

MRS reports 19 companies to the Information Commissioner's Office

Contributed by MRS
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On Data Privacy Day, 28 January 2015, the Market Research Society (MRS) announces that it is reporting 19 companies, including a number of charities, to the Information Commissioner's Office. This is part of its campaign to combat the practice of selling under the guise of research, known as 'sugging', and fundraising under the guise of market research, referred to as 'frugging'.

This follows the MRS's launch of a hotline in July last year which enables organisations and members of the public to report unsolicited calls which contravene MRS Code of Conduct.

Typically these unethical calls are labelled as 'lifestyle surveys' and used to lead participants into the mistaken belief that the survey is genuine market or social research. The participant 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.

As the UK regulator and professional body for the market and social 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 recent study by regulator Ofcom revealed that consumers who experienced nuisance calls received around two per week on average.

By launching a sugging hotline, tel: 0800 975 9955 or email: sugging@mrs.org.uk, MRS provides the opportunity for members of the public to report sugging and frugging calls which can then be referred to the Information Commissioner's Office to be formally investigated.

DATA MARK SET TO REBUILD PUBLIC TRUST

MRS is also encouraging organisations to sign up to its ethical mark for personal data use. The mark, Fair Data, means that members of the public can easily identify between those organisations which collect, use and retain personal data properly and ethically, and those that do not.

Fair Data was launched on Data Protection Day in 2013, for all those organisations "public and private sector" which collect and use personal data. It is designed to be an instantly recognisable standard to show that the organisation treats all individuals' data ethically. Consumers and the general public should look for the Fair Data logo, which can only be used when an organisation signs up to the ten core Fair Data principles.

Jane Frost CBE, MRS Chief Executive, comments: "The Market Research Society has undertaken a number of initiatives to combat unethical practice in the use of personal data. While Data Protection Day acts as an important focal point to remind members of the public of the importance of safeguarding their personal data it is an ongoing issue. MRS conceived, developed and launched Fair Data as we believe that there is a real need to help the public identify with whom they can trust their data. Public concern is at an all time high and we are getting increasing numbers of complaints about data use.

"The research sector that MRS represents has been at the forefront of ethical personal data collection and use for decades. We work closely with the Office of the Information Commissioner and it is appropriate therefore that we should take a leading role on this issue" reporting firms that have been identified as acting unethically for further investigation."