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## Forum: Unrestrained data broker industry behind those pesky telemarketing calls

By Bill Murray Published 4:47 pm, Wednesday, July 15, 2015

On June 18, the **Federal Communications Commission** ruled that carriers can block unwanted calls. Many of the calls made by scammers and criminals use spoofed caller ID numbers. Many of them also ignore the “do not call” registry operated by the **Federal Trade Commission**.

This practice is illegal and many of the calls target seniors, requesting information or money. It has created an unprecedented number of complaints to both the FTC and FCC. The FTC has attempted to enlist hackers to combat the problems with spoofed telemarketing calls. It has run a contest called Zapping Rachel at Defcon, the annual black hat convention held in Las Vegas. It is named after the telemarketing offer that begins with “Hello, this is Rachel from cardholder services.”

Some seasoned politicians and bureaucrats recognize that our government is reacting to a symptom, not the cause. Almost all of the telemarketing calls, junk mail and spam sent to your email address are a direct result of an unrestrained data broker industry.

Data brokers are companies that buy and sell information about everyone. There are many companies involved in selling your personal information beyond the ones you can find on the Internet peddling it. Some in the industry make respectable appearances on national television news programs. They are the exception; the majority of the players in the industry are more similar to street hustlers with computers and your personal information. Information from some computer and cellular spyware is also sold to and used by data brokers. Some of the online brokers offer no contact information or any way of removing your personal information. Brokers will sell anything about anyone.

Testimony was given to Congress in 2013 that a list of recent rape victims was sold. Over 30 companies currently list the name and home addresses of our police and active military. One broker in Seattle sells a list entitled “Wealthy elderly females who live alone with over 500 thousand dollars in assets.” Another broker sells a list of who

is sick or has a disease or ailment. Data brokers have sold information to criminals, who have used it to commit crimes.

Most of the industry offers phone numbers, home addresses, and email addresses. Some also offer Facebook and Twitter identities along with general demographic information including annual income, marital status and number and ages of children.

Recently television news programs around the country have been reporting on the opt-out possibilities with the brokerage industry. The **Direct Mail Association** is a trade organization for the industry that began in 1971 as a way to add or remove names from mailing lists. It offers an opt-out program for some forms of postal mail and claims to be self-regulatory. But not every company that is a data broker is a member of the organization. My estimate would be around 40 percent of list brokers participate in the organization.

It may take some pressure from the general public to coerce the carriers to adopt blocking the calls of telemarketing. Too bad the same can't be said for junk mail and spam.

**Bill Murray** writes books as Trip Elix and is the author of "A Right to Property – It's your information." He blogs at <http://tripelix.com>. His website <http://itsmyinfo.org> attempts to identify every company that sells personal information. It also identifies other companies that collect information without permission.

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