

Battle against robocalls, illegal number spoofing reaching boiling point with irritated consumers

By Sarah Krouse
for **The Wall Street Journal**

Americans' growing battle against illegal robocallers has reached a boiling point. Victims of one form of phone-related malfeasance are now lasting out at those impacted by a different form of it.

Here's an example. Jeffery Lewis Knapp, an Arizona retiree, saves the four to six telephone numbers his caller ID logs each day. At night he seeks his revenge, calling back those he thinks are illegal robocallers, and saying to those who answer "How can I help you?"

The problem with the approach is that he sometimes calls people who didn't, in fact, call him first. Rather, the individuals that he calls are themselves victims of a phone-related crime called malicious number spoofing, where callers falsify their number to disguise their identities.

Mr. Knapp reports that those he calls back are often unaware that their number has been spoofed by scammers.

Hiya, one of many mobile phone applications with call blocking features, estimates that there were 8 billion robocalls to U.S. cellphones in the final quarter of 2018, up substantially from about 5 billion in the first quarter.

Many illegal robocalls use number spoofing to obscure their identities. The practice allows bad actors to display to recipients numbers that aren't actually the ones that they are calling from.

Meir Cohen, chief executive officer of TelTech Systems Inc. which sells a call blocking app called RoboKiller, said phone numbers are often misused when robocallers deliberately generate numbers that appear to be in the same area code as the recipient. This is meant to lead victims to believe the call is legitimate and answer their phone.

Web-based calling technology makes it easy for robocallers to display a randomly generated number. Phone numbers spoofed may belong to a real person or business that is unaware that the

number is being used in that way.

Unfortunately, there's no fail-safe way for consumers to keep their numbers from being spoofed. Even changing numbers won't guarantee that the problem will go away.

The Federal Communications Commission has said that combating illegal robocalls and malicious phone number spoofing is a top consumer protection priority and that consumers and businesses impacted by the problem can file a complaint with the agency or record a voicemail message that says they don't

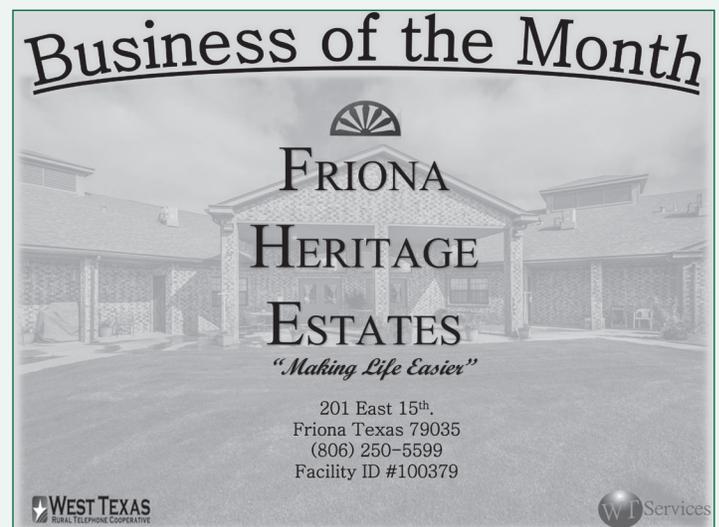
make marketing calls. But clamping down on spoofing is difficult.

A lot of spoofing can happen overseas and it can be difficult to trace the origins of the call.

There are also legitimate uses of spoofing, making an outright ban on such technology a problem.

Doctors who call patients back from their cellphone may want to spoof an office number to avoid giving out personal contact information. A domestic violence shelter, where privacy is paramount, may similarly wish **(See SPOOFED, Page 2)**

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Spoofer consumers are getting fed-up...from Page 1

to disguise its number when it calls the home of a client.

The FCC has handed out hefty penalties to bad actors and allowed carriers to block calls from fake area codes, as well as numbers that aren't used for outbound calls.

The FCC proposed a \$37.5 million fine against a Tucson company for maliciously spoofing numbers in millions of telemarketing calls over 14 months starting in 2016. In that case at least one person in Arizona received more than five calls a day from people complaining that she had called them when in fact the company had used her number.

The telecommunications industry is working on a call certifying protocol known as STIR and guidance for implementing it in coming years. Under that system, carriers on the originating end of a phone call would check to make sure that the caller has the right to use a given number while the carrier on the receiving end would certify that nothing had changed as the call was routed and received.

Consumers will eventually see an indicator on their phone signaling whether a call has been verified. That verification would not occur if a bad actor spoofed a number.

Efforts to stop phone

number abuse such as spoofing have had limited impact, with some victims of angry calls fearful for their safety in taking heat from strangers.

Angela Santiago changed her phone number of 20 years after receiving an angry call from a woman accusing her of robocalling. After doing

so, however, the same thing happened with her new number.

"It's a violation and a huge inconvenience," Ms. Santiago said.

Texans can now register for national Do Not Call List

National Do Not Call Registry

Consumers in Texas can now register for the National Do Not Call List by visiting www.donotcall.gov or by calling toll-free at **1-888-382-1222** (TTY 1-866-290-4236).

Texas No Call Lists

Texans may register a telephone number with either the Public Utility Commission-sponsored "Do Not Call" List or "Electric No-Call List." By placing your name, address, and telephone number on a list, you identify yourself as someone who does not want to receive telemarketing calls, thus limiting telephone solicitations, including text, graphic, and image messages from all telemarketers operating in Texas.

Statewide Do Not Call List

The Statewide "Do Not Call" List is for registering any residential or wireless phone number and applies to any Texas telephone marketer, including Retail Electric Providers and telemarketers calling on their behalf. Business numbers are not eligible for this list. There is a registration charge of \$2.25 for each phone number included on this list unless you register online.

Electric No Call List

The Electric No Call List is for registering under the Statewide Do Not Call List. There is no charge for adding phone numbers to this list.

How do I Sign Up?

At www.TexasNoCall.com for instant registration. Use the Internet for an easy, automated expedited registration. The site is available 24/7/365. To register by mail use the printable registration form. Write Texas No Call, 100 Summer Street Suite 800, Boston, MA 02110. You may register your mobile or wireless phone number for the statewide "Do Not Call List."

Will putting my name on the No-Call list stop all telemarketing calls?

No, but it will help limit the number of telemarketing calls that you receive. The intent of the law is to stop unwanted calls to customers from companies that the customer does not have an existing business relationship with. House Bill 143 further defines a call to include the transmission of a text or graphic message or image to a mobile telephone number. However, customers with existing business relationships may continue to receive calls from these companies.

In addition, customers with prior business relationships may continue to receive calls from businesses with which they did business for one year after the relationship was terminated. Also, if a customer requests contact with a company, the company may respond to that request. Non-profit and political organizations are exempt from complying with the list.

Charges and duration

There is no charge to register your residential or wireless number on the statewide Do Not Call list. Your number(s) will remain on the list for three years.

How do I file a complaint?

First, if you have contact information, contact the business. If the business does not resolve the problem directly, you can file a complaint with the Public Utility Commission, the Office of the Attorney General, the Better Business Bureau in your area, or small claims court. Contact the Customer Protection Division of the Public Utility Commission of Texas by calling toll-free **1-888-782-8477** (TTY 1-800-735-2988, by emailing customer@puc.texas.gov or completing the Online Complaint form.