred to as *robocalls*, and all consumers, regardless if they are on the Do Not Call Registry, receive them.

Generally speaking, robocalls are legal provided that solicitors follow guidelines established under the National Do Not Call Registry (DNCR). According to these guidelines, charities, political organizations and businesses conducting telephone surveys are allowed to make solicitation calls to phone numbers on the DNCR. Calls from businesses are prohibited, however, unless the consumer has given the business permission *in writing*, to call. Companies with whom the consumer has an account, or has received a service or product within the last eighteen months may also solicit over the phone unless the consumer asks to be put on the company's *do not call* list. Because businesses are able to transmit thousands of solicitation robocalls a minute at very little cost, it comes as no surprise that a greater number of businesses are using this method to market their goods. But even legitimate entities, lured by the ability to mass-advertise, may not be screening phone numbers against the Do Not Call Registry. Many robocalls are scams however, and common ones offer debt or mortgage relief, or deals to lower interest rates. One way to spot a robocall scam is to check the number on caller ID. Common scams using robocalls regularly falsify numbers to make it appear to be from a legitimate or known business. Some may only show the numbers 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9; while others may just come up as “unknown”.

Eliminating robocalls is difficult. Having a block placed on these numbers by a phone service may offer some relief, but scam artists deliberately change their numbers to get around this. Screening all calls by allowing them to roll over into voicemail may be more effective. Other suggestions for reducing robocalls can be found on the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) website by clicking on www.ftc.gov/robocalls. The FTC regulates telemarketing calls, and is working hard to shut violators and scam artists down. To learn more about robocalls, to file a complaint, or to sign up with the National No Call Registry, click on www.donotcall.gov or call 1-888-382-1222.

Regarding those instructions about pressing certain numbers to get a live operator or to stop future calls? **Don't press any number.** It is just a ploy to determine if the phone number is active. Punching ANY number will result in more robocalls.

DA – 18th Consumer Protection Line: 720-874-8547