

# Protecting yourself from nuisance calls and messages

For many of us nuisance calls are an irritating and annoying interruption to our daily lives. But for some vulnerable people they can also cause anxiety and distress. This guide provides some tips on how to reduce the number of nuisance calls and advice about what to do when you receive them.



## How to reduce nuisance calls

### 1. Ways to block different types of calls

There are various products and services that can help block nuisance calls, although you may need to pay to use them. These may block particular types of call (such as international calls, or calls where the number has been withheld) or a selected list of around 10 numbers. You need to ensure that you are able block the calls you want to block and nothing else. To find out more you can:

- **Talk to your phone provider about the services they offer.** Different providers have different charges and so you may wish to shop around for the best deal. For more information on some of these services and charges that may apply take a look at <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/phone/tackling-nuisance-calls-and-messages/phone-company-services-that-can-help-tackle-nuisance-calls/>
- **Consider a call blocker.** These are devices which you can attach to your phone, or which may already be part of a phone. These can be used to block different types of call. Some ask the caller to give their name before the call is put through to you. For more information on call blocking devices you may wish to look at advice by Which? available here: <http://blogs.which.co.uk/technology/phones-3/call-blocking-devices-everything-you-need-to-know/>. Ofcom has no affiliation with Which? and the provision of this link should not be taken as an endorsement of its findings.

Before you decide on, activate or install these products, carefully read the instructions to make sure they will not block calls that you want to receive.

## 2. Register with the Telephone Preference Service for free



The Telephone Preference Service (TPS) allows consumers to opt out of receiving any unsolicited telesales calls. You can register your phone number - either landline or mobile – online at <http://www.tpsonline.org.uk> or by phoning 0845 070 0707. It's free to register and takes up to 28 days to come into effect.

It is a legal requirement that telemarketers do not call a number registered to the TPS. However, registering with the TPS won't stop all unwanted calls. Firms may still call you if you've previously given them permission to contact you by phone. To stop these calls, contact the firm in question (preferably in writing) and ask them not to call you for marketing purposes. Firms will also still be allowed to call you for genuine market research purposes, provided the call does not include any marketing or collect data for use in future marketing calls. Some firms do break the rules, although the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is working hard to stop this. Complaining about such firms can help the ICO take action (see point 7 below).

Although there are some commercial companies that offer similar services for reducing nuisance calls (and may charge for this), the TPS is the only register that organisations are legally obliged to check against before making live telesales calls. TPS and Ofcom are not affiliated with any of these commercial organisations. If you choose to explore options provided by these commercial companies it is advisable to make sure you understand exactly what services they are offering you and any applicable charges.



## 3. Look carefully at the marketing “opt-in” or “opt-out box”

Be careful who you give your contact details to. When you need to provide them, for example when you buy something, enter a competition, or use a price comparison website, make sure you look carefully at the marketing “opt-in” or “opt-out” boxes. Sometimes these boxes can be buried in the small print and are often found near the part where a signature is required.

An “opt-in” box generally refers to a box which, if ticked, confirms that you are agreeing to be contacted by the company or other companies (known as “third parties” or “trusted parties”).

With an “opt-out” box you are agreeing to be contacted, unless you tick the box. Look out for phrases such as “tick here to opt-out” or, if you're online, pop up boxes inviting you to receive a company's newsletter.

### Opt-in example:

Tick if you would like to receive information about our products and any special offers by post  /by email  /by telephone  /by text message  /by recorded call

### Opt-out example:

By submitting this registration form, you indicate your consent to receiving email marketing messages from us. If you do not want to receive such messages, tick here:

## 4. Consider going ex-directory.

Some businesses use directory services to build their sales lists. Going ex-directory may help prevent these businesses from getting your phone number through this route.





## What to do when you receive nuisance calls and messages

### 5. Consider screening your calls

You could also screen your calls by using a phone that displays the number of the caller -known as “Caller ID” or “Calling Line Identity” (CLI), or using an answer machine or voicemail. This will help you choose whether to answer the call or to call the person back. Please note that some providers charge for displaying the caller’s phone number. Click [here](#) for more information about this.

You should treat all calls from people you do not know with caution because sometimes a telephone number which appears on your screen may not be the real number that the Caller is calling from.

### 6. Ask for the caller’s details

When you receive a nuisance call, of course you can just put the phone down. Many people do this. But if you choose to talk to the caller, they must give you the name of the organisation and, if you ask for it, its address or a free telephone number. You can use this information to notify the organisation that you no longer wish to receive sales calls.

If you’re unsure whether you want the product or service that is being promoted and are being put under pressure on the phone, you may want to end the call. You can then give yourself time to consider further and shop around.

### 7. Don’t give out your personal details

Be careful about who you give your personal details to, including when you answer the phone, particularly if the caller asks you to carry out an action which might have financial consequences. Avoid answering the phone by saying your telephone number and name as a greeting and avoid including these details on your answerphone or voicemail.

Before you start a conversation, make sure the caller gives you their details first. This will help you to check that they’re calling from a credible place (for example, from your electricity supplier).

Be aware that sometimes the caller may not give you the correct detail such as the correct “Caller ID” or “Calling Line Identity” (CLI).

If someone rings you asking for personal financial information, don’t provide it. Instead, hang up and call the phone number on your account statement, in the phone book, or on the company’s or government department’s website to check whether the call was genuine. Wait at least five minutes before making the call – this ensures the line has cleared and you’re not still speaking to the fraudster or an accomplice.



### 8. If you receive an unwanted call you can make a complaint

Complaints information helps regulators such as the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and Ofcom take targeted action against those making calls unlawfully.

When you receive a nuisance call, make a brief note of the call if you can, including the date, time, name of the firm (if it’s known) and also the number you were called from (even if it doesn’t look like a valid phone number). Then make a complaint to the relevant organisation or regulator. But, even if you don’t have all the information available, you can still make a complaint. For details on who to complain to and how to do it, please see <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/tell-us/telecoms/privacy/>.



## 8. If you receive an automated marketing call

These calls may ask you to press a number to speak to a live agent. You can of course choose to put the phone down. However, if you choose to speak to someone you will not be charged for the call.

If a phone number was provided with the call, our advice would be to refrain from calling it, unless you are familiar with the firm trying to contact you. If you do decide to call the number the call charges will depend on several factors, such as the type of number called and whether you call from your landline or mobile phone, as set out in our guide on call costs, available at <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/files/2010/01/numbering.pdf>.

## 9. If you receive spam texts....

If they're from a sender you are familiar with, or from a shortcode (a shortcode is usually 5 digits long but can be up to 8), reply 'STOP' to the telephone number or short code shown in the text message. You should not be charged for this. This will inform the sender that you no longer wish to receive their text messages.

However, if the text message is from an unknown sender, or from an organisation you are not familiar with, we recommend you don't reply. Responding will confirm that your number is active and might actually result in you receiving more messages, or even voice calls.

Instead, report the spam text to your network operator. **Simply forward the text to 7726.** An easy way to remember '7726' is that they are the numbers on your telephone keypad that spell out the word 'SPAM'.

You may get an automated response thanking you for the report and giving you further instructions if needed, such as forwarding on the number that the spam text message was sent from. You will not be charged for forwarding spam texts to 7726.

If you are unhappy about receiving such texts or continue to receive them after asking the sender to stop, you should complain to the ICO. You can complain to the ICO by phone 0303 123 1113 or online <https://www.snapsurveys.com/swh/surveylogin.asp?k=138312369469>



These tips are intended to help you reduce and deal with nuisance calls and messages. Please remember that sometimes your existing service providers may need to get in touch with you for important non-marketing reasons. For example, your utility provider may need to report a fault or your bank might need to contact you about suspected fraudulent activity on your account. You should keep your main service providers updated with any changes to your contact details, such as a change of phone number, as well as how you prefer to be contacted, such as over the phone, by text, by email or by post. This will help to ensure that you do receive any important calls and messages. If you do not wish to receive marketing calls from existing service providers, let them know.