

FCC and FTC Crack Down on COVID-19 Robocall Scammers

April 6, 2020

The [Federal Communications Commission](#) and [Federal Trade Commission](#) sent joint letters to three companies that provide voice over IP "gateway" service, which is used to connect voice over IP calls to the US telephone network. The letter told the gateway providers to stop transmitting robocalls from scammers offering fake services related to COVID-19 and warning them that US voice service providers will cut off calls delivered by those gateways unless they act by April 5. As of 5:00 pm on April 6, neither the FCC nor the FTC had issued any further statements indicating whether the gateway operators had responded to the letter.

The FCC/FTC action came after a telephone industry group tracked scam calls back to the three gateway providers – SIPJoin, Connexum and VoIP Terminator/BLMarketing – and determined that they were routing the calls into the telephone network. The scams include calls offering a nonexistent free test kit for COVID-19 and a campaign that offers HVAC cleaning services robocallers falsely claim will help fight COVID-19.

The FCC also sent a letter to US Telecom, a telephone trade association, authorizing carriers to block calls from these gateways if they did not stop transmitting the scam calls and to take any other steps necessary to block scam calls coming from the entities that originated the calls identified by the FCC and FTC. It is likely that carriers will cut off network access if the gateway providers have not complied. The FCC also indicated it will take similar action against other gateway operators found to be transmitting scam calls.

In January, the FTC warned 19 gateway operators that facilitating robocall scammers is a violation of US law, and it also has filed a complaint against Globex Telecom for transmitting scam calls. However, the FCC/FTC letter marks the first time either agency has threatened to cut off a gateway operator's access to the telephone network. It is significant that the letter resulted from industry efforts to track the origins of illegal robocalls and to identify the companies carrying them.

The FCC/FTC action also was intended as a reminder that the advent of COVID-19 has resulted in new scams, and robocallers are likely to exploit fear of COVID-19 infections. It is likely the agencies will take additional action going forward.

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Key Contacts

Christy Burrow Washington, DC	cburrow@cooley.com +1 202 776 2687
J.G. Harrington Washington, DC	jgharrington@cooley.com +1 202 776 2818
Robert M. McDowell Washington, DC	rmcdowell@cooley.com +1 202 842 7862

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