

Crossing the Digital Divide (v145)

Ho Hum

by Joseph Feigon
for the Observer

It's not just you.

Those pesky robocalls — at best annoying disturbances and at worst costly financial scams — are getting worse.

In an age when cellphones have become extensions of our bodies, robocallers now follow people wherever they go, disrupting business meetings, church services and bedtime stories with their children. Though automated calls have long plagued consumers, the volume has skyrocketed in recent years, reaching an estimated 3.4 billion in April, according to YouMail, which collects and analyzes calls through its robocall blocking service. That's an increase of almost 900 million a month compared with a year ago.

Twice this morning, I've received robocalls from (410) 267-2833. I checked the number against the website findwhocallsyou.com, and yes, that number has been reported by many. Here's the transcription for your amusement:

"Your name," the local county sheriff are going to arrest you for serious allegations before this matter goes to the courthouse and we freeze your bank accounts and get you arrested. For more information regarding this case, you can get back to us @ (410)267-3833, I repeat, (410)267-3833. Make sure you give us a call back before you get arrested.

According to the New York Times, the problem will like not resolve itself anytime soon. Spoofing Caller ID is fairly easy in the age of VoIP, and while some have suggested blocking all calls and enabling "contacts through only" fair to acknowledge the death of the land-line. Those with land lines who have registered their numbers with the Do Not Call Registry shouldn't be surprised that those numbers are available to telemarketers on the Dark Net – that's right, register your number and have it apart of the list that's stolen and resold to scammers and rip-off artists.

Advice and Reminders:

1) If you answer a call from an unknown number, wait before saying anything, if automated, most of those systems will disconnect the call;

2) If you do answer a call, assume the calling party is fishing for information, verifying information (yes, your information is already out there), do not give them anything. If they ask leading questions like: “Bob, I have your email as, bob@email.com, is that correct?” Do NOT answer.

3) While it irritating to receive these calls, use it as an opportunity for entertainment. I find many ways to waste their time, including: “Where’s my pizza, I ordered two hours ago”, “...caller ID fraudulent activity division, where are you calling from?” “Security”, etc.

Final message for the week: Windows and Mac updates are critical to your sanity and well-being. Software bugs are discovered daily, this is how vendors (Microsoft, Apple, Linksys, etc.) improve their products and services. Don’t ignore the need to upgrade, it’s really non-optional if you want your digital life to be as stress-free as possible.

Control those things you can, and keep the surprises to a minimum.