



“Wangiri “ Directory Enquiries Rip-off scam - reported by The Sun 7 October 2017

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SCANDAL OF PUNTERS DUPED INTO CALLING PREMIUM RATE LINES

PHONE scams that trick people into calling premium-rate directory enquiries numbers are being investigated.

Victims such as Richard Wickham, from Cheltenham, said they were duped into calling costly 118 lines when they returned missed calls from landline numbers.

Richard was in the middle of selling his home when he got a missed call in February.

The 58-year-old retired civil servant rang back, thinking someone must have called about his house.

Instead he heard a recorded message telling him the line was out of service and that he should contact directory enquiries.

He claims he was then transferred to 118 004 where he immediately explained the mistake and hung up.

But he was charged more than £16 for the call when his phone bill came through.

The 118 004 number is owned by premium phoneline operator Telecom2, which also owns the landline number that left a missed call on Richard's phone.

'A scam to exploit the vulnerable'

Richard said: "It's a scam - I was charged £16.09 for a call I didn't make.

"It clicked through and the next thing I heard was a lady saying, 'Hello, directory enquiries, what number do you require?'

"I just apologised and said I didn't even know who had called me so couldn't ask for a number. Then I hung up.

"I didn't think about it at the time and there was nothing on my next bill. But in the following bill I was charged."

A spokesman for BT insisted Richard was not transferred and must have dialled the number after hearing the recorded message - although he is adamant he was put through automatically.

Either way, he was charged for connecting to a directory enquiries line he never meant to call.

The 118 004 number was Britain's most expensive directory enquiries line, charging £15.98 per call, then £7.99 a minute. It was taken offline at the end of March after headlines about people running up huge phone bills without realising.

The Phone-paid Services Authority (PSA), which regulates premium phonelines, has launched

Hello, how can I direct your call?



AVOIDING RIP-OFFS

- 1 If you call a number and hear a recorded message telling you to phone another one, listen to the end - it should say how much it will cost.
2 When calling directory enquiries, say no when you are asked if you would like the operator to put you through to the number you are looking for. If they put you through, you get charged a premium rate for every minute you are on the phone. Instead, take down the number then hang up and dial it.
3 Numbers can often be found for free by searching online. Or call 0800 118 3733, a directory enquiries service that is free from landlines if you listen to an advert first.
4 Report to Ofcom any occasions where you receive a missed call and ring back to hear a recorded message telling you to call a 118 number. The practice is banned.



It is banned by Ofcom and offenders could be fined up to £2million - but the watchdog is yet to punish any firm for it.

Campaign group Fairer Telecoms said it was becoming increasingly common and is calling for a ban on recorded messages similar to the one heard by Richard.

The Sun has reported how callers who misdial when trying to reach helplines and customer service centres are being duped into calling 118 services.

Companies who run premium-rate lines have bought phone numbers with just one digit different from popular helplines for water or energy companies, the NHS, councils and charities.

It means when callers misdial, they reach one of these landlines.

They then hear a message telling them the number is out of service and that they should call directory enquiries instead on a 118 number.

But these can cost as much as £15.98 to connect and then up to £7.99 a minute.

The Sun misdialled an NHS number by one digit and reached a recorded message telling us the number was out of service and to call 118 018 - owned by Telecom2 - at £2 per minute plus a £2 connection fee, plus a provider access charge.

Earlier this year, a 90-year-old woman reportedly ran up a bill of more than £500 after being

directed to 118 004 when she misdialled the number for Southern Water.

David Hickson, of Fair Telecoms, said: "The promotion of premium-rate services to callers who have dialled a wrong number must be banned.

"This is not an acceptable means of marketing. It can only operate as a scam to exploit the vulnerable."

A spokesman from the Phone-paid Services Authority said: "We currently have an ongoing investigation into Telecom 2 and are also looking into other woman reportedly ran up a bill of separate and unrelated directory enquiry services. Our code of

practice requires phone-paid services, including all 118 directory enquiry services, to ensure that consumers are fully and clearly informed of all information likely to influence the decision to purchase.

"The 118 directory enquiry services must tell consumers what the price is when they promote their services."

An Ofcom spokesman said: "We launched an overarching review of the 118 market earlier in the year to ensure prices are transparent and fair to consumers."

BT said it had waived Richard's charge as a goodwill gesture and given him £11 a month off his broadband and calls package to apologise for the poor customer service he received.

Telecom2 refused to comment.

'It can only operate as a scam'



fair telecoms campaign

press cutting



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The Phone-paid Services Authority (PSA), which regulates premium phonelines, has launched an inquiry into Telecom2, and other unnamed 118 providers, over claims callers are not fully informed how much calls will cost. Regulator Ofcom is also carrying out a wider investigation into the costly lines and how they attract customers.

Richard is not the only one to have fallen for the "phishing" trick using missed calls.

Leaving a missed call on a phone so people ring back is known as "wangiri" — a Japanese word meaning "one ring and cut". It is banned by Ofcom and offenders could be fined up to £2million — but the watchdog is yet to punish any firm for it.

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