

Illegal Robocalls and Call-Based Fraud

USTelecom-led Industry Traceback Group (ITG) ... plays a pivotal role in combating illegal calls.

INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP

USTelecom and its members are at the forefront of the fight against illegal calls, including illegal robocalls and call-based fraud. The industry has championed, developed, and deployed powerful analytics-based call blocking and labeling tools, as well as a call authentication framework that has led to a substantial reduction in “spoofed” calls. In addition, the USTelecom-led Industry Traceback Group (ITG), designated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as the official U.S. Traceback Consortium under the TRACED Act, plays a pivotal role in combating illegal calls. Each day, the ITG traces illegal call examples all across the globe, directly disrupting campaigns as well as gaining critical information to power law enforcement efforts. The ITG works closely with government agencies, state Attorneys General, and industry stakeholders to disrupt illegal call campaigns and empower law enforcement, further protecting consumers.

Together, these efforts work: Scam robocalls are down over 80 percent from peak levels and prolific illegal telemarketing robocall campaigns have dried up entirely based on government enforcement actions powered by ITG tracebacks.

CRIMINAL FRAUD'S NEW FRONTIER

ITG tracebacks, aggressive enforcement by civil government agencies, and voice service providers' analytics and authentication tools have made it harder for bad actors to get their calls on the phone network and to U.S. consumers. The criminals behind these calls, however, are adapting, presenting an ever-evolving challenge for the industry and law enforcement. For instance, the criminals behind these calls shifted from making calls with foreign internet-based voice service providers to establishing SIM box operations in the United States and originating calls from major wireless networks. They also have shifted from blasting robocalls indiscriminately to targeting specific victims, sometimes with significant knowledge about the potential victim, including their bank, as well as turning to social media and other channels to contact targeted consumers.

The ITG and industry have worked to adapt to these new challenges, including through an informal task force with the wireless carriers to disrupt SIM boxes used for scam calls and texts, and getting actionable information to law enforcers. The ITG also is working directly with banks and other partners to collaborate, innovate, and disrupt the most sophisticated call-based fraud. These partnerships show promise for continuing to evolve the fight against scammers.

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CHARTING THE PATH FORWARD

While progress has been significant, more needs to be done. USTelecom continues to advocate for targeted regulation and enforcement, including aggressive criminal enforcement actions against both domestic and international criminal fraudsters. The association also supports the passage of the Robocall Trace Back Enhancement Act, which would reinforce the traceback process, adapting it to increasing complexity in the telecommunications ecosystem.

FURTHER BUILDING THE DEFENSE AND GOING ON OFFENSE: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prioritize criminal enforcement and cross-border collaboration, ensuring the Department of Justice (DOJ) has the resources and focus needed to prosecute the criminal organizations responsible for call scams.
2. Champion public-private partnerships, including by providing legal certainty that will enhance information sharing across industry sectors.
3. Ensure the registered traceback consortium is afforded protection from frivolous legal actions designed to undermine the group's important work.
4. Ensure that voice service providers continue to be empowered to protect their customers by maintaining their flexibility to deploy analytics-based call blocking and labeling tools as threats evolve and avoiding new burdens on such tools that could reduce their effectiveness.
5. Ensure that voice service providers can focus call authentication investments on protecting consumers and modernizing their networks, rather than force wasteful investments on ineffective solutions, including for legacy networks.