

Stop Cold Calls

Unwanted phone calls - or cold calls - are one of the UK's most-hated marketing tactics. Don't put up with them - use Which? top tips to keep nuisance phone calls to a minimum.

1 Register for free with the Telephone Preference Service (TPS)

UK-based companies must not make unsolicited sales and marketing calls to TPS-registered phone numbers, even if the call centre is overseas. To register with the TPS, call 0845 070 0707 or go to the TPS website. However, the TPS won't stop scams, market research calls, calls from companies where you have 'opted in' or calls from companies based abroad. If you want to opt out of receiving most junk mail at the same time, go to the Mail Preference Scheme (MPS) website. Both the TPS and MPS are free - if a company ever asks you to pay for this service, refuse and inform the TPS. For more help and advice read our Consumer Rights guide on how to deal with unwanted phone calls.

2 Go ex-directory

Some companies, particularly local businesses, may use online or paper phone books to find phone numbers to target sales calls. Ask for your number to be excluded from directories - this will stop companies from finding out your number in this way.

3 Keep your name off sales call lists

Some companies, particularly local businesses, may use online or paper phone books to find phone numbers to target with sales calls. Ask for your phone number to be excluded from directories - this will stop companies from finding out your number in this way. If you must provide your phone number to a company ask the company not to call you for marketing purposes or pass your number on to third parties. Carefully check the marketing 'opt out/opt in' boxes to see if ticking or unticking them will prevent calls from the company itself or from third parties. If it doesn't, directly ask the company not to call you for sales and marketing purposes. Contact companies you already receive unwanted sales calls from and ask to be removed from their call lists. Companies should abide by verbal requests, but it's a good idea to put your request in writing too so there is a formal record.

4 Screen your phone calls

If you have caller display and an answer phone, consider only answering calls from numbers you recognise. Legitimate callers are likely to leave a message.

5 Set up call barring for unwanted calls

Many cold calls come from abroad, so unless you need to receive international calls, ask your phone operator if it can block calls from international numbers (it may charge for this service). You may also wish to block calls from withheld numbers, though this may prevent some calls you want to receive. For example, if a friend or relative is calling from their workplace, this number may be withheld.

6 Consider using a call blocking service

Dedicated devices such as CPR Call Blocker and TrueCall Call Blocker plug directly into your home phone and allow you to screen the calls you receive. Read our hands-on review of the CPR and TrueCall call blockers. Alternatively many cordless phones now offer call blocking capabilities. Find out which models we recommend in our guide to the best call blocking home phones.

7 Don't bow to cold-calling pressure

If you receive a cold call, stay calm and don't let the caller intimidate you or pressure you with 'one-day-only' offers. Never reveal your name, address or financial details. If it's a legitimate call from a company you're interested in or are already a customer of, you can always call the company directly. If you suspect a scam, don't press any phone buttons during the call. This could redirect you to a premium-rate number which you will be charged for.

8 Make a note of the cold-call number

If possible, get the cold-call phone number and company name (dial 1471 to check the number if you don't have caller display). These details will help organisations such as Ofcom take action.

9 Report cold-calling offenders

Report TPS rule breaches to the TPS. The TPS will contact the company and pass complaints to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which can take action against repeat offenders. Report suspected scams to Action Fraud (0300 123 2040). Report other problem calls - such as silent calls - to your phone provider and/or Ofcom (0300 123 3000), which is responsible for tackling nuisance calls.

10 Distance selling regulations - your rights

If you buy something as the result of a cold call, under distance selling regulations you usually have 14 working days from the day after you receive the item to change your mind and return it.