



Hitting back at Cold Callers by using a 0871 number

We are pleased to offer comment on the widely covered story of Lee Beaumont who got a 0871 telephone number to make money out of receiving cold calls.

We note that this is something which has worked out well for a particular individual and celebrate his joy and sense of victory. There are however some serious issues raised by this story:

- We understand that most of the calls on this number would have been from those to whom it was offered - these are not cold calls.
- It is suggested that some of those to whom the number was provided in good faith have passed / sold it on to wholly unrelated businesses - i.e. PPI claims companies. If that can be clearly shown, then this is a very serious matter.
- 0871 numbers fall within the category of being used for the provision of "Premium Rate Services" and are thereby subject to strict regulation. As Mr Beaumont does not even pretend to be offering a "Premium Rate Service", there must be serious questions about the ease with which he was apparently able to acquire it. This begs the question about businesses who are misusing these numbers.
- We believe that the problem of Nuisance Telephone Calls has to be addressed nearer the source - i.e by those who actually regulate the businesses that make (or initiate) the calls or who use the direct marketing information obtained from them. The existing structure of control has clearly failed - driving Mr Beaumont and others to take unusual measures, out of anger and frustration. We will be presenting evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee inquiry into this topic in parliament next Tuesday morning.
- Some people acquire expensive "revenue sharing" numbers as a means of retaliation against companies that use them. More commonly these are the numbers in the 084 range, which are not subject to the control associated with "Premium Rate Services". Measures to prohibit use of these numbers for customer enquiries and complaints (in many cases) will come into effect next year. Ofcom is about to introduce new regulations which will discourage use of 084/087 numbers by requiring the benefit gained by the user to be clearly declared.

Mr Beaumont is a self-employed businessman working from home, who goes to considerable lengths to ensure compliance with the regulations that apply to this number. He is also able, indeed keen, to spend a lot of time chatting on the phone to callers, so as to earn money. At 7p per minute = £4.20 per hour, this is less than the National Minimum Wage for adults.

If this provides a little cash and a sense of satisfaction to someone who understands exactly what he is doing, then it is hard, indeed not right, to criticise. It is not clear as to how many other people are in exactly the same situation.

The fair telecoms campaign opposes misuse of 084/087/09 numbers and would not promote listening to otherwise unwanted telephone calls as an occupation.

If the threat of rarely applied financial penalties, or the incurring of high call charges fails to discourage the making of Nuisance Calls, then proper focussed regulatory action must be taken - by the appropriate regulator.

