Consumer Alert

How are robocallers getting your phone number?

By: Andrew Rayo, Consumer Education Specialist | January 2, 2024

Does it ever feel like you're getting more robocalls than calls from actual humans? Illegal robocalls aren't just annoying — they're also often scams. But you might be wondering — how did they get my number in the first place?

Sometimes robocalls are random. But sometimes, a company tries to trick you to get your information and sells it. That's what the FTC says happened with lead generation company Response Tree LLC in a settlement announced today. People looking for a quote to refinance their mortgage gave the company their name and number. But instead of giving quotes, Response Tree took people's information and sold it to telemarketers making illegal robocalls about things like fake auto warranties, solar panels, hearing aids, and Social Security disability services.

Here's what to do to avoid and report robocalls and scams:

- **Protect your personal information.** Before you enter your personal information on a website, research it. Search the name of the site plus "complaint," "review," or "scam."
- **Read the fine print**. Some websites might have small disclaimers that say if you click a link or check a box, you're agreeing to having your information collected and sold to other companies.
- **Know your rights.** A robocall trying to sell you something is illegal unless the company has your written permission to call you that way.
- **Report illegal robocalls.** Reporting helps law enforcement and investigators stop illegal robocalls. Report them at DoNotCall.gov.

For more advice on how to stop unwanted calls, check out ftc.gov/calls. Also, learn about Operation Stop Scam Calls, the FTC's latest joint effort with federal and state law enforcement partners in the fight against robocalls.

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Topics: Unwanted Calls, Emails, and Texts, Unwanted Calls

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Nora Goldschlager January 03, 2024

Wish this applied to politicians!

Laura January 30, 2024

Seriously! They call, text and fill up my email with junk! Why does it not include politicians?

Tom Turner January 03, 2024

Very helpful. Thanks!

Nola M January 09, 2024

I have my numbers listed with Do Not Call and have reported callers. But what is not mentioned here is that unscrupulous enterprises do not use the Do Not Call list to update their databases. Also, the numbers that are faked using VOIP are never stopped because they are pretending to be a legitimate caller so we're reporting a legitimate number that was faked. There's no way to win this war. I use RoboKiller now and only numbers in my Contacts ring through. It's been very helpful.

Mary Seal January 03, 2024

Easy for you to say to take their number and report it to the FTC. Most of the numbers they call from are faked anyway, so there's no way to learn the real number they're calling from. I actually got a call one time and the caller ID was my OWN phone number!!!

RustyLite January 08, 2024

I had the same thing happen to me more than once.

CAROLE NIEMAN February 12, 2024

I GET PHONE CALLS ALL THE TIME, IF I DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE NUMBER I BLOCK AND DELETE !!!

Garush January 03, 2024

I seldom answer the phone unless I am expecting a call back from my doctor. I answer to any call then and may get a spam call. The problem is that my doctor may call and cannot get through. Maybe the phone company should be held liable or my telephone bill be reduced by the number of spam calls they allowed.

Mike January 08, 2024

I totally agree

Mike January 08, 2024

I totally agree

Vicki mckim February 09, 2024

I agree too

Beth Bicierro January 08, 2024

It happened to me somebody called my own number when I was a customer with Spectrum since 2006 to 2014. And the customer service charged me for long distance call in which they charged me in my plan $10.99 a month. When I called the Spectrum tel supervisor "she stated in their own system"nothing called me for long distance call". But the guy customer service continuously asking money from me" leads to nothing. Only the money put in their own pocket.

Louise S, Ratliff January 08, 2024

Up to 25 calls a day have been recd, with phone ID active. When phone ID not available, I'm about to scream with the phone ringing. Thank goodness for DO NOT CALL. Next, the intrusions of McAfee on my internet screen. Appears firm is having fun or joking with the repeat intrusions across the screen.

Jean Carpenter January 09, 2024

I get about 25 SPAM calls or unknown callers for every legitimate, wanted call. It has gotten so much worse with my current cell phone provider,
I am switching companies.
It does seem the company should be held responsible for these calls!!

Phyllis Moore January 16, 2024

I have given up answering the phone due to the 80-120 calls I get. They are all from the Marketplace GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIZED insurance. Why is that!?

Deborah Evans January 30, 2024

I love the idea of giving back money for robo calls, my phone bill would be non-existent.

Tony Shallin January 03, 2024

How should we report the 5-10 calls that we get every day. This would take a lot of time. Is the ftc going to to actually do something about this?

FTC Staff January 03, 2024

The FTC continues to bring enforcement actions against robocallers and has already stopped people responsible for billions of robocalls. The FTC also works with other law enforcement agencies and encourages industry efforts to combat robocalls and caller ID spoofing.

Read about recent FTC cases and other robocall-related actions on this FTC page: ftc.gov/news-events/topics/do-not-call-registry/robocalls.

Patrick M Paeth January 04, 2024

Than why is there no improvement?

Kathy may January 08, 2024

The world has become overwhelmingly desperate and lost its morality .

azure January 04, 2024

Is the FTC and a majority of Congress going to do anything EFFECTIVE about all the spam and scam calls? Like requiring every corporation/utliity that markets/sells/provides cell, VOIP or landline services to develop effective call blocking service AND provide it for free? I can remember, years ago, sending the FTC spam faxes I received, sent copies, date, time, etc. Never received any kind of response. I kept getting them until I got rid of the fax number. When my business website got linked to a fake site (used my name), I filed a complaint with the FBI--it's automated, you never speak to a live person. I contacted at least one cloud based entity involved in the mess, requested it investigate, that eventually solved the problem & stopped the calls I got from some people who'd gotten ripped off by the fake site. Never heard from the FBI.
Clearly,dealing w/spam and scam robo& other calls isn't a priority of the federal gov't, at least, not in my experience. Yet I'd really appreciate a majority of Congress taking the problem seriously & providing extra funding just so the FTC and FBI can be much more effective, devote more resources, but also I'd like to see Congress shift the burden & responsibility for solving the problem to the corporations that provide the telecommunications services, penalize them financially enough that they feel it's a problem worth solving.

Pokey January 16, 2024

Well said. We couldn't agree more. We need to get corporations OUT of Congress/senate . We might see an end to carriers doing WHATEVER they want We're all sick of losing sleep from the5am wake up fax spoofs.

Anthony Martin January 09, 2024

The FTC has been at these guys for at least a decade and it is the same old story, the calls decline for several months and then eventually ramp back up. A $10,000,000 fine may sound like a lot of money, that's not being paid by the way, but I think they're making more money than that for the 750bn calls made. How about mandatory jail time of 3-5 years for everyone involved?

comment January 03, 2024

Response Tree took people's information and sold it to telemarketers making illegal robocalls. Was Response Tree punished for theft?

Virginia Gelineau January 03, 2024

Thank you. I really appreciate these tips. At times it feels as if there is no one or no department actually helping to protect us from anything.

Theresa Guthrie January 04, 2024

I agree with you! I reporting phishing emails all the time and nothing seems to be done-I still get the same emails days later! I mark an email spam and Ourlook continues to let the email through. Perhaps Microsoft needs to spend more time protecting their clients instead of worrying about tracking us and making changes to our personal settings causing the loss of production.

Elaine Dell January 03, 2024

Thank you for the information and services

Carlos Morcate January 03, 2024

How about other well known Internet companies? Why are these not made public?

Hoyt Clevenger January 03, 2024

I never got all the robo and human calls on my cell phone until I did what some of the companies and social media asked of me. I gave them my cell number for two-method authentication. So, since they have all obviously shared information, it is necessary to get a text code from them sometimes when you log in. My phone numbers have been on the "do not call" list for 20 years.

M Gregory January 03, 2024

What happens after an unwanted call is reported to you? I have been recording all my unwanted calls since August, yet there's been no change to the number of calls I continue to receive. I seldom see a number more than once, yet many are from the same place/name and have similar numbers, leading me to believe they are the same business, just with multiple numbers.
Am I wasting my time reporting all these calls?
Thank you for any attempt you make to halt these annoying and disruptive calls.

frank o January 03, 2024

I have received calls from my own phone number, so how valid is the numbers on caller ID?

Bill Eaton January 03, 2024

Thank you for this information.

Robin Connelly January 03, 2024

I have found that by lengthening the announcement on our answering machine from 9 seconds to 19 seconds causes most ROBO callers to hang up and go away. The few who do stick around and actually leave a message may be analyzed at a later and more convenient time. Most of those who do leave a message and are not among our friends, relatives, or those with a sincere desire to communicate have their messages deleted.

Lengthening the message on our answering machine pits our machine against the ROBO caller machines.

J King January 03, 2024

Almost every illicit call I receive now has a spoofed number from my area code and exchange. They use a rolling bank of random numbers, once, so blocking doesn't help. My revenge has been a snarky message and I just never answer any of the calls.
Where/how they get ages for the people they seek to scam is a real problem. They target elders far more. Too much information is public access like voting, driver's licenses, etc., in addition to the sellers.

Walter Hutcherson January 24, 2024

I was getting a lot of calls concerning Social Security sign up for services. I would ask why I was being called I was too young, I would tell them my age was 53 or 55, way under the age for Social Security help. You could tell they would just stop and say but, but then they would hang up and not call again. My wife would just keep them on the line for as long as she could, just asking more and more questions. I seen her keep them for at least 20 or 30 minutes just acting hard of hearing and more information. Just funny.

Irma Jean (I ... January 03, 2024

I put my phone numbers on do not call a long time ago. It does not work.

Gloria DeVine January 17, 2024

The "do not call number" must be renew each year. They don't keep your number for years as people think. I finally change my number. It should be quite for a few months.

FTC Staff January 17, 2024

@Gloria,
Your registration will NEVER expire on the National Do Not Call Registry. The FTC will remove your number from the Registry only if it's disconnected and reassigned, or if you ask to remove it.

Jeanne Kerlin January 03, 2024

I'm on the do not call list & I still get calls

CAROL A. OAKES January 03, 2024

I've share this on facebook - they (and Instagram) are guilty of this practice!! Instagram has been posting several obviously guilty 'businesses' selling half-price postage stamps. I was duped into this, but was able to cancel the 'purchase' WITH NO HELP FROM MY CREDIT CARD!!

Brenda Ross January 04, 2024

I myself saw the postage stamp one however I felt it had to be illegal being the post office never has sales...... And.... If you push talk button it disconnects the call. You can't Google them up either. It says no match....

mary ann stock January 03, 2024

I've found being a subscriber to this department of the FTC very helpful -- and will send this report on.

Consumer101 January 03, 2024

Thank you for your efforts on our behalf. Whereas this is an ongoing NUISANCE for the American public, there also EXISTS the never ending junk mail being sent subsidized by the USPS. This delivery material is a nuisance and an additional burden on the USPS system.
Gratefully,Consumer101

Jamie January 04, 2024

I was recently assigned a cell phone for my job. The number had belonged to a woman named "Joyce." I received over 50 calls and texts a day of spam looking for this woman. She is dead; I researched her. I have put the number on the Do Not Call, along with my own personal phone and it does not make a difference. The calls come from spoofed numbers so you cannot trace it; the human spammers hang up when you ask for their number, company name and address. How is this supposed to be stopped if the FTC cannot stop criminals from spoofing numbers?

Patrick M Paeth January 09, 2024

I wish the Do not Call List really work! Seems that when I went on the list, I received more calls. What good is the do not call list when it has no teeth for prosecution. And how do you prosecute cloned numbers? Seems that Cloned numbers are the only numbers that show up on the caller ID. How does the system work when they use cloned numbers? Answer, IT DON'T! Do not call is a waste of time and money!

Kathleen Bryson January 04, 2024

Thank you.

CarloPenall January 04, 2024

1) RoboText or RoboSMS as well qualify as sofisticated scam message-calls and should also be a FTC concern. How shall you proceed?
2) Unlike Gmail, Microsoft Outlook permits approximately 130 Scam x Junk emails per DAY and senior citizens are falling victim. How shall you proceed?

Susan Santiago January 04, 2024

We've been getting "con calls" for almost a year. They are the same people, in India, and start off with a recording that they can cut our bills, which may include (separate calls) AT&T, utility, Comcast, Insurance, and others down 30%. We get them at least 4 to 6 times a day. Then they transfer you to a live person. With all the technology out there today, why can't they be caught and stopped by the FBI, CIA? They're criminals stealing from the American people!!!

Frank E January 04, 2024

I have noticed that I get increased calls after getting a haircut, repeatedly.
They are probably hacked or selling my number which I have to
give or they will not schedule a haircut. That should be illegal.

Ruby Corbin Courey January 04, 2024

What about the phone calls you pick and there is no one there. Seems to happen quite a bit for me. Sometimes I believe people key in the number and wait until the light turns green before they pick up the call. Those, I believe are robocalls with a live person there.

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