

# Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection Subcommittee Hearing

## Do Not Call: Combating Robocalls and Caller ID Spoofing

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### Summary of Testimony:

RoboKiller is a unique mobile application that is solving the robocall problem through disruption. The app answers the calls it blocks on behalf of its users, then deploys Answer Bots, our own army of robots designed to talk back to and waste spammers' time.

Spoofing, caller ID blocking, and other tools limit the effectiveness of solutions that simply block numbers. These services protect their users, but make it easier for scammers and spammers to skip over their savvy customer base to more quickly reach the most vulnerable Americans.

Our service turns the tables on telemarketers, engaging them in protracted conversations. Answer Bots cannot be robbed of their wealth or identities, and the time they waste doesn't just protect our users, it protects everyone else as it prevents telemarketers from making additional calls.

RoboKiller leverages several advanced technologies including audio-fingerprinting and machine learning to power an algorithm that blocks more than 200,000 spammer's numbers at any time. But answering the calls we block is what allows us to deploy our Answer Bots to truly combat the problem.

Spammers make billions of robocalls knowing that only a small percentage will get answered, and even fewer will reach their human telemarketers. They don't have to be targeted because robocalls let the most vulnerable in our society self-select themselves as victims. But last month our Answer Bots fought back and stole an estimated 25,000 hours of time from spammers and scammers.

This problem has reached epidemic proportions, and it is not going to be solved through legislation or enforcement, though both of those efforts are important. This is a problem fueled by inexpensive phone calls, and huge margins, so our solution focuses on impacting the economics of spam calls.

We are here because the FTC put innovation to work when it held the Robocalls: Humanity Strikes Back competition, which we were fortunate enough to win. The government can help solve this problem by continuing to support creative solutions. This hearing and the FTC and FCC's technology expo next week will help us spread our message and grow, and ultimately that will help us end the robocall scourge.

## **RoboKiller Written Statement**

Every day we are adding thousands of RoboKiller users to our service, which means we are putting Answer Bots to work, hitting telemarketers where it hurts: in their wallets.

When our mobile application, RoboKiller, reaches 10 million users, we estimate we will have reduced spammer's revenue by more than 50%. We believe this is enough of a disruption to their bottom line to put them out of business.

Robokiller doesn't just block unwanted calls, it answers the calls it blocks with Answer Bots, our army of robots that know how to press one to reach the human behind "Rachel from Cardholder Services." Answer Bots, turn the tables on scammers and spammers by wasting their time. That is time that they no longer have to scam and steal from our users or anyone else.

Our competitors have approached this problem from the Caller ID angle, but spoofing, caller ID blocking, and other tools limit the value of those approaches. It is a cat and mouse game that can never be won. We are not interested in playing that game, we'd rather steal the cheese that the spammer's are after; our approach is about cutting off their revenue.

RoboKiller blocks more than 200,000 spam and telemarketing calls from ever reaching our hundreds of thousands of user's phones, but more importantly we answer the calls we block with these Answer Bots. From an adorable Southern Belle to a guy dealing with a gazelle running around his apartment, our robots are as hilarious as they are effective. But don't mistake entertaining for simplistic.

Our service leverages several advanced technologies including audio-fingerprinting and machine learning to power an algorithm that blocks spammer's calls, then answers those calls with Answer Bots. RoboKiller users can either create their own custom answer bots or choose ones from our library. That means at any given time thousands of unique Answer Bots can be fighting back against spammers.

How effective are they? In a single day, we deployed one of our answer bots more than 1200 times, and it interacted with telemarketers for more than 5000 minutes. Last month we estimate that Answer Bots wasted more than 25,000 hours of human telemarketer's time.

And remember, these robots are protecting you even if you don't have RoboKiller. Every minute our Answer Bots are engaging telemarketers is a minute they don't have to speak to anyone else.

The spammer's business model is based on making billions of calls, knowing that only a small percentage will get answered, and an even smaller percentage will connect their human telemarketers with viable targets. They don't have to be surgical in their strikes, robocalls let the most vulnerable in our society self-select themselves as victims.

So a relatively small pool of humans, often on the other side of the world, are sitting in seedy call centers and back rooms just waiting for their auto-dialed robocall systems to connect. Waiting for someone's grandmother to say "hello".

Answer Bots love to say hello, but their inanimate identities cannot be stolen. Their invisible wallets cannot be infiltrated. They can keep spammers engaged in conversations for several

minutes, and often much longer than that. Answer Bots are great revenge for our customers, but they are great news for all of you on this panel.

You cannot solve this problem with legislation alone. A three-man IRS scam operation in a nondescript room in India isn't worried that the long-arm of the American Justice system will ever knock on their door. And singularly-focused call blockers may even help the scammers. Scammers are happy to skip a well-educated young executive with a call blocker app to more quickly get to a vulnerable elderly grandmother.

The real solution to this problem is already in the app store and it's called RoboKiller, and you can take pride in the fact that government efforts made this happen. We weren't in this fight until the FTC had the vision to look beyond legislation and enforcement towards innovation. When the FTC created the Robocalls: Humanity Strikes Back competition in 2015 they got us, TelTech, into this fight.

We have been innovating for 15 years, helping consumers use technology to protect their privacy and security on their phones. From unmasking blocked calls with TrapCall, to recording calls with TapeACall, to helping people keep their numbers secure with SpoofCard, we have always been focused on giving people control of their phones. The robocall competition ignited our passion, and it is accomplishing your goals to help Americans end the robocall epidemic.

We have seen telemarketers change their tactics because Answer Bots have started to impact their bottom line. When we heard a telemarketer say in an exasperated voice, "Oh no, everyone's got RoboKiller today," we knew we had turned the tide. When we heard another scammer angrily yell, "oh which one are you? The guy with the baby, the guy on the movie set?" we knew we were winning the fight.

Telemarketers have had their way for years. As it became cheaper and cheaper to make calls, the incentive to deploy more robocalls increased exponentially and there was no way to fight back. The Do Not Call Registry did exactly what it was supposed to do, but unfortunately not at all what people expected it to do.

Stopping the tiny percentage of legal robocalls that fell under the Do Not Call list purview was almost no help to consumers who were expecting and counting on the government to deliver a panacea. In-fact, some have theorized that the Do Not Call list may even help spammers by giving consumers a false sense of security when the phone rings.

Beyond the Do Not Call List the government's efforts have been well-intentioned and well executed, they just don't have broad implications on the problem. Despite the FCC and FTC's well-publicized multi-million dollar enforcement actions, with an estimated \$9.5 billion dollars in yearly phone scam revenue, these efforts just are not a real deterrent. RoboKiller isn't a deterrent either, it is a solution.

This week, you gave us the chance to testify for this subcommittee, which will help us to promote our efforts further. Next week, the FTC and FCC are hosting a technology expo where we will again present RoboKiller. Do more of this. Help us get more attention so that we can speed up our growth.

At our current growth rate we will hit 10 million users in June of 2021. At that point telemarketers will have seen a 50% decline in revenues and have no other choice but to move their scams elsewhere.

We are not worried about putting ourselves out of business by solving this problem. We have built a culture of innovation, so when the scammers start ringing doorbells, we will have a solution for that too!

Answer Bots wasted more than 25,000 hours of human telemarketer's time last month. For our hundreds of thousands of users that meant millions of blocked calls and the peace of mind that when their phone rang it wasn't a harassing call from a scammer. For thousands of other Americans who have yet to purchase RoboKiller, that was 25,000 hours where they too were protected from those otherwise engaged telemarketers.

The robocall problem has grown into an epidemic. Today, 2700+ unwanted calls are being made every second in the United States, but it's over. RoboKiller is on the case, and we will solve this problem.