FCC Seeking to End Robocalls That Use Spoofed Phone Numbers

March 31, 2017 - The FCC has begun a rule-making process that will eventually allow phone companies to block phone calls from spoofed (meaning faked or made up) phone numbers. Calls from spoofed numbers are used in the vast majority of telemarketing fraud. But the agency is specifying that it doesn't want to interfere with legitimate business telemarketing. Because of the technology involved, that may be easier said than done.

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It isn't just criminals who use spoofed phone numbers to conduct telemarketing. I get phone calls several times a week from companies that are soliciting me for home improvement projects. I suspect that my name wound up on a list which was sold by a large home improvement store that I registered with. The calls, which can come in several times each day, were so bothersome that I registered my phone with NoMoRobo to screen them out. The service isn't perfect but it is free and it intercepts a majority of the calls I don't want.

Prior to signing up with NoMoRobo, many of the calls came from phone numbers that were obviously fake. Some came from area codes that don't exist. Others had prefixes that aren't in use, such as 111. There is no reason for the phone company to put through calls like this. The technology exists to stop them right now.

The real problem may be stopping calls that originate using a copied or stolen spoofed number. Making calls like this is more common than you think. There are a variety of web based telemarketing applications used by businesses. Most of these allow you to set the caller ID information that the person receiving the call will see.

The effort by the FCC is long overdue. With the advent of voice over IP calling several years ago, the issue of spoofing phone numbers has continued to grow each year. Under the proposed rules, telephone companies would be able to block phone numbers that they determine are spoofed. They will also allow phone companies to block the use of stolen phone numbers when the actual owner of the phone number requests them to do so. That probably means that the FCC will have to establish a database of phone numbers that is shared across all telephone companies for call-blocking purposes.

In all, we expect the final rule will have an impact but will not be 100% effective. Over the years we've seen criminals become particularly effective at getting around technological barriers that have appeared in their way. Because of this, it will remain incumbent on consumers to remain vigilant. That said, we're in complete support these proposed rules.

A full copy of the FCC's notice of proposed rulemaking in this matter can be found here.
byJim Malmberg
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