

Report by Trading Standards

Technology is developing that allows individuals to decide which calls they do, and which calls they don't want to receive.

First Generation

The First Generation of call management technology was the Caller-ID service (CLI or CLID) – this was introduced around 1990 in the USA and in the early 90's in the UK. Prior to this, individuals had no indication of who was calling when their phone rang, and the only thing they could do to control calls was to screen them directly through their answering machine's speaker (as seen in countless US sitcoms).

With Caller-ID you can check the caller's number when the phone rings and choose whether or not to answer the call. This technology has major limitations. Your phone will ring for every incoming call, and in most circumstances you have to go to the phone to find out who is calling so even unwelcome calls will disturb you. Some phones can give a different ring for different callers but this is not widely used.

Second Generation

The Second Generation of call management technology is built upon the Caller-ID service and allows users to unconditionally block calls from particular numbers or classes of caller.

Second Generation network services include Anonymous caller reject (available from all landline and mobile networks), and BT's 'Choose to refuse' service that allows you to block up to 10 numbers. Second Generation devices include BT's 6500 phone, a number of Panasonic phones, and the CPR Call Blocker product.

Second Generation call blocking technology has many limitations, mainly because it blanket blocks classes of callers or numbers.

Calls from International call centres

If you want to block international call centres you need to block all international calls – even friends and family who live abroad. Recent trueCall research suggests that 41% of people have friends or family who live abroad who they do want to receive calls from (and of course for everyone else there is the risk of missing an urgent call from a friend or relative who is on holiday overseas).

Calls from call centres that withhold their number

If you want to block calls from call centres that withhold their number this will block all callers who withhold their number. This includes doctors, hospitals, social workers, and many businesses. While it is possible for callers to 'unblock' their number on a call by call basis, it is rarely possible to do this from a switchboard. Blocking callers who withhold their number is only appropriate in exceptional situations.

Calls from specific callers

As shown in Appendix B, there are literally thousands of Caller-IDs used by UK call centres. Second Generation systems tend to have the capacity to block between 10 and 100 numbers. If you were to block all the top 10 numbers, you could only block 3% of unwelcome marketing calls, if you blocked the top 100 numbers you could only block 13% of unwelcome marketing calls.

In practice the technology can be a little more effective this because people often receive repeated calls from the same call centre number, but in the Angus Council trials residents received calls from up to 37 individual calling numbers over just an 8 week period.

In addition, managing long lists of calling numbers on a device is extremely difficult as they, at best, have a small screen, limited user interface and no ability to import or print out lists of blocked numbers.

You have to receive one bad call first – Users of Second Generation systems have to wait until they receive a call from an unwelcome caller, then tell the system to block all future calls from that number. This means that each unwelcome caller will get through once before it is subsequently blocked. One Second Generation device (CPR Call Blocker) is pre-populated with numbers of 200 nuisance callers, but there is no published list of these numbers so it is unclear which numbers are blocked and how effective it is.

In summary, assuming that :-

- You don't have friends and family abroad so you block all international calls
- You don't expect calls from hospitals, doctors, local authority departments, social services, etc. so you block all callers who withhold their number
- You select the optimal call centre numbers to block.

Then a 10 number blocker can block up to 33% of unwelcome calls, and a 100 number blocker can block up to 43% of unwelcome calls.

In the Angus Council trials 32% of unwanted calls were blocked by a Second Generation device - the CPR Call Blocker.

Third Generation

Third Generation technology differs from Second Generation technology in that it intercepts certain categories of caller, tells them that you don't accept telemarketing calls, and asks them to identify themselves either by pressing a button, saying their name, or both.

While it may seem counter intuitive, the vast majority of telemarketers hang up when they are intercepted – they have commission to earn and they know that they are extremely unlikely to make a sale to someone who is screening their calls in this way.

The effectiveness of this approach can be demonstrated by a study of the calls received by trueCall customers from DM Design. During the 12 months from 1st March 2012 trueCall units intercepted 335 calls from DM Design, and asked the caller to either press a key or say their name. In 92% of cases the call centre agent immediately hung up and the user wasn't disturbed. In the Angus Council trial unrecognised callers over 95% of unwanted calls were blocked in this way, with over half the trialist receiving no nuisance calls at all during the 6 week trial period.

This creates a 'porous' barrier - it is no longer necessary to unconditionally block an entire category of caller, but you can apply different levels of control over different categories of caller - for example, you may choose to configure a Third Generation system to intercept all callers from abroad and ask them to enter a two digit code - friends and family who live abroad know the code and can get through, but overseas call centres are blocked.

While these systems may have a 'block' list, they don't rely on it so they start intercepting (and effectively blocking) unwelcome calls as soon as the device or service is installed.

Third Generation network systems can keep a call log online so that users can see details of all the calls they have received and how they were handled. This gives them important information and makes them feel in control.

Third Generation call management technology was first launched in 2001 in the USA as a network service from a number of networks – Bell South, Qwest, Ameritech, and Verizon. The service was expensive costing up to \$18 per month, but Verizon said that their version (Call Intercept) had a very rapid take-up and was their fastest ever growing service. It was designed to intercept callers who withheld their number. Verizon claimed that it blocked 85% of anonymous callers, and in a 12 month period blocked 430 million calls for the 1 million users. France Telecom's Third Generation call manager 'Stop Secret' is their most popular VoIP service and costs subscribers 1 € per month.

Note that both Verizon's Call Intercept and France Telecom's Stop Secret are very basic implementations of Third Generation technology.

Two devices - UK Data IT's CallBlocker and trueCall - are the only Third Generation options currently available in the UK. They are supplied as devices that cost £70 - £100.

TELEPHONE PREFERENCE SERVICE

The TPS The Telephone Preference Service is the official central opt out register on which you can record your preference not to receive unsolicited sales

or marketing calls. It is a legal requirement that all organisations (including charities, voluntary organisations and

political parties) do not make such calls to numbers registered on the TPS unless they have your consent to do so

<http://www.tpsonline.org.uk/tps/index.html>