

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

Hang Up on Illegal Robocalls

Consumers are getting more and more unsolicited robocalls. As the number of these calls has multiplied, so have the number of complaints reported to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, state and local law enforcement agencies, and consumer organizations across the country.

What's a robocall?

If you answer the phone and hear a recorded message instead of a live person, it's a robocall.

You've probably gotten robocalls about candidates running for office, or charities asking for donations. These robocalls are allowed. But if the recording is a sales message and you haven't given your written permission to get calls from the company on the other end, the call is illegal. In addition to the phone calls being illegal, their pitch most likely is a scam.

What's the reason for the spike in robocalls?

Technology is the answer. Companies are using autodialers that can send out thousands of phone calls every minute for an incredibly low cost. The companies that use this technology don't bother to screen for numbers on the national Do Not Call Registry. If a company doesn't care about obeying the law, you can be sure they're trying to scam you.

What's the FTC doing about robocalls?

The FTC has stopped billions of robocalls, offering everything from fraudulent credit card services and so-called auto warranty protection to home security systems and grant procurement programs, during the last two years. Tracing these calls is a tough job:

- Many different companies use the same or very similar recorded messages.
- Robocallers fake the caller ID information that you see on your phone. That's called caller ID spoofing — and new technology makes it very easy to do. In some cases, the fraudulent telemarketer may want you to think the call is from your bank, or another entity you've done business with. Sometimes, the telephone number may show up as "unknown" or "123456789." Other times, the number is a real one belonging to someone who has no idea his or her number is being misused.
- Robocallers often place the calls through internet technology that hides their location.

What should you do if you get a robocall?

If you get a robocall:

- **Hang up the phone.** Don't press 1 to speak to a live operator and don't press any other number to get your number off the list. If you respond by pressing any number, it will probably just lead to more robocalls.
- **Consider contacting your phone provider** and asking them to block the number, and whether they charge for that service. Remember that telemarketers change Caller ID information easily and often, so it might not be worth paying a fee to block a number that will change.
- **Report your experience to the FTC** online at www.donotcall.gov or by calling 1-888-382-1222.

To learn more about illegal robocalls and what the FTC is doing to stop them, visit ftc.gov/robocalls.

The FTC works to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. Watch a video, *How to File a Complaint*, at ftc.gov/video to learn more. The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.