

Phone customers are being misled by cold-callers

Watch out for the mobile phone switching scam

MOBILE PHONES

Mobile phone customers should be on guard against cold calls from firms masquerading as their network provider and switching them unwittingly.

The calls are in fact from smaller mobile phone suppliers out to get you to switch to another deal or to another handset. They usually know which network you're on from your mobile number prefix and use equipment – known as a random number generator – to call you. They then ask you to confirm your address – all the details they need to switch you to a different deal.

This is the latest switching scam to hit consumers. In the past we've reported how unsuspecting householders have been tricked into swapping their home phone or energy supplier.

John Naulls from London was a victim of the scam. He was cold-called by a salesperson claiming to be from his mobile phone provider, Orange, in March. The rep offered a new handset and a reduction in John's bill. John said no to the offer but was told he would be sent a free replacement handset which he could give away.

When the phone arrived John discovered his old phone had been cut off and he'd actually been dealing with a separate company. He had to return the phone at his own expense and wait for reconnection to his previous supplier, Orange.

John says: 'I find it extraordinary that this can happen. The rep tricked me into revealing my address by asking me to confirm my house number and postcode.'

'The rep tricked me into revealing my address'

Orange told us it that hadn't heard of the other company and warned that it would cut the supply of mobile phones to any outlets which sell its phones if they're found to be misleading customers. It has urged customers to tell it about situations in which they've been approached.

Customers on several networks are being inundated with cold calls from reps asking when their contract is due to expire so they can sell new contracts. Following complaints, last week T-Mobile banned dealers who sell its phones by cold-calling customers.

All the mobile phone companies we approached said they do not sell on their customer's details to third-party companies and that they approach customers only when their contract is ending.



John Naulls was a victim of the mobile switching scam



Misleading health claims banned

Victory on food claims in EU

FOOD AND HEALTH

Food labels that make unproven and misleading health claims are being banned by the European Parliament following years of campaigning by Which?.

The European Parliament says that all foods carrying a new health claim will first have to be passed by the European Food Safety Authority.

This closes a loophole which allowed food companies to get away with making questionable claims about their products.

For example, in March we found packets of Nestlé Cinnamon Grahams claiming that the cereal contained 'essential nutrients...to help keep you and your family healthy from the inside out'. But it's high in sugar and salt when compared with existing Food Standards Agency guidance.

The ruling means that foods high in more than one of the elements fat, sugar or salt will be banned from carrying a nutritional claim. So a food that was high in both sugar and salt couldn't carry a claim to be low in fat.

The EU ruling also means that nutrition claims on foods such as 'low fat' or 'light' will have to be clearly defined, and the meaning standardised across the Continent. Similarly, if a label claims a food is low in a nutrient such as salt, it will have to make it clear whether it's high in either fat or sugar.

Which? Public Affairs Officer Michelle Smyth welcomed the news. She said: 'At long last people will be able to buy foods with the confidence that the health claims on the label have been checked. It will help people make healthier food choices.'

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN TRENHOLM, ROBIN BECKHAM, KEITH EMMITT

TAKE ACTION!

Avoid mobile mis-selling

■ Your phone provider will call you only when your contract is due to expire. Never confirm your name and address unless you are certain you are dealing with your own provider. Genuine calls from your network should include security checks.

Environmental Health investigates the sale of damaged goods

Asda sells unfit food

FOOD AND HEALTH

Asda has apologised after it was caught selling food and drink in an appalling state at one of its superstores.

Customer Elizabeth Kaelin was horrified by the items on the bargain shelf at the supermarket's store on London's Isle of Dogs. She found bulging and dented cans, opened and used containers of water, a bottle of Coke that had been resealed with tape and leaking packages.

'The state of most of the products was appalling,' Elizabeth told us. 'Some were so badly damaged that the checkout lady just gave them to me.'

Elizabeth bought the goods because she intended to report the retailer to the local environmental health department, but it said it couldn't find any evidence when it visited the store.

When Elizabeth visited the store less than two weeks later, she again discovered it selling shoddy foods, including a taped-up box of white rice and two mouldy, leaking cartons of children's juice. 'I contacted the council again. It told me it had had a



These badly damaged foods were sold by one Asda store

'Some were so badly damaged the checkout lady just gave them to me'

meeting with Asda's manager and he'd agreed that the food I'd bought was unsuitable for consumption. He's promised that there would be staff re-training regarding selecting items to place on the bargain shelf.'

We contacted Asda. It told us: 'We try to reduce on waste wherever possible. If that means reducing the price of items with damaged packaging, we will - as long as the product itself has not been affected. However, these products were unacceptable and we have been in touch with the store to ensure that this does not happen again.'

TAKE ACTION!

Report it

■ If you find very badly damaged food for sale, report it to your local environmental health officers.

And finally... Scouser's salute

When Alliance & Leicester sent out fliers backing Liverpool as a 'Capital of Culture', there was an extra surprise - and some red faces.



GET IN TOUCH
Send your examples of daft or misleading products or promotions to
Liz Edwards
PO Box 44
Hertford X
SG14 1SH

101 FOR NON-EMERGENCIES

■ The new non-emergency number 101 launches in Hampshire, Leicestershire, Northumbria, South Wales and South Yorkshire this month. People can report anti-social behaviour such as vandalism and noisy neighbours. Calls cost a fixed 10p. The number will be in use across England and Wales by 2008.

PRIVATE HEALTHCARE REVIEW

■ The health watchdog will review the quality of care at private centres providing treatment for NHS patients. The Healthcare Commission said people need to know that they're getting the same standard of care as the NHS provides. Each year 250,000 patients facing long waits have surgery at private centres.

CHEAP MOBILE CALLS ABROAD

■ Orange and T-Mobile have cut the cost of calling from abroad this month. This follows the EU threat to cap roaming charges. T-Mobile has a 55p per minute flat rate to make or receive calls. Orange has cut charges by 25 per cent but you must apply in advance. Vodafone won't cut prices until April 2007. 3, O2 and Virgin hadn't announced price cuts as we went to press.

ASPARTAME CLEARED BY EC

■ Controversy continues over the sweetener aspartame. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has said it poses no cancer risk. The EC watchdog reviewed a 2005 study which claimed a link between the sweetener and tumours in rats. EFSA said the study was flawed and there was no need to adjust recommended maximum intake limits of 40mg per kg of body weight - the equivalent of 22 cans of Diet Coke a day for an average British adult. But we'd like to see more research.

CONTACT US

■ If there's something you'd like us to investigate, call 0800 252088 and leave a message or email insidestory@which.co.uk