FINES

Protect Your Contact Centre from Nuisance Calls Complaints

Understanding the Six Common Reasons why People Lodge a Complaint

Hostcomm
Business VoIP Solutions

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About the Author

Chris Key, CEO, Hostcomm

Chris is founder and Managing Director of hosted telephony provider Hostcomm. The business was one of the first of its kind in the UK and today offers an unrivalled VoIP network infrastructure. Chris's 20 years' experience in voice and data networking and pursuit of innovative new technologies ensure Hostcomm's services are stable, cost-effective and continuously evolving.

Are YOU making unintended nuisance calls?

When you're running a contact centre, striving to deliver the best possible service to your customers, it's tempting to think that nuisance call regulations don't apply to you.

But the reality is they apply to everyone.

Whatever your intentions when you configure your dialler and begin a new campaign, all customers see is the outcome. Perhaps they repeatedly receive silent calls. Or they struggle to get in contact with you to be removed from your lists. Maybe they are called despite being on the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) database.

To you, they're small mistakes and inefficiencies. To your customers, they're signs of nuisance calling. And that leads to complaints, leading to investigations, fines, and irreversible damage to your business.

There are **six key reasons** that people complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Read on to find out what they are – and what you can do to avoid them.

Repeated, answered or unanswered calls

A dialler aims to make contact with every lead before it goes cold. To support this, automated lead recycling makes repeated attempts at the same numbers if a positive outcome isn't achieved on the first try.

But if automated lead recycling is poorly configured, customers can end up receiving huge quantities of calls in a short space of time. This is one of the leading reasons that customers lodge complaints with the ICO.
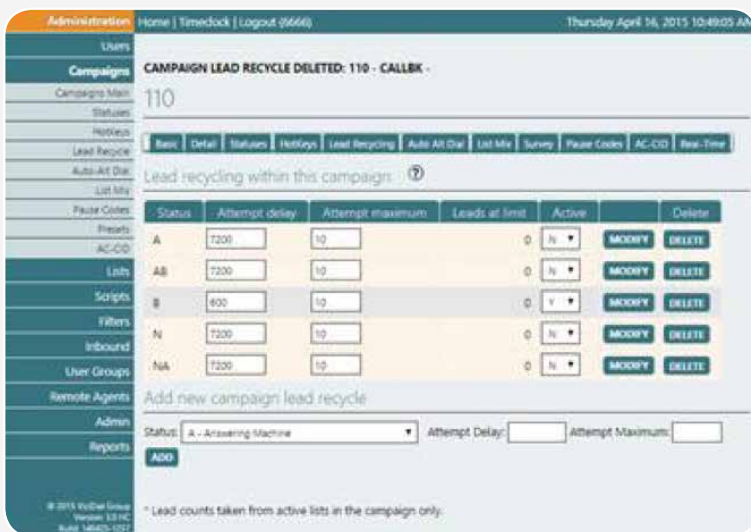
Configure lead recycling to leave a suitable period of time between call attempts, and expire numbers that have already been called several times.

Recommendations

To avoid making repeated answered or unanswered calls:

✓ Configure lead recycling using the campaign settings.

✓ Auto-expire phone numbers that reach a maximum call limit.

✓ Monitor call connect rates to spot stale data and where your calls are being avoided.

Multiple silent calls

On some occasions, customers answer calls only to be greeted with silence. This is a frustrating experience if it happens just once – and if it happens more than once, a complaint is almost certain.

There are two typical causes of silent calls, which are dropped or abandoned before the customer speaks to an agent.

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Answering machine detection (AMD) false positives

Answer Machine Detection (AMD) systems are designed to detect when calls are answered by machines, and disconnect those calls rather than send them to an agent. This is a huge time saver in the contact centre environment.

However, AMD systems are not 100% accurate and even the best AMD systems need careful configuration. When improperly configured, a system will recognise a real human response as a machine, and disconnect the call.

No free agents to take calls

To minimise agent downtime between calls, a dialler can work in 'ratio mode'. This is where several calls are made for each agent,
on the assumption that they will not all be answered.

For example, a 2:1 ratio sees two calls made for each available agent.

However, this inevitably leads to dropped calls. While these are permitted by Ofcom, they must be kept under 3%.

Set a ratio that is appropriate for your number of agents, and enforce a drop call limit in your dialler to avoid making multiple silent calls.

Recommendations

To avoid making repeated answered or unanswered calls:

✔ Use 1:1 ratio automated dialling to avoid making more calls than the number of agents you have available.

✔ Stop using Answer Machine Detection (AMD), where false positives are inevitable.

✔ Set a dropped call limit at 3%, in line with Ofcom regulations. Once this threshold is met, the dialler can alter its behaviour to avoid dropping more calls.

Silent calls with no recorded message

The nature of outbound calling leads to dropped calls, and Ofcom regulations allow for this occurrence. But you remain obliged to identify yourself to the people you are calling.

Within 2 seconds, your dialler must connect customers to a recorded message containing:

➕ **The name of the caller**

➕ **A geographic contact number**
(as opposed to a premium rate number that generates revenue)

A large number of complains are made to the ICO from customers who received silent calls from unidentified companies.

Your dialler should make it easy to configure appropriate action (such as a recorded message) that occurs whenever calls are dropped.

Recommendations

To avoid complaints as a result of silent calls with no recorded message:

✔ Configure the 'drop call action' on your dialler to play a recorded message when calls are dropped

✔ Be sure to include your company name and a geographic contact number in the message

Cold calls to TPS -registered numbers

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The Telephone Preference Service (TPS) database allows consumers to opt-out of unsolicited marketing and sales calls. Contact centres are therefore obliged to check all data against this database, and are not permitted to call listed numbers.

Customers who have already registered with the TPS are likely to make a complaint if your agents attempt to call them.

The solution is simple – **don't call numbers registered with the TPS.**

However, this is largely in the hands of the company that provides your data lists. It is important to verify that all data is filtered against the TPS database before using it as part of a campaign.

Recommendations

To avoid making cold calls to TPS-registered numbers:

✔ **Check that any data you purchase is from a reputable source and filtered against the TPS database.**

Calls after the recipient has asked to be removed

When somebody your agents call asks to be removed from your list, this must be taken very seriously. Continuing to call the number is a serious breach of Ofcom regulations, and complaints about this type of behaviour are taken very seriously.

Most contact centres are happy to comply with requests to be removed. This involves dispositioning the call as 'DO NOT CALL', or DNC. Once the number is marked in this way, the dialler will not call it again. However, it's easy to start working with a new data list that contains the same number. This is the most common cause of repeated calls after verbal requests for removal.

Using multiple DNC lists tied to your campaign, you can effectively filter out the numbers of people who have asked not to be called.

You can easily export numbers marked as DNC for use in subsequent campaigns, or manually add numbers to your DNC list.

Recommendations

To avoid complaints from people who have asked not to be called:

✔ Ensure that Do Not Contact (DNC) filtering is set up on your dialler

✔ Make sure that agents understand the importance of dispositioning these calls appropriately

Calls made after 21:00hrs

The final cause for customer complaints to the ICO is a simple one – few people like to receive unsolicited calls late at night.

While everybody has a different idea of how late is too late, Ofcom regulations state that no unsolicited calling can take place after 21:00.

Latest Server Time: 2100   4 digits only ⑦

Configure your dialler to stop making calls by 21:00 to avoid potentially serious complaints.

Recommendations

To avoid complaints regarding calls made too late at night:

✔ **Set up a last call time in your dialler's campaign settings**

Ofcom regulations changes from April 2015

With New Regulations, Every Complaint Matters

Unsolicited calls have a tendency to frustrate people, but there's a significant difference between an unwelcome call and a nuisance call.

Ofcom regulations aren't designed to prevent contact centres from doing business, but they help establish standards that are fair to consumers.

Historically, complaints only led to fines for contact centres if the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) could prove 'substantial damage' or 'substantial distress' was caused. But since April 2015, these requirements have been removed.

As a result, the ICO has more power than ever to investigate contact centres. Rather than a clear definition of damage or distress, the ICO has more discretionary power to decide which calls count as true nuisance calls.

In short, it's more important than ever to take your obligations seriously – and to make sure your dialler is supporting you in remaining compliant.

You can find out more about Ofcom regulations and stay up to date at:

Ofcom.org.uk
Ofcom's main website, with detailed information for stakeholders and updates on the latest consultations

ICO.org.uk
The Information Commissioner's Office website, with easy to understand guides to the latest legislation.

How Hostcomm helps you avoid complaints

Using an automated dialler has its advantages and disadvantages. While you can significantly increase agent productivity, eliminate downtime, and achieve better results from your campaigns, you also need to stay in control of your calling – and on the right side of the legislation.

Remember, consumers tend to complain because of:

1. Repeated answered or unanswered calls
2. Multiple silent calls
3. Silent calls with no recorded message
4. Cold calls to TPS-registered numbers
5. Calls after the recipient has asked to be remove
6. Calls made after 21:00

A dialler can directly cause several of those issues, particularly dropped or silent calls. But these issues are easily remedied with intelligent dialler configuration.

At Hostcomm we support you with:

➕ **Dialler training:** Before your dialler goes live, we'll help you make sense of Ofcom regulations and demonstrate the relevant features of your dialler.

➕ **Ofcom-compliant setup:** Your dialler is pre-configured to stay within Ofcom guidelines, enabling you to get started as soon as possible.

➕ **Education and guidance:** Including PDF hand-outs covering Ofcom regulations in detail.

➕ **Regular monitoring:** To make sure your campaigns remain compliant and alert you if changes to your configuration need to be made.

➕ **Videos:** We always record helpful training videos. This one shows how to configure an Ofcom compliant campaign.

**So there's no need to worry about unexpected complaints or fines.
Just set up your dialler and start using it with confidence.**

Discover
Hostcomm services

Visit our website:

www.hostcomm.co.uk

Talk to us... we are here to help

If you have any questions or require further information, please get in touch:

📞 **0808 168 4400 / 0203 372 8420**

✉️ **sales@hostcomm.co.uk**

🖱️ **www.hostcomm.co.uk**

in **linkedin.com/company/hostcomm-ltd**

🐦 **twitter.com/Hostcomm**

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