



POLICY & ACTION FROM CONSUMER REPORTS

Note: Similar letters were sent today to Verizon and CenturyLink

August 7, 2015

Randall Stephenson
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
AT&T Inc.
208 S. Akard Street
Dallas, TX 75202

Dear Mr. Stephenson:

Last week, I sent you a quick email heads-up about the latest Consumer Reports story “Rage Against Robocalls” and our campaign. Attached is the Consumer Reports print magazine, on newsstands everywhere and already profiled on CBS This Morning.

Now that the FCC has made it crystal clear that phone companies have the legal right to stop unwanted calls before they reach our homes, and the nation’s attorneys general have urged carriers to take action without further delay, we’re anxious to hear about the solutions that AT&T is ready to offer.

In response to last month’s letter to you from 45 attorneys general, USTelecom Senior Vice President Jon Banks issued the following statement (our emphasis):

*We are fully on board with this request, and share the concern expressed in the letter about **the need to inform consumers about steps they can take** to halt calls and identify robocall perpetrators. Our members offer a number of call blocking solutions, from tools that force anonymous or out-of-area callers to identify themselves before the call is completed to call rejections and white-listing approved callers.*

The FCC and the nation’s AGs have made it very clear that **simply educating consumers about their current call blocking options is not enough**. Now it’s time for you to take the lead, blocking unwanted robocalls before they reach people’s phones, at scale and free. Consumer Reports notes (article attached) that call blocking options currently available from the major carriers “depend on your geographic location and service package, and are limited in their ability to block calls...Adding insult to injury, customers may have to pay for the services.”

Mr. Banks also noted:

Strong enforcement against illegal robocallers is critical, and we will continue to work closely with the Federal Trade Commission and federal and state prosecutors to put bad actors out of business.

Federal and state agencies have successfully enforced the law against some bad actors. Unfortunately, as soon as one scam is shut down, another one appears. That’s why **it has become urgent that the phone companies step up**. This problem simply can’t be solved with better law enforcement.

Verizon spokesman Lee Gierczynski told the Philadelphia Inquirer that the company has resisted advanced call blocking technology due to “the risk of accidentally blocking wanted calls (including public safety announcements, severe weather alerts, and automated school closing messages).”

Consumers deserve the choice to opt-in to advanced call blocking services, so they can decide for themselves whether the benefits outweigh any potential downsides. Moreover, effective, optional call blocking technology, such as the Primus Canada Telemarketing Guard, can screen unwanted calls while taking steps to avoid inadvertently “blacklisting” wanted calls.

As you can see from the enclosed magazine, consumers around the country helped Consumer Reports examine an array of call blocking devices. The consumers who participated in these tests overwhelmingly reported positive experiences with services like Nomorobo, which significantly reduced the number of robocalls they received. We are calling on you to upgrade your services to offer a similar option to all of your customers for free.

In the few months since we launched this effort, hundreds of thousands of Americans have joined Consumers Union’s campaign calling on AT&T and the other top phone carriers to offer free, effective call blocking technology. It’s time to offer your customers the protection from unwanted robocalls that they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim Marvin", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tim Marvin
Campaign Manager, EndRobocalls.org