



NETWORK NEWS

NETWORK NEWS IS A PUBLICATION OF CONSUMER SENTINEL, LAW ENFORCEMENT'S SOURCE FOR CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

ROBO-CALLS.

The FTC has brought three more cases against telemarketers who violated federal law by making hundreds of thousands or even millions of pre-recorded robocalls. The new cases target organizations — **Economic Relief Technologies, 2145183 Ontario**, and **JPM Accelerated Services** — that allegedly used prerecorded messages to sell worthless credit-card interest-rate reduction programs for advance fees of up to \$1,495. At the FTC's request, the court has temporarily stopped the robocalls in each case pending trial. Since September 2009, virtually all robocalls have been illegal unless the people have given written authorization to get them. ■■■

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE.

A federal court has jailed **Zolio Cruz** for ignoring a 2008 court order that required him to stop scamming Spanish-speakers in the U.S. and Puerto Rico into thinking that, for a fee, they could earn substantial income working at home stuffing envelopes. Instead, buyers got a pamphlet explaining how to place their own misleading ads to sell the same pamphlet. ■■■

SAFE WEB.

The FTC has issued a **report** that details how the Commission has used the Safe Web Act's expanded authority to share information and work with foreign law enforcement agencies to protect consumers from cross-border fraud. One example: the FTC's partnership with the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs to shut down a vast international spam network that emailed U.S. and foreign consumers to peddle bogus products. The FTC got a \$15.15 million default judgment against the principal operator of the network. The report emphasizes that this kind of cross-border cooperation is critical to the FTC's ability to combat global scams. ■■■

PAYBACK.

As a result of a December 2008 settlement with **Suntasia Marketing**, the FTC has mailed more than 356,000 checks — totaling approximately \$14 million — to reimburse people who were victimized by a fraudulent telemarketing scheme operated by the company. According to the FTC, from 1999 to 2007, Suntasia deceptively marketed a series of memberships in buyers' and travel clubs to nearly a million people nationwide. ■■■

STAT-O-SPHERE

With the authority granted by the SAFE WEB Act, the FTC has shared information in response to 38 requests from 14 foreign law enforcement agencies — resulting in over 17 enforcement actions by U.S. and foreign authorities. The FTC has issued **23** civil investigative demands on behalf of **6** foreign agencies in **11** investigations.

Safe Web Act Report

DO NOT CALL

The FTC has three new reports about the Do Not Call Registry:

FY09 DATA BOOK. Contains FY 2009 complaint data — by month, complaint type, population, area code and more, as well as general information about the Registry.

BIENNIAL. Focuses on the use of the Registry in FY09: more than 191 million registrations are active, including more than 18 million new phone numbers; nearly 45,000 sellers, telemarketers, and others paid a total of \$15 million in access fees; and the new procedure for tracking disconnected and reassigned phone numbers.

ENFORCEMENT. Details efforts since 2003: the FTC and the FCC have collected more than \$22 million in penalties from Registry violators. The agencies have prohibited — and the FTC has brought 18 actions stopping — “robocalls,” the practice of delivering a pre-recorded message instead of connecting someone to a live representative when they answer the call. ■■■

FRAUD FOR ‘EM.

The FTC has released a report following up on its 2009 Fraud Forum where academics, consumer advocates, industry representatives, and state and federal law enforcers discussed more effective ways to protect people from fraud and scams. Among the report’s recommendations: extending the FTC’s outreach to under-served communities, referring people who file complaints to appropriate social services organizations, expanding the number of contributors to the FTC’s Consumer Sentinel database, and making additional fraud data accessible to law enforcers. ■■■

NEW MEMBERS

A total of 19 agencies have joined the Consumer Sentinel Network since December 2009, including 14 sheriff and police departments. Seven organizations in Minnesota signed up during the same time. ■■■

COMMUNITY BEAT.

In the wake of the devastation caused by the earthquake in Haiti, many people have read, heard and seen the urgent appeals for aid. The FTC suggests that the best way to provide immediate help is to donate money directly to established national relief organizations that have the experience and means to deliver aid.

Encourage those who want to give to donate to organizations they’ve given to before, and to be skeptical of charities that seems to spring up overnight. They may be well-meaning, but they lack the infrastructure to provide assistance. One more tip: Some phony charities use names that sound or look like those of respected, legitimate organizations in an effort to confuse well-meaning and generous people.

Check out any charities before you donate. Contact the Better Business Bureau’s Wise Giving Alliance at www.give.org, and read the **FTC’s tips** on avoiding charity fraud, as well. ■■■

NATIONAL CONSUMER PROTECTION WEEK

The 12th Annual NCPW — March 7-13 — is an initiative to encourage people to learn about and take full advantage of their rights in the marketplace, and to highlight the resources that so many law enforcement agencies and advocacy organizations have available. This year’s theme — Dollars & Sense: Rated “A” for All Ages — highlights the importance of using good sense at every stage of life, from grade school to retirement. **Download** content, **order** free print materials, **grab** web buttons, and check out the NCPW **blog**. ■■■

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, OR KUDOS

Got a success story? Should we profile your agency? Want to share an article idea? Email sentinel@ftc.gov.

STOCK UP!

Order free FTC materials at ftc.gov/bulkorder. ■■■