

What is 'Sugging' and 'Frugging'?

Contributed by Market Research Society
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Sugging is a market research industry term, meaning 'selling under the guise of research'. Sugging occurs when individuals or companies pretend to be market researchers conducting a research, when in reality they are trying to build databases, generate sales leads or directly sell product or services.

Fundraising under the guise of market research is referred to as 'frugging'.

What's wrong with it?

As the UK regulator and professional body for the market research sector, MRS is actively trying to address the growing prevalence of traders and organisations using the guise of research as a means of generating sales or fundraising. A study by regulator Ofcom into nuisance calls revealed that consumers who experienced unwanted calls received around two per week on average.

Typically these unethical calls are labelled as 'lifestyle surveys' and used to lead respondents into the mistaken belief that the survey is genuine market research. The respondent is unaware of the reason that his or her information is being used and how it will be stored and shared. Often these 'surveys' are conducted by a commercial third party to generate sales leads, or even sold on to a further commercial third party to exploit.

What is the scale of the problem?

MRS received approximately 1250 complaints in 2013 on the general issue of nuisance calls. Most of these relate to 'lifestyle surveys', ie, collecting data for future direct marketing.

How can MRS help?

MRS provides the opportunity to report suspicious calls to be formally investigated, and has launched a sugging hotline tel: 0800 975 9955 or email sugging@mrs.org.uk.

What will happen?

If a call is found by MRS to be in breach of the MRS Code of Conduct, the individual or organisation may be referred by MRS to the Information Commissioner's Office for breaches of the Data Protection Act 1998.

How does this practice contravene the Code?

The practices of sugging and frugging bring discredit on the profession of research, in breach of rule A8, and mislead members of the public when they are being asked for their co-operation, in breach of rule B17.

Failing to clearly specify the purpose for which the data is being collected is also a breach of rule B9 and the first principle of the Data Protection Act 1998.

What if the person or organisation isn't an MRS member?

In the first instance, MRS will contact the person or organisation concerned and ask them to withdraw the survey. MRS may also report the person or organisation to the Information Commissioner's Office, their trade association, professional body or any other relevant regulator.